



# interlitteraria

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# interlitteraria

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## Introductory Note

With its nearly forty articles by literary and cultural scholars from the entire world, the present *Interlitteraria* 16/2011 has become the most voluminous thematic *miscellanea*-issue of our journal to date. It shows comparative literature at work in its varied fields. It also demonstrates that especially in an annual journal it is hardly a good idea to launch exclusively monographic issues: a remarkably great potential of scholars would be left without a chance to contribute over a longer lapse of time. Thematic adaptation which has become anyway a suspicious feature in cultural scholarship – researchers being increasingly manipulated by fashionable topics, which are ever and ever repeated from one conference and seminar to other, with little hope to add anything substantially new to the area – has clearly its limits. Instead, we should try to introduce new topics of comparative literature and revive as well as reinterpret those unjustly destined for oblivion. It is also important to provide a chance to continue discussing important topics dealt with in the recent monographic issues of our journal.

Having in view the above said, it is our pleasure to include in the present *Interlitteraria* reflections by outstanding international scholars on the general landscapes of cultural and literary scholarship at the time when postmodern ideology seems to have exhausted its energies in the battle against “grand narratives” of the past and has left us in a spiritual void.

The fact that a number of essays in the present issue of *Interlitteraria* are dedicated to poetic issues, could be seen as a symptom of the need to fulfil a substantial gap in postmodern scholarship. With its cult of intellectual playfulness (ironies, simulacrum, logic-games) – a kind of a new mannerism –, on the one hand, and a conscious self-adaptation to the rules of market economy, on the other, it has persistently tried to drive poetry and, in particular, lyrical manifestation beyond the field of research.

However, reality contradicts it. Despite being declared by the main postmodern discourse unfashionable, poetry is being massively cultivated in all parts of the world. Festivals of poetry have become an ever expanding worldwide phenomenon, while even in the field of prose fiction works carrying poetic imagery, accents and rhythms have still the greatest chance to survive and be saved for posterity, once their coeval marketing clamour has died down.

Poetry still seems to be the gist of an honest response culture can hope to produce, to meet the spiritual needs of societies.

Therefore the effort to bring poetry to the research areas dominated in the last quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> century by prose narrative can only be seen as highly desirable. Poets of the past have echoed their nation's deeper consciousness and aspirations. Why have we started to believe that poets cannot do it any longer? If poetry has been exhausted in "centres" – which is certainly far from being true –, why should we suppose that it cannot flourish in peripheral areas and in the creation of smaller nations?

It is a special honour to include in the present issue of *Interlitteraria* an homage by our long time Indian contributors to one of the greatest poets of the modern era, Rabindranath Tagore, in celebration of his 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of birth. Tagore was lucky to know English and to be able to translate his work into an international language. The same was not true at all of Tagore's contemporary Estonian poet Juhan Liiv. He spent his entire life in dire poverty and obscurity, writing the best part of his work between bouts of mental illness and did not manage to publish any book. Even now, nearly a hundred years after his death, though unanimously claimed as one of the greatest poetic voices of his country, Liiv is still nearly unknown outside Estonia and its language.

It is almost certain that there are a number of great poetic talents in the world, both in the past and present, still hidden from the scope of international cultural scholarship. Therefore it should be among the primary tasks of comparative literary research to bring their work to the fore of world's cultural conscience, as well as to explain the factors which until now have obstructed such an activity.

There is a good chance for it at the next international conference of the Estonian Association of Comparative Literature, "World Literature and National Literatures", to be held in Tartu at the end of September, this year. We will publish its papers in the next monographic issue of *Interlitteraria*. The manuscripts should arrive by January 31, 2012.

Jüri Talvet,  
*Editor*



## *Grandeur et décadence des paradigmes littéraires*

### 1. L'éternel retour: mémoire, tradition, interprétation

Ce qu'on appelle conventionnellement l'arbitraire du signe n'est pas sans conséquence pour le statut sémiotique de la littérature. Il explique sa quête perpétuelle de moyens pour compenser ce défaut génétique. Les stratégies de la motivation littéraire sont diverses. A part la justification qu'on appelle *l'illusion réaliste* (tout le monde en est familier, ou croit bien l'être) il faut ajouter *l'arbitraire artistique assumé*. C'est la solution choisie par Sorel, dans sa fameuse défense du *Cid*, au siècle classique. L'auteur du plaidoyer y conclut sèchement que, bien qu'il soit tout à fait inacceptable pour la bienséance du moment, tel ou tel détail du texte s'avère techniquement indispensable au créateur.

Au XXI<sup>ème</sup> siècle, les modèles conservés par la mémoire littéraire fournissent fréquemment aux écrivains un type particulier de *motivation paradigmatique*. Aussi éloignée de la motivation réaliste que de l'arbitraire assumé, elle prend pour point d'appui ce qui a été déjà produit au fil du temps: le patrimoine.

La conscience de la filiation culturelle du texte reste une des formes paradigmatiques majeures de l'autoréflexivité littéraire. Les auteurs penchés vers ce type d'*autoréférence régressive* adoptent une perspective comparative manifeste, en rapportant leurs textes à des modèles originaires, que l'on peut concevoir au moins de deux façons.

D'une part, on postule *une relation intertextuelle explicite* entre un hypertexte et sa précédenance hipotextuelle, dans les termes brevetés par Gérard Genette. (Genette: 1979; 1982)

De l'autre, les références aux entrepôts de la littérature renvoient à *une mémoire génétique diffuse*, à une réalité axiomatique, ou si l'on



veut à une hypothèse de lecture. Dans tous les deux cas, l'auto-référence régressive reste une fonction servie par des formes et par des techniques littéraires variées.

Par la répétition, la citation, l'allusion, le plagiat imaginaire, l'exégèse fictive, la parodie, la paraphrase ou la pastiche, la succession s'impose comme une des lois fondamentales de la création littéraire. La littérature est l'héritière d'une tradition surannée, qu'elle évoque, commente, interprète, traduit, contrefait, reconvertit, transfigure, corromps, pervertit et qu'elle fait renaître systématiquement

Ma contribution porte sur le patrimoine faustien européen, l'entrepôt d'une riche mémoire littéraire se prêtant à des réinterprétations diverses. Dans les analyses qui suivent je vais m'intéresser aux buts poursuivis par la manipulation de la mémoire génétique aussi bien qu'à ses effets de réception.

## 2. La tradition assumée: entre lucidité et ludicité

*Historia von D. Johann Fausten, dem weitbeschreyten Zauberer und Schwarzkunstler* (éditée en 1587) est la source d'un paradigme bien charpenté de la littérature européenne, successivement illustré par Marlowe, par Goethe, par Thomas Mann ou par Mickhail Boulgakov. Parmi ses nombreuses reconversions du XXe siècle, *La mort du docteur Faust*, de Michel de Ghelderode et *Lust, la demoiselle de cristal*, de Paul Valéry étalent ostensiblement le même penchant autoréférentiel.

Autoréflexif et à la fois intertextuel, le drame *La mort du Docteur Faust* de Michel de Ghelderode (1955a) entame un dialogue direct avec sa précédence goethéenne. Il y est question de la littérature au second degré, en tant que méta-littérature qui réfléchit sur la genèse, les prérogatives et les recettes consacrées de la littérature.

Au début de l'intrigue, à l'intérieur de la taverne *Aux quatre saisons*, une scène de théâtre représente le monde des personnages goethéens, tandis que dans la salle évoluent leurs doubles, confectionnés par l'écrivain belge. Il faut aussi remarquer que la mise en page du texte, qui se range en deux colonnes parallèles, confère une

réalité graphique supplémentaire à la relation entre le Faust gothéen et sa copie.

Derrière tous, au plus bas fond de la salle, campe le Diable, nommé Diamotoruscat, qui a plus d'une façon dans son sac et qui parvient à tout surveiller. Il mène de main de maître le jeu de la littérature et produit des remarques saisissantes visant le syndrome répétitif frappant du monde fictif qui l'entoure. On lui réserve le privilège d'évaluer du dehors l'univers imaginaire de Michel de Ghelderode et de révéler au lecteur son modèle vénérable. De cette façon-ci, le Malin s'arroge le statut de commentateur d'une pièce ou il se trouve inscrit en tant que personnage.

A un moment donné, le vieux savant nommé Faust, qui se mêle abasourdi parmi la foule de la taverne, et respectivement son modèle, l'acteur du spectacle gothéen, se trouvent face à face dans un épisode autrement significatif. Aucun des deux n'est plus sur de son identité. Qui est le modèle et qui sa copie? Ou bien qui est réel et qui ne l'est pas.

De telles questions incommodes se multiplient à perte de vue dans la pièce, poussant les deux sosies vers des sentiments débordants. La conscience plus ou moins acute de tout personnage archétypal que son existence est prédéterminée par la littérature porte d'habitude l'empreinte d'une humeur particulière. Autrement dit, la représentation fictive de la descendance d'un texte littéraire engendre couramment des réactions placées entre des extrêmes comme l'orgueil, d'un côté, et la frustration plus ou moins mélancolique, de l'autre.

Dans *La mort du Docteur Faust* ainsi que dans *Don Juan* (de Ghelderode: 1955b) les deux pièces métafictionnels de théâtre produites par de Ghelderode, l'auteur insiste sur les humeurs de ses personnages archétypaux, qui oscillent entre la révolte, la rancune, et les ressentiments larmoyants. Il y en a qui sont accablés par la grandeur de leur rôle, complexés par leur mythe génétique, ou bien malheureux et pleurnichants. Dans *Don Juan*, les quatre imitateurs occasionnels d'un précurseur littéraire illustre oscillent entre le Don Juan qui pleure sur le parvis de sa légende et le Don Juan arrogant, qui étale tambour battant sa fierté archétypale. Dans *La mort du Docteur Faust*, les deux personnages homonymes éprouvent plutôt une sorte de confusion, mêlée d'une véritable terreur paradigma-

tique, dont ils tachent à se défaire, coûte que coûte. Quant à l'orgueil, il est exclusivement la part du Diable.

Diamotoruscat épie diligemment les deux sosies, qui se disputent à tour de rôle leur droit à la réalité ou tout au contraire leur droit à l'art. Finalement, tandis que l'acteur déconfit se livre à la foule, ameutée par la mort de la petite Marguerite, le Docteur Faust, lui, se tire une balle à la tête, pour se débarrasser de son fardeau génétique. A son chevet, le Diable tire adroitement les conclusions de rigueur, portant sur le statut de la littérature, sur son ainsi dite « réalité » et sur ses racines, qui plongent implacablement dans le déjà-crée. En tant que porte parole de Michel de Ghelderode, tout le long de l'intrigue Diamotoruscat s'est d'ailleurs copieusement amusé à propos des vaines efforts des deux Faust qui nourrissent l'illusion d'une frontière entre le réel et l'art, au beau milieu d'un univers cent pour cent fabriqué,

Son point de vue vient à la rencontre des indications régisoraes du drame, qui nous avertissent que celui qui représente le Docteur Faust sur la scène n'a l'air d'être réel que s'il est un fort mauvais acteur. Ce qui veut dire qu'en dépit de leurs fantasmagories, les personnages de la pièce sont toujours circonscrits par la littérature et que toute évasion de leur théâtre imaginaire débouche implacablement dans une vie également fictive.

A ce point, on pourrait bien se demander pourquoi Michel de Ghelderode imprimerait-il un teinte méta technique si prononcée à sa pièce de théâtre?

On pourrait y entrevoir une tentative de lancer un défi à des poéticiens comme Genette, qui ne doutent pas que, dans la littérature, tout puisse être trié sur le volet, à l'aide des grilles taxinomiques inflexibles, et rangé dans une sorte de *Musée imaginaire de la Reine-Poétique*. En fin de compte, les manœuvres de Diamotoruscat, un personnage dont les visées théoriques le placent dans la proximité de son auteur, semble avoir comme but de saboter tout effort systématique d'élucider les rapports entre les modèles littéraires et leurs copies. De son angle de vue, les réfractions spéculaires croisées, ayant pour théâtre le territoire de la mémoire génétique, seraient plutôt réversibles. On peut bien lui faire crédit et admettre que les modèles littéraires illustres ne sont guère immuns aux influences



rétroactives de leurs reconversions successives. Relu à rebours, dans la perspective de Thomas Mann, de Michel de Ghelderode ou bien de Mikhaïl Boulgakov, le *Faust* goethéen suggère des interprétations plus d'une fois surprenantes. Le processus de l'éternel retour littéraire institue entre le modèle et ses imitations des rapports qui compromettent toute tentative taxinomique.

### 3. Le défi moderniste du patrimoine

*Lust. La demoiselle de cristal* fait partie d'un chantier de création et de réflexion que Paul Ambroise Valéry désigne globalement par le titre *Mon Faust. Ebauches*. (Valéry 1960)

Au premier plan de la pièce de Paul Ambroise, se placent les rapports de force entre le Diable et son disciple, deux personnages également comblés par une mémoire génétique prodigieuse. Dans une représentation qui tient l'affiche européenne depuis des siècles, Lust, la secrétaire novice du docteur Faust, reste l'unique débutante. Son surnom, *la demoiselle de cristal*, désigne métaphoriquement sa transparence, mal en point auprès de telles masques rendues opaques par leur vénérable âge culturel.

Néanmoins, on se rend vite compte que dans le texte de Valéry, les rapports paradigmatiques quasiment figés entre le Diable et le docteur Faust – «auteur de plusieurs œuvres littéraires et musicales estimées» – son parodiquement mis à l'envers. Dans l'esprit d'une modernité ostentatrice, l'écrivain français met en débat le modèle goethéen, rien que pour le déconstruire diligemment. Dans cette démarche, la coopération du lecteur averti – «le lecteur de mauvaise fois et de bonne volonté» – reste cruciale.

Le personnage auteur de Paul Valéry est en train de rédiger ses mémoires. Il ne faut surtout pas prendre ces *Mémoires de moi, par le professeur docteur Faust, membre de l'Académie des sciences mortes etc. Héros de plusieurs œuvres littéraires estimées, (littéraires et musicales estimées, ajoutera-t-il plus tard, et pour cause)*, il ne faut donc pas les prendre pour des souvenirs autobiographiques. Car il s'agit de pures représentations (ou même des inventions) de soi-même, qui puisent leurs sources dans les riches réservoirs des modèles culturels.

Le Faust valéryen est cent pour cent le produit de la mémoire livresque et l'œuvre qu'il est en train de concocter a pour but de la représenter, de l'interpréter et de l'évaluer *en abyme*. D'un certain angle de vue, ce personnage est un brave homologue de son auteur, un des exégètes constants du thème faustien. On se rappelle que dans ses *Cahiers* ou dans *Variété*, Valéry s'applique à étudier les deux paradigmes littéraires qu'il va plus tard mettre en scène: d'un côté le docteur Faust et de l'autre Méphistophélès. Surtout dans les notes occasionnelles parsemées dans ses *Cahiers*, le modèle goethéen est discrédité sans merci.

Dans le premier acte de *Lust*, l'auteur fictif nommé Faust affronte vaillamment son maître d'autrefois – maintenant un pauvre diable en papier. Leur dialogue est censé mettre à l'envers l'image du dernier, telle qu'elle fut accréditée par la mémoire littéraire et avant tout par Goethe. Cet entretien, visant le rôle assumé par les modèles et par leur mémoire paradigmatique dans la création, se transforme progressivement dans un docte polémique professionnel sur l'éternel retour littéraire. Il y est question de l'originalité et de son rapport avec les ambitions innovatrices modernes.

Le Faust poéticien de Valéry amorce d'une manière bien subtile les détails techniques visant le mécanisme de la descendance littéraire. Pour ce critique du patrimoine, l'ainsi dite originalité – taxée par lui de répétition inconsciente, amnésique, de type biologique – devrait toujours être conçue dans les limites du déjà créé.

D'une part, l'auteur Faust ne se déclare point un adepte des théories naïves, qui nourrissent l'illusion de l'innovation absolue, quasi-démiurgique, ignorant le soubassement répétitif de toute création. (Il faut y ajouter qu'à cet égard Méphistophélès, l'avocat obstiné du canon et de la permanence des modèles humains, se range à ses cotes.) Mais d'autre part, le personnage écrivain de Valéry n'admet pas la répétition telle quelle ou la routine pieuse, non plus. A son avis, l'homme moderne s'est enfin éveillé et il s'est mis à s'attaquer aux fondements de la création.

Placé à la mi-distance entre le mythe de l'originalité absolue et la sclérose du canon autoritaire et concerné par les recettes concrètes de la reconversion de l'héritage, le docteur Faust est en quête d'une solution conforme à la souplesse moderniste. Mais dans ce but,

explique-t-il, on devrait tout d'abord abandonner les schémas figés, devenues stériles, comme l'épisode de Faust et de Marguerite, pour lequel le Diable garde un penchant particulier.

En ce qui le concerne, Méphistophélès se montre tout d'abord réticent. Il s'emporte contre l'érosion des vieux symboles en perte accélérée de prestige et contre la manie contemporaine de tout transformer. Il commence par dénoncer le vice du changement à tout prix, mais au moment où le docteur Faust lui propose de coopérer à la rénovation du mythe faustien, il accepte de conclure un pacte avec lui. Voilà donc les rôles du scénario traditionnel tout à fait mis à l'envers, car chez Valéry c'est bien l'homme qui s'approprie la tentation. Le pacte stipule aussi un changement de perspective sur la fabulation traditionnelle, ce qui rend le Diable dépendant de l'homme. Il est tout à fait légitime de concevoir ce contrat comme un pacte de lecture, car les deux partenaires se mettent d'accord sur l'interprétation d'un certain texte et sur ses conséquences pratiques.

À la suite de ce contrat, le docteur Faust est censé produire une grande œuvre consacrée à Faust. Mais, hanté par des questions de méthode, il ne s'empresse pas de se mettre au travail. Examiner méticuleusement son projet lui semble prioritaire. En fin de compte, l'auteur fictif de Valéry ne produit pas des chefs œuvre, comme le Maître anonyme de Boulgakov, ou comme Adrian Leverkühn de Thomas Mann. Il est plutôt un petit monstre de la hyper lucidité, un intellectuel de la même souche que *Monsieur Teste*.

Dans le second acte de sa comédie, Valéry change brusquement de perspective. Après son dialogue avec le Diable, ayant visé surtout la production et le produit littéraire, l'écrivain Faust affronte un lecteur ingénu, qui se précipite dans sa maison directement de la rue et exige de lui être présenté. Il s'agit évidemment d'un personnage dépourvu de subtilité, qui tient avoir l'opinion de Faust sur ses menues questions existentielles.

À ce point il nous faut retenir un détail essentiel pour la logique démonstrative du texte valérien: dans *Lust*, au premier plan du débat ne se trouvent pas tellement les dilemmes de l'auteur à l'égard des questions épineuses de la création, que la lucidité et la clairvoyance de son lecteur.



C'est justement pourquoi il munit sa pièce de toute une équipe de commentateurs du prototype culturel nommé Faust: le jeune apprenti volontaire du maître, autant stupide qu'il est borné; Lust, la secrétaire candide et dévouée; enfin, Méphistophélès en personne, le plus subtil de tous, ce qui pour un diable herméneute n'est pas du tout exceptionnel.

Il y a dans la pièce de Valéry un certain moment où Méphistophélès a l'air de pousser Faust de la littérature vers la vie. Dans les termes de Genette, qui donne un commentaire de cet épisode dans *Palimpsestes*, cet auteur bouffi d'orgueil oscillerait entre la production d'un grand livre et une idylle avec Lust, autrement dit entre *Vivre et Livre*. (Genette 1982: 155–157) Mais de toute évidence, Genette s'accroche plutôt au sens épidermique de cet épisode. Il faut nous rappeler qu'une situation similaire survient dans le fragment dramatique *Le Solitaire* qui fait aussi partie de *Mon Faust* valérien. Les fées proposent sans succès au vieux savant une transaction aguichante: sa mémoire littéraire, contre l'innocence primordiale et la vie éternelle. Dans les deux textes dramatiques apparentés, la tentation a une tente polémique évidente. Tout comme dans ses *Cahiers*, Valéry y saisit l'occasion de relire le scénario goethéen, rien que pour détourner ses sens dans une direction opposée.

Si l'on y est attentif, on remarque que le système de référence où Paul Ambroise situe ses personnages archétypaux exclut la possibilité d'une alternative *vie* ou *littérature*. L'oscillation apparente entre *Vivre* et *Livre* n'est qu'une mise en scène trompeuse, une simple mascarade où Méphistophélès et Faust agissent en partenaires et complices. Pour les personnages de Paul Valéry il n'y a qu'un monde de delà: le royaume de la littérature éternelle, dont les otages sont eux-mêmes, dans des circonstances sans issue.

#### 4. En guise de conclusion: «Noblesse de l'esprit»

Dans les textes européens antérieurs au XX<sup>ème</sup> siècle, même si on faisait fréquemment appel aux services de l'affiliation paradigmatique, les personnages n'étaient pas au courant de leur condition de *revenants* de la littérature. C'était de la métafiction tout court,

comme dans le roman de Cervantès, comme dans la littérature du XVIII<sup>ème</sup> siècle ou comme dans le *Künstlerroman* romantique.

Plus on avance vers la modernité, plus la mise en fiction de la mémoire parvient à mener de main de maître la lecture du texte, dans une direction nettement désignée. Le glissement progressif des allégories herméneutiques vers de vrais débats esthétiques explique la présence dans le texte des créateurs de littérature et des lecteurs diégétiques de toute sorte. Leurs colloques animés, portant d'habitude sur les vertus et les risques de la descendance culturelle, procurent un point de départ aux hypothèses de plus en plus élaborées aptes à évaluer les fonctions légitimantes de la mémoire. Ce type de texte étale les questions controversées de sa propre réception et indique en même temps ses points d'ouverture vers le contexte historique et culturel global.

On peut même admettre avec Genette (1997) que les effets d'un texte dépendent également de *l'intention* expresse de son créateur et de *l'attention* particulière de son public. L'étalage délibéré de l'héritage littéraire peut fonctionner comme un stimulus extrêmement efficace de l'attention de lecture. Dans la littérature du XX<sup>ème</sup> siècle, la mise en scène de la mémoire devient donc une des tactiques privilégiées, aptes à précipiter l'effet esthétique. Elle agit au moins dans deux directions convergentes. D'une part, le lecteur virtuel est poussé à se reconnaître dans tel ou tel personnage du texte. Dans le miroir fictif que lui procure généreusement l'auteur, il se voit réagir par rapport au statut successoral de la littérature. De l'autre, l'auteur instigue son lecteur à formuler des jugements personnels sur la mémoire littéraire et réserve à ses réactions une portée théorique explicite. Il faut y ajouter que, de cette manière, l'attention du lecteur virtuel est automatiquement projetée dans un système de repères transindividuel et contextuel.

Dans l'économie symbolique occidentale, le XX<sup>ème</sup> siècle s'impose par une mise en question des polarités fondamentales consacrées depuis Platon (*le vrai* et *le faux*; *le réel* et *le fictif* etc.). La mémoire culturelle procure à la littérature moderne une chance de compromettre de pareilles oppositions. Si chez Cervantès, par exemple, la mise en scène de la mémoire confirme l'antinomie *Vivre-Livre*, Borges, Graham Greene, Boulgakov, Valéry, Michel de

Ghelderode, Thomas Mann, parmi tant d'autres, réservent à l'autoréférence régressive le rôle de déconstruire une pareille polarité.

Au delà de leurs stratégies et de leurs techniques différentes, les deux auteurs qu' l'on vient d'analyser ci-dessus se laissent fasciner par les moyens de reconvertir l'héritage littéraire. Chez de Ghelderode tout comme chez Valéry, la filiation littéraire revêt l'aspect d'une représentation théâtrale ou l'on ne perd jamais de vue le public. Pour eux la mémoire génétique de la littérature est avant tout un effet perceptif. Chacun à sa façon, ils mettent au jour quelques repères essentiels de ce que j'appellerais une vraie *poétique de la réminiscence*, qui glisse progressivement vers une théorie de la lecture.

D'après Thomas Mann (Mann: 1960a) l'appel aux paradigmes de la création procure à la lecture un point indispensable d'appui dans le déjà-connu. En vertu de l'identité du nouveau crée avec une instance légitimante prestigieuse, lire veut toujours dire reconnaître.

Dans une conférence, donnée en 1932 à l'occasion du centenaire goethéen – *Goethe als representant des burgerlicher Zeitalters* – l'écrivain allemand appelle le retour de la création vers ses sources «noblesse de l'esprit»:

«C'est l'Allemagne et l'Europe tout ensemble: une filiation dont nous sommes fiers, car toute ascendance dans le domaine de l'esprit est de nature aristocratique.» Il faut que l'artiste ait des ancêtres, il faut qu'il sache de qui il descend» a dit Goethe.» (Mann, 1960a:42)

La littérature illustrée par les textes de Michel de Ghelderode et de Paul Valéry se met intrépidement au service de cette noblesse de l'esprit. Pour citer Serenus Zeitblom, un des personnages du *Docteur Faust* de Mann, elle s'enracine dans la courbure du monde, qui nous permettrait de retrouver le commencement dans la fin.

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*The Precarious Future  
of the "Humanities Enterprise"  
in the Digital Information Millennium*

Introduction: Tzu-Gung's Anecdote

In his seminal study *The Gutenberg Galaxy* (1962), Marshall McLuhan, whose prophetic visions of the dawn of a revolutionary electronic and digital communication culture (era) became reality well before the end of the twentieth century, reflects on the potential impact of modern technology and science with reference to the timely relevance and wisdom that the great physicist and Nobel prize winner Werner Heisenberg (1901–76) found in the ancient Chinese anecdote of Tzu-Gung, a disciple of Confucius. The anecdote is quoted here in full since it identifies some of the key problems mankind will be confronted with in the new "global millennium":

As Tzu-Gung was traveling through the regions north of the river Han, he saw an old man working in his vegetable garden. He had dug an irrigation ditch. The man would descend into the well, fetch up a vessel of water in his arms and pour it out into the ditch. While his efforts were tremendous the results appeared to be very meager.

Tzu-Gung said: "There is a way whereby you can irrigate a hundred ditches in one day, and whereby you can do much with little effort. Would you like to hear of it?" Then the gardener stood up, looked at him and said: "And what would that be?"

Tzu-Gung replied, "You take a wooden lever, weighted at the back and light in front. In this way you can bring up water so quickly that it just gushes out. This is called a draw-well."

Then anger rose in the old man's face and he said: "I have heard my teacher say that whoever uses machines does all his work like a machine. He who does work like a machine grows a

heart like a machine, and he who carries the heart of a machine in his breast loses his simplicity. He who has lost his simplicity becomes unsure in the strivings of his soul.

Uncertainty in the strivings of the soul is something which does not agree with honest sense. It is not that I do not know of such things, I am ashamed to use them. (GG: 29–30; UM: 63)

Despite the origin of the anecdote in the pre-literate Chinese world, some two and a half thousand years ago, its relevance and timeliness is beyond doubt and exemplary of literature and art in general as a sensitive register of human insight, concern and Socratic wisdom and thus of great value and interest to the globally open, inclusive and critical mind.

Without a doubt, Marshall McLuhan's voluminous critical oeuvre and his lifelong affinity to the humanistic aims and objectives of comparative literary and cultural studies is the modern embodiment of such inclusive critical openness, as underlined by such critics as George Steiner and Janine Marchessault, among others: "These conceptualisations have helped define some of the most productive questions for media studies and have served to lay the foundations for the development of cultural studies in a variety of national contexts from the 1950s onward." (JM 2005: 4)

## 1. The Ancient Skill of Reading

Although Marshall McLuhan's international reputation rests primarily on his research on modern technology and the understanding of the media, he was essentially "a Victorian man of letters, a satirist, very much steeped in literary culture" (ib. 75), past and present, Anglo-European and extending to such distant Asian cultures as China, Korea and Japan and to remote and little known tribal cultures in Africa and South America. The complex intersection of disciplines (literature, film, electronic media, philosophy, anthropology, linguistics, history, mythology and architecture, to name the most prominent ones, and temporalities and everyday life, highlighted above all in *The Gutenberg Galaxy*, and closely related to Henry Remak's concept of the "humanities enterprise" (Remak



1999: 100; 104–106 ), constitutes a hallmark of Marshall McLuhan's lifelong scholarly and pedagogical commitment to the study of literature and culture, starting in Cambridge as a scholarship student of F. R. Leavis, I. A. Richards, among others, (JM 2005: 8) and subsequently as university teacher in St. Louis and Toronto summed up by Janine Marchessault as follows:

McLuhan's work needs to be understood as arising out of collective engagement, conversations, letters and dialogue. Just as *The Mechanical Bride* grew out of courses he taught at St. Louis University, so too did *The Gutenberg Galaxy* grow out of an interdisciplinary confluence of students, scholars, scientists, artists and journalists in Toronto. Moreover, it is important to remember that McLuhan's insights depended on the coming together of different disciplines as well as different cultures that were beginning to populate the city (JM 2005: 77; Remak 1999: 100).

It was probably Marshall McLuhan's outsider-position with regard to the dominant elite culture at Cambridge and his comparatively modest Canadian social and cultural family background, which explains his lifelong "search" for what Janine Marchessault refers to as "an integrated *aesthetic*, conceptually bound to both English literature and American popular culture" (JM 2005: 8). The desirability of including popular culture in the study of high literature and culture attracted Marshall McLuhan's attention, above all, during his early years in Toronto, where he witnessed the rapidly growing importance of popular culture in the United States, on television and in daily life, just across the border: "It was precisely the new culture that emerged in post-war America that was of interest; the *commodity culture* that he had studied in *The Mechanical Bride* had expanded to cover every aspect of lived experience." (JM 2005: 79–80) Significantly, books, and art in general, were reduced to commodities and subjected to market strategies. His commitment to the study of popular cultures as an article of faith teaching and research, though only reluctantly embraced by some of his colleagues and rejected or ridiculed by others. A noteworthy exception, is Henry Remak, who also highlights interdisciplinary

inclusiveness in his scholarly reflections (Remak 2002: 245–250; 1999: 100) and a “synthesis based on international collaboration” (Remak 1999: 104–105) as the cornerstones of comparative literary studies and the ideals of a liberal education in general (Remak 1981: 217–228; Trommler 2010: 149–150).

The very fact that the debate on the inclusion of popular culture (sometimes also referred to as “mass culture”) is still in progress among present representatives of comparative literature and culture, highlights the open-mindedness, farsightedness, and intellectual affinity of Marshall McLuhan and the late Henry Remak. McLuhan (together with Edmund Carpenter) also formally argued his insistence on inclusiveness and openness in education in a Government report entitled *Classroom without Walls*, in which the liberation of education from traditional impediments and restrictions and the equipment of students with “the analytical tools to understand culture” (JM 2005: 167) is proposed:

The class-room without wall, like the counterpart in Malraux’s museum, is an argument for an education that is connected rather than separated from the life-world. McLuhan believed that the real education was essentially taking place through the media. (JM 2005: 108)

Significantly, this proposal was rejected in parliament, which underscores Marshall McLuhan’s visionary perspective of education and his affinity to some of the key tenets of enlightened comparative cultural studies, which is also based on intellectual openness and inclusiveness. The report was eventually published some twenty years later in a book, co-authored with his son Eric McLuhan and Kathryn Hutcheon and published under the title *The City as Classroom: Understanding Language and Media* (1977). It should be mentioned here, that the Chinese scholar Song Li has applied McLuhan’s “City as Classroom” template in an exemplary study of the Imperial Palace, published in Issue No. 5 of the *Marshall McLuhan Studies* (Song Li 1996).

However, critical openness and inclusiveness alone do not suffice as guiding educational principles in the rapidly changing techno-

logical world of “global villages” (GG: 31; UM: 34; 96ff.) where everything is *in flux* and the future precariously uncertain. But as always, Marshall McLuhan believes in the power of education, mental adaptability, intellectual resistance and the search for solutions and, above all, in what he refers to as “the ancient skill of reading”:

The goal of science and the arts and of education for the next generation must be to decipher not the genetic but the perceptual core. In a global information environment, the old pattern of education in answer – finding is of no avail: one is surrounded by answers, millions of them, moving and muting at electric speed. Survival and control will depend on the ability to probe and to question in the proper way and place. As the information that constitutes the environment is perpetually in flux, so the need is not for fixed concepts but rather for the ancient skill of reading that book, for navigating through an ever uncharted and uncharitable milieu. Else we will have no more control of this technology and environment than we have of the wind and the tides. (McLuhan 1988: 239)

## 2. Gargoyles and Grotesques

While McLuhan’s lifelong reflections on the global network society and its impact on the future of mankind are generally speaking balanced and critically open-minded, the subtext of his deliberations tends to be tinged with serious concerns and reservations as to the impending consequences and the role of education and human intellectual resourcefulness with regard to their solution. Marshall McLuhan’s disquiet on this matter runs like a red thread through all his works, overtly and covertly. Significantly, he reflects on great ideas and shared concerns among great writers and thinkers, past and present, highlighted most conspicuously in *The Gutenberg Galaxy* (1967), which ends in a disconcertingly dark, Kafkaesque, apocalyptic vision of the future, overshadowed by questions without answers:



What will be the new configurations of mechanisms and literacy as these older forms of perception and judgment are interpreted by the new electric age? The new electric galaxy of events has already moved deep into the Gutenberg galaxy. Even without collision, such co-existence of technologies and awareness brings trauma and tension to every living person. Our most ordinary and conventional attitudes seem suddenly twisted into gargoyles and grotesques. Familiar institutions and associations seem at time menacing and malignant. These multiple transformations, which are the normal consequence of introducing new media into society whatever, need special study and will be the subject of another volume on *Understanding Media* in the world of our time. (GG: 278–79)

However, there is also an element of encouragement in Marshall McLuhan's concern for the future: the call to study the rapidly changing world in search of solutions. As indicated previously, Marshall McLuhan is a man of letters whose critical approach is deeply embedded in literature and culture, as a cursory glance at the "Index of Chapter Glosses" at the end of *The Gutenberg Galaxy* underscores (GG: 291–294). The affinity of Marshall McLuhan's comparative practice and understanding of literature and culture, his interdisciplinary style, and the contextualisation of literature in culture, signal not only the lasting influence of Matthew Arnold's (1822–1889) deep-seated humanism and professed commitment to the study of foreign nations, their culture and thought, which was still alive at the time of Marshall McLuhan's enrolment at Cambridge, but also his lifelong intellectual and scholarly alignment with such cultural theorists as Raymond Williams, Roland Barthes, Umberto Eco, Howard Innes (JM 2005: 3), Henry H. Remak, and other leading thinkers and representatives of comparative literature and culture studies, despite obvious differences with regard to "academically defined norms of writing", that is, a succinct, aphoristic literary style, brevity of argument or statement, and what Janine Marchessault perceptively refers to as "exceeding of disciplinary boundaries" (JM 2005: 4).

While Marshall McLuhan had no doubts as to the validity of the global openness of his critical mind and his scholarly commitment to

the tenets of a liberal education, other leading educators and scholars declared the comparative approach to literature, and the humanities in general, in a state of irrevocable crisis and demise.

### 3. The Death of a Discipline?

No doubt, a key concern among supporters of Comparative Literary and/or Culture Studies has been the vulnerability of the discipline and the question of survival due for a plethora of reasons, scholarly, cultural, and socio-political. Significantly, René Wellek addressed this problem already as early as 1958 in his often quoted paper on *The Crisis of Comparative Literature*, presented at the Second Congress of the International Association of Comparative Literature in Chapel Hill (Wellek 1963: 282–95). Susan Bassnett, amongst others, pronounced comparative literature “dead” in 1993 (Bassnett 1993: 47; Kernan 1992; Zhou and Tong 2000: 4), just like Gayatri Spivak some ten years later, who also characterizes the discipline as being “at the last gasp” (Spivak 2003: vii) or David K. Harrison (2007). Andrew Dalby (2002), Daniel Nettle and Suzanne Romaine (2000) who deplore the “loss” and “extinction” of linguistic and cultural diversity and the “erosion of human knowledge” associated with it.

Others identified comparative literature as an “endangered discipline” suspended between life and death, ready for an “autopsy” (Bauerlein 1997), or “dead” with the potential of “resurrection” (Schwartz 1997) and numerous other conditions of “near death”. Wang Ning’s rhetorical question “Death of a Discipline?”, on the other hand, signals, tongue in cheek, the fact that comparative literature is not dead at all, on the contrary, alive and well in China:

Even in the age of globalization when many of the other disciplines of the humanities are severely challenged, comparative literature studies in China is still flourishing as it is closely related to or even combined with world literature into one discipline, with many of the internationally discussed theoretic topics “globalized” in the Chinese context. (Wang 2006: 149; see also Zhou and Tong 2000: 4)

While Zhou Xiaoyi and Q. S. Tong agree with Wang Ning’s view expressed above, they see the situation in China much more critically. Their reflections, albeit placed in a predominantly historical

Chinese context, focus, like Lydia Liu's groundbreaking perceptive studies (Liu 1995), on fundamental theoretical aspects of the problem and the necessary methodological modifications due to the political and ideological changes in China:

The crisis of comparative literature that has been a cause of concern for scholars in China in recent years registers, in fact, a deeper level of crisis of the ideological and political foundation of comparative literature – its conviction in the existence of the universality of literary values. (Zhou and Tong 2000: 8)

Despite the widespread scholarly pessimism in the West concerning the demise of comparative literature and the "death of languages" and the "erosion of human knowledge" directly associated with it (Harrison 2007; Wade and Harrison 2007), Chinese scholarship and research is unambiguously Western oriented, but at the same time also based on the maintenance of Chinese cultural traditions, national independence and self-assuredness:

In the field of comparative literature, René Wellek and Austin Warren and Henry Remak (e.g. 1961) are the most translated Western scholars because some of their formulations can be readily appropriated for legitimating and strengthening comparative literature, not just as an academic discipline but as an agency enabling a dialogical relationship between Chinese and Western literary traditions and thereby allowing Chinese literature to be integrated into a world system of literature. Embedded in this desire to have a direct and equal dialogue with other literary traditions is the conviction of the existence of a common system of valuation in culture akin to Goethe's much debated notion of *Weltliteratur*. (Zhou and Tong 2000: 6)

The reasons advanced for the alleged predicament of comparative literature in the West (USA included) are manifold and range from Henry Remak's characterisation of the scholarly representatives of the discipline as "guardians of yesteryear's topical and methodological conventions" and "intellectual incoherence" (Said 1999: 3) to questions concerning the viability and legitimacy of Comparative



Literature/Culture (Studies) as an autonomous scholarly discipline in the light of the financial constraints imposed on the humanities and social sciences in Western (i.e. European, American, Australian) universities and the forced commercialisation (Bok 1995) and overt vocational focus of education at the expense of the traditional university and the ideals of a liberal education, in brief, what Henry H. H. Remak refers to as the "Humanities under siege" (Remak 1999: 101).

One of the most outspoken critics of the malaise ("last gasp") of Comparative Literature in the United States is the internationally acclaimed literary theorist and cultural critic Gayatri Spivak, who blames "self-doubt", that is, "a discipline always in search of itself", rigid academic rules, disciplinary boundaries, questions of canon, core curricula, outmoded concepts of culture, teaching (class-room) conditions, or what she refers to as the "teaching machine", and the inability to handle the reality of change, which echoes Marshall McLuhan's already mentioned reflections on this matter.

In the light of her research focus on deconstruction, it comes as no surprise that she is arguing in favour of a "Deconstructive Cultural Studies" discipline, an approach fiercely critiqued together with other flaws by John M. Ellis in his seminal study *Literature Lost: Social Agendas and the Corruption of the Humanities* (1999) and the early work *Against Deconstruction* (Ellis 1989), in which he attacks the marginalisation of (great) literature as traditional core of the liberal education tradition in favour of apparently incoherent (see Said 1999: 3) and fragmented teaching programs (including film, television, documentaries, comics, cartoons, sitcoms, amongst others) at the expense of great works of literature. and the politico-ideological focus on race, gender, class, sexuality and the numerous "ism-fads" (see also Remak 1999: 100) which earned him the "literary Jeremiah" tag and triggered off a lively debate in the United States and Europe (France), well documented by Newton P. Stallknecht and Horst Frenz (Stallknecht and Frenz 1961/1971). Also, Gayatri Spivak's emphasis on the "precariousness and marginalization" of Comparative Literature and Cultural Studies in the United States is not shared by other representatives of the discipline, as highlighted in Haun Saussy's collection of essays, published in

2006 under the title *Comparative Literature in an Age of Globalisation*, where comparative literature, and world literature, "appear enviably well-established in the USA" (Saussy 2006).

#### 4. Legitimising Comparative Literature

A completely different proposal with regard to the legitimisation of Comparative Literature as a discipline, comes from Emily S. Apter who, under the "traumatic experience" of 9/11 (Apter 2006: vii), and inspired by Walter Benjamin's reflections on translation (Apter 2006: 7ff.), developed, what she calls "A New Comparative Literature", by liberating translation from textual restrictions and the "fidelity to an original" which she considers "ripe for expansion as the basis for a new discipline, with emphasis on "language wars" (including mistranslation in the art of war), linguistic incommensurability in translation studies, the tension between textual and cultural translation, the role of translation in shaping technologies, a global literary canon, censorship, the resistance to Anglophone dominance, the global impact of translation technologies on the complexity of language politics, and a detailed history of comparative literature, among others. (Apter 2006: 4–5).

Emily Apter's complex proposal has its roots in the public criticism after 9/11 of American mono-lingualism as a political, military, and economical handicap in the impending war in a culturally and linguistically largely alien part of the world (echoing Sarkhan in William J. Lederer's and Eugene Burdick's influential novel *The Ugly American* (1958) and a breakdown of communication and cultural understanding as reflected in McLuhan's vision of the "global village", which, at least in the early years of his career, had raised contrary hopes and expectations.

Significantly, such breakdowns have a long history, as underscored in Lord Macartney's ill fated expedition to China as envoy of George III in 1791 (Snell-Hornby 2006, 166–169) and many others since, as for example Western cultural illiteracy in contacts with other cultures in the East, highlighted by Marshall McLuhan in the failure of the UNESCO experiment to provide an Indian village with running water (UM: 86). The systematic study of such problems in

the context of the digital age thus constitutes the premise of Emily Apter's reflections on her new approach to Comparative Literature and translation studies, which she briefly sums up as follows:

An underlying premise of the book has been that language wars, great and small, shape the politics of translation in the sphere media, literacy, literary markets, electronic information transfer, and codes of literariness. The field of translation studies has accordingly expanded to include on the one hand, pragmatic, real world issues, intelligence gathering in war, the embattlement of minority languages within official state culture, controversies over "other Englishes" – and, on the other, more conceptually abstract considerations such as literary appropriation of pidgins and Creole, or multilingual experimentation among historic avant-gardes, or translation across borders. (Apter 2006: 4ff.).

The introductory reflections on Marshall McLuhan's scholarly strategies, while not strictly compatible with what Henry Remak refers to as "methodological conventions", nevertheless, point at the need of a paradigm shift and at exemplary innovative methodological templates and perspectives with relevance to comparative literature in a global information environment (McLuhan 1988: 239).

## 5. Distressingly Monolingual and Monocultural

Emily Apter's introductory reference to the political background of 9/11 as trigger in the conceptualisation of a *new* approach to comparative literature highlights the serious consequences of neglect, marginalisation and disinterest in foreign languages and culture translation and literary studies had in the United States:

The urgent, political need for skilled translators became abundantly clear in the tragic war of 9/11, as institutions charged with protecting national security scrambled to find linguistically proficient specialists to decode intercepts and documents. Translation and global diplomacy seemed never to have been mutually implicated. As America's monolingualism was publicly criticised as part of renewed calls for shared information, mutual under-



standing across cultural and religious divides and mutual cooperation, translation moved to the fore as an issue of major political and cultural significance. No longer deemed a mere instrument of international relations, business, education, and culture, translation took on a special relevance as a matter of war and peace. (Apter 2006: 3)

While government (military) interests responded promptly to the public outcry for remedial action, previous warnings by leading scholars in the field, such as Henry Remak, among others, was far less successful, when he aired his distress on this matter in his books and articles: "I find most interdisciplinary studies currently carried out in the United States distressingly monolingual and monocultural." (Remak 2002: 250)

The matter is specifically raised by Emily Apter in the context of the design and the objectives of her vision of comparative literature as a "new" discipline, when she proposes the acquisition of a foreign language and its cultural matrix as integral part of the course structure. The global implementation of such a proposal should be given serious consideration, and academic appointments in this field without at least second-language proficiency should not be considered.

Unfortunately, in Australian universities, the majority of lecturers in Comparative (World) Literature are monolingual (and monocultural), which is regrettable. As in the United States, the belief that English "is the only language that counts and the mentality that language diversity is a problem rather than a resource" (Wiley 1996: 65) is well and alive in Australia. Significantly, this mentality is also widespread and aggressively promoted by such leading public intellectuals as Andrew Bolt and influential national newspapers such as the *Herald Sun*, where the following vilification of learning languages was published on May 28, 2010:

It was a dud idea the day Premier Jeff Kennett decreed in 1998 that all children should learn a foreign language up to year 10. Even more doomed was Prime Minister Kevin Rudd's \$62 million plan two years ago to make yet *more of these poor children* learn an Asian language. The results are now in, thanks



to a study from Melbourne University's Asia Education Foundation. For many students, it seems those *years of forced study* have been largely *wasted, and wasted most with Asian languages*. Moreover, what was sold as a way to reach out to other cultures *has divided students on ethnic lines*. (Bolt 2010) (italics by the author of this paper).

The reduction (and ultimate loss) of linguistic and cultural diversity under the pressure of the mass-media and globally powerful languages such as English "spawns new forms of multilingual aesthetic practice" (Apter 2006: 2) and has serious global consequences with regard to societies and the future of mankind (Dalby 2002). While it has become commonplace, for example, to bemoan the hegemony of global English as the *lingua franca* of technocracy, there has been insufficient attention paid to how other global languages are shifting the balance of power in the production of world culture. Chinese, for example, is now a major language of Internet literacy and is taking on English as never before (Apter 2006: 3–4).

In the context of the reflections on the societal status of "minority" and "other Englishes" (ib. 4), Emily Apter also raises the problem of the unprecedented loss of languages which must be of concern to comparative literature and culture studies (Wade and Harrison 2007). Her brief references to David Crystal, who has written widely on this matter (e.g. *Language Death*, 2000) and Andrew Dalby, who underlines in his study *Language in Danger: The Loss of Linguistic Diversity and the Threat to our Future* (2002) that 2500 languages (out of 5000) will be lost over the course of the century.

In the light of the widespread assumption, that every language equals a library in terms of cultural wealth and human knowledge even in oral and unwritten form (Harrison 2007; Deutscher 2010 and 2011; Nettle and Romaine 2000) the loss of linguistic and cultural diversity is catastrophic and the promotion of "ecolinguistics" an absolute must. (Crystal 2000: ix). In order to highlight the implications of the impending crisis and immensity of cultural loss, a brief statement published in the *1995 Newsletter of the Foundation of Endangered Languages in the UK* will be quoted here:

There is agreement among linguists who have considered the situation that over half of the world's languages are moribund, i.e. not effectively being passed on to the next generation. We and our children, then, are living at the point in human history, where, within perhaps two generations, most languages of the world will die out. (Crystal 2000: vii).

## 5. The Tower of Babel

The alarming extinction of the world's diversity of languages and cultures (matched by flora and fauna) and the associated irretrievable loss of the wealth of knowledge about the human condition accumulated over the centuries, constitutes a paradox in the age of the global village (GG: 31) in a steadily shrinking world, where man is no longer subjected to the laws of time and space, but capable of being "henceforth (actively and passively) simultaneously present, over land and sea, in every corner of the earth" (GG: 32).

The formal and systematic study of "great books" or what Henry H.H. Remak refers to as the "Humanities enterprise" as a broadly inclusive academic discipline and focus for thought and reflection (Remak 1999: 104), has lost its past status and legitimacy and has crossed the threshold of the digital information millennium, where "great works" are no longer "needed" (Spivak 1989: 43–52) and more vulnerable than ever before, as succinctly underpinned by Marshall McLuhan, amongst others, as follows:

Instead of tending towards a vast Alexandrian library the world has become a computer, an electronic brain, exactly as an infantile piece of science fiction. And as our senses have gone outside, Big Brother goes inside. (GG: 32)

The cryptic reference to the destruction of books (echoing Elias Canetti's novel *Auto-da-Fé* (1935) signals the ominous future of knowledge (printed books) in the brave new world of television and electronic information technology and the far-reaching detrimental effect of the electronic media on society in form of "division" and "separation". Significantly, it is the "media", and not the "content"

they carry, that matter; in short: the medium is the message. A negative outcome of this development is also underpinned in Marshall McLuhans's Biblical references to the "Tower of Babel" (Genesis: 11: 1-9; James Joyce's *Finnegans Wake*) and the complex archetypal connotations associated with it:

Electric technology does not need words any more than the digital computer needs numbers. Electricity points the way to an extension of the process of consciousness itself, on a world scale, and without any verbalization whatever. Such a collective awareness may have been the preverbal conditions of men. Language as the technology of human extension, whose powers of division and separation we know so well, may have been the "Tower of Babel" by which men sought to scale the highest heavens." (UM: 80)

While most interpretations of the Biblical narrative of the "Tower of Babel" are based on religious aspects and/or reflections on the role of language, as for example George Steiner's *After Babel* (1975) and Jacques Derrida's *The Tower of Babel* (1991), Marshall McLuhan's thematic point of reference is James Joyce's *Finnegans Wake* (1939) and his identification of the "Tower of Babel" with "sleep" and "witlessness" as hallmark of the human condition in the global village of the electronic century, and the blind faith in the promise of technology, that is, the computer, of "a Pentecostal condition of universal understanding and unity" (UM: 80): "Throughout *Finnegans Wake* Joyce specifies the Tower of Babel as the tower of Sleep, that is, the tower of the witless assumption, or what Bacon calls the reign of the Idols. (GG: 183)

The complementary reference to the "somniaesthetes and zombies" in T.S. Eliot's early part of *The Waste Land* and the mechanical regulation of city life (London) (UM: 149) highlights the embeddedness of Marshall McLuhan's critical reflections on the "electric century" and the role of the media, in "great books" and the precarious future of "Arnoldian humanism". The above characterisations of modern Western man as "zombie" and "witless" machine are closely related to Tzu-Gung's *Anecdote* in the introductory section of this paper. A closely related character trait is also the prevailing "apathy"



in the electric century: "Thus the age of anxiety and of electric media is also the age of unconsciousness and apathy." (UM: 47) Among the numerous other negative character traits of modern Western man (UM: 50; 69; 82; 86) as product of the "electric world", above all television, and a mechanical culture (UM: 308–337) intellectual "numbness" is most frequently underpinned (UM: 16):

The electric technology is within the gates, and we are numb, deaf, blind, and mute about its encounter with the Gutenberg technology, on and through which the American way of life was formed. (UM: 17–18)

Therefore, it comes as no surprise that, as predicted by the great British poet Alexander Pope (1688–1744), in the "new mass culture" the notion of "great works" would lose its relevance:

Language and the arts would cease to be prime agents of critical perception and become mere packing devices for releasing a spate of verbal commodities. (GG: 268)

Another significant factor in the depreciation of the printed word is the rapidly growing global influence of electronic technology, summed up in Marshall McLuhan's prophecy of the primacy of the Visual (television) at the expense of the printed word as core of a liberal education or comparative literature and culture studies, an argument, however, dismissed by Umberto Eco as a "fallacy" (Eco 1996: 298–301):

For the world of visual perspective is one of unified and homogeneous space such a world is alien to the resonating diversity of spoken words. So language was the last art to accept the visual logic of Gutenberg technology, and the first to rebound in the electric age. (GG: 136)

The demise and uncertainty associated with the humanities as defined by Henry H. H. Remak (Remak 1999: 106), among others, is further aggravated by a general trend in the electronic media to mono-lingualism and mono-culturalism, massive cuts in government



funding of universities, even in such rich countries as Australia, the associated closure of departments (predominantly humanities), the “market-model university” (Engell 1998: 50–54), the “vocational siege” of the universities, that is, an imposed focus on vocational training with employment prospects, the restriction of cross-cultural engagement and the promotion of business interests, and finally, the numerous internal conflicts, alluded to above, concerning the inclusive and broadly knowledge-focused role of the humanities in defense of the endangered diversity and the wealth of human knowledge and cultural traditions in the brave new world of the digital information millennium.

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(GG: The Gutenberg Galaxy; UM: Understanding Media; JM: Janine Marchessault)

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## *Open Challenges, Hidden Stories. The Power of Literary Histories*

### The Two Realisms of Literary History

The best of recent literary histories offer a new paradigm for the writing of literary histories and new criteria for the selection of relevant texts and materials. Together with interpretations, description of periods and portraits of authors and critics they also bring to the fore new paths and contexts for the historical trajectory of literature through cultural history. But most importantly, they unearth larger or smaller groups of hidden texts and authors, hitherto forgotten either for ideological or for theoretical reasons, and thereby they re-address the problem of remembering and forgetting as it shapes how we proceed to unravel the vicissitudes of literary and cultural history. Literary histories from the cultural margins on the old continents like Europe or from postcolonial cultures constitute important examples, and the same do literary histories of specific social groups, often in a cross-cultural and transnational perspective.<sup>1</sup>

How to write those histories through their partly neglected texts and authors and reshuffle the relation between remembrance and forgetting? The easy, and customary way, is to pretend that we can simply remove the veil and open a full view to what until now for various reasons has been overlooked, as if the neglect and ignorance was a mistake that can be done away with to finally reveal what was really there. We could call it the practice of the *realism of the hidden*.

But what we then tend to forget is that the hiding itself is also part of the real history of these texts and authors, and therefore it cannot be reduced without removing an important historical experience and thereby also impede our ability to recognize it as a historical fact and, subsequently, to uncover the meaning and importance of the

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<sup>1</sup> E.g., *A History of Literature in the Caribbean* 1–3 (1997–2001); *History of the Literary Cultures of East-Central Europe* 1–4 (2004–2010); *Nordisk kvindelitteraturhistorie* 1–5 (1993–1998).



hiding process. Hiding has actually contributed to the shape of the texts and their afterlife. This problem is dealt with in many postcolonial literary histories, in the literary histories of traumatic experience as e.g. related to war, apartheid or genocide, in the reintegration in the histories of literature of oral literature as well as in the recognition of the foundational role of translations. Hiding is an important part of literary history with an impact on forms, themes, genres, literary cultures, canons and traditions. We could call it the practice of the *realism of the hiding*. Both realisms form an integral part of the formations of literary histories today.

The realism of the hidden is quite in line with the conception of realism of the primary literary material being concerned as it is, although often in complex and contradictory ways, with *textual reference*. Being concerned with the culturally suppressed the realism of hiding is more complex, not least in its relation to what has actually been hidden. This complexity forms a parallel to Sigmund Freud's attempts to generate stories of the unspoken and unspeakable, most radically in the so-called Dora case from 1900 where the verbalization and narrativization of the suppressed experiences and emotions of the patient Dora is reduplicated by the suppressed recognition, on the part of Freud, of the process of transfer between the patient and the analyst. The transfer blocks the process because the patient places the doctor in a role that forms her remembrance and the ensuing narrative. It constitutes an emotional undercurrent produced and repeated by the very way Freud defines the relation between the doctor and the patient. This relation is set up in order not to involve the doctor, but only to reveal the hidden facts of Dora's life, and therefore his own involvement that blends with the unveiling of Dora's past is inaccessible to himself. Consequently, the therapy had to be discontinued and the account of it, called a fragment, *Bruchstück* (Freud 1971). Thus, the realism of the hiding is a not problem of textual reference, but of *textual communication* where both subject and object is part of the communicative problem and also influences to what extent the hidden eventually is accessible. The former type of realism challenges our capacity to know, the latter our capacity to tell.

In spite of Freud's attempts to separate the two dimensions in order to end up exclusively with some knowledge independent of the process through which it has been acquired, they cannot be separated as it is shown in Joseph Conrad's *Lord Jim* (1900). Here young Jim is exercising a complicated process of remembrance in the courtroom where he stands trial in the case of the sunken ship *Patna* carrying 800 pilgrims. He did not stay onboard as he should, but jumped from the ship to save himself; he was later rescued and now appears in court as co-responsible for the accident. But having escaped, he has himself contributed to the complication of memory he is experiencing in front of the court: The hidden events and the process of hiding them cannot be separated from his own responsibility. He has no clue to the hidden series of events and is incapable of relating the truth to the judges. The court tries hard, like Freud, to separate the hidden from the hiding and unravel only what is necessary for a verdict. But one thing they cannot find out: How did the ship actually get damaged? Inside Jim, however, the two dimensions – the hidden reality and the reality of the hiding – are inextricably entangled as part of *his* story about what happened. Here, he is confronted with the questions of the prosecutor about the actual details of the shipwreck:

The questions were aiming at facts. [...] They wanted facts. Facts! They demanded facts from him, as if facts could explain everything! [...] He spoke slowly; he remembered swiftly and with extreme vividness; he could have reproduced like an echo the moaning of the engineer for the better information of these men who wanted facts. After his first feeling of the revolt he had come round to the view that only a meticulous precision of statement would bring out the true horror behind the appalling face of things. The facts those men were so eager to know had been visible, tangible, open to the senses, occupying their place in space and time, requiring for their existence a fourteen-hundred-ton steamer and twenty-seven minutes by the watch; they made a whole that had features, shades of expression, a complicated aspect that could be remembered by the eye, and something else besides, something invisible, a directing spirit of perdition that dwelt within, like a malevolent soul in a detestable

body. He was anxious to make this clear. [...] He wanted to go on talking for truth's sake, perhaps for his own sake also; and while his utterance was deliberate, his mind positively flew round and round the serried circle of facts that had surged up all about him to cut him off from the rest of his kind [...]. This awful activity of mind made him hesitate in his speech.... [...] There was no incertitude as to the facts – as to the one material fact [...]. How *Patna* came by her hurt it was impossible to find out; the court did not expect to find out; and in the whole audience there was not a man who cared. (Conrad 1993: 21–23, 42)

There are two intertwined storylines at work here. First, there is the storyline of the hidden, that is to say the attempts to discover the facts, not all of them, but the facts relevant in the perspective of the law. But it is not possible. Later in the novel we learn that the ship did sink – only nobody knows why – but also that the 800 pilgrims were saved by a French ship. Second, there is the storyline of the hiding: It embraces all the impressions that are too emotional or existential for Jim to tell, even if the court were interested. The interaction between the two storylines disturbs his mind and his speak.

The first storyline is not fundamentally changed by the second, and also not by the surprising and later disclosure of the lucky fate of the passengers, and the second is not deeply affected by the first: The burning images of sounds, peoples and his own weakness that swirl around in Jim's mind and determine the rest of his life. Nevertheless, their interaction prevents the creation of a regular narrative storyline. We also learn that the facts are no simple facts we can just observe. They are determined by the context and the aim of their disclosure and the way they are communicated, in this case to the court. Moreover, we witness how the hiding is related to Jim's capacity to remember and also to express himself, thereby shaping the necessary communication of the facts.

Although relatively independent of each other there is never a clear cut distinction between what is hidden and what is not, what can be revealed and what is subject to hiding. It is an interactive process with the perceiver and the storyteller actively involved. This process is crucial to literature, among other phenomenon, and that is what underpins its aesthetic devices, narrative procedures and



imaginary language. Therefore, it is fair to say that Jim's troubles mirror the practice of the art of literature, the novel Conrad is making us read. The same is the case in Freud's experience with the talking Dora on his couch. What Freud exemplifies in theory and scientific practice is mirrored in his abortive report on the case. *Lord Jim*, on the other hand, repeats the same experience in the mode of imaginative writing.

What I am going to do in the remaining part of my essay is to try to learn from literature the intricacies of hiding as an integral part of the art of literature and to draw the consequences for the writing of literary history, a relationship modeled after the relationship between realism of the hidden and the realism on hiding, exemplified by Freud and by Conrad who are connected by the similarities as a theoretical and an aesthetic practice that binds together the hidden and the hiding as a real textual and historical processes.

As the hidden does not appear all by itself and the process of hiding does not dissolve automatically and transform itself into a transparent storyline, there is a question of cultural *power* involved here. Literature's power is that it shows by hiding, and hiding by showing, and literary histories, on the other hand, investigate and present this process in its historical unfolding as an open cultural challenge. For literary history the task is to develop a paradigm for the historical investigation, just like the court did on the basis of the law and like Freud did when he tried to establish the psychoanalytical paradigm. A paradigm provides its practitioners with the power to decide what is hidden and what is not. Conrad's practice is the real creative practice of literature exposing itself in front of us in the mode of Jim's meticulous and reluctant looking for words: the fight for the power to tell.

On the one hand, we meet the power to impose a paradigm to discover and select what is relevant among the hidden facts and, on the other, the power to fashion the result in a convincing story. However, this is a process with now guarantee of success, as is amply shown by Freud and Conrad. There are boundaries to be confronted with – the limits of the paradigm as in Freud and in Conrad's courtroom, the hidden facts that remain undiscovered in Dora's life and in the shipwreck, and finally the limited capacity to



put the findings into adequate words. Therefore, literature does not only deliver the material of literary history, but also presents a way of working with the relationship between the hidden and the hiding which may also serve as a model for the creation of paradigms for literary histories.

Art is a particular type of remembering what is hidden, and maybe also forgotten. It is the process of unraveling that never stops and therefore feeds on those dimensions of the hidden that will remain so and therefore emerge in infinite protean variations. Art never simply discloses it, but shows it as hidden in such a way that the creativity of art is transferred to the process of reading or watching the traces of the hidden. Obviously, the writings on holocaust constitute a prime example of this constellation, but here I will avoid this well studied and still important field. With three examples I will instead point to the general complexity of hiding and disclosing in the texts, and leave the consequences for the writing the literary history until the conclusion: Amitav Ghosh's *In an Antique Land* (1992), Multatuli's *Max Havelaar* (1860) and Hans Christian Andersen's *The Shadow* (1847).

### Anonymity Recognized

Ghosh's fabulous novel is set in Egypt around 1990, in the period leading up to the still ongoing Gulf war. But it also integrates various locations across the globe and across historical epochs since the Middle Ages. The young Indian anthropologist Amitab lives in a small village in Egypt while he is pursuing his studies of some old documents, located in Cairo and in the USA after they have been found in a hiding place in Cairo and dispersed partly by the Germans during WW2 but thoroughly studied by a German non-Jewish philologist in the 1930s during the Nazi regime.

The old papers contain a story about medieval commercial relations between Cairo, Aden and Mangalore, involving merchants of Jewish, Arab and Indian descent who interact harmoniously across the geographical and cultural boundaries. This story gradually emerges out of the documents and is discretely presented as a contrast to our contemporary world of persistent conflicts in the

same region. A both hidden and forgotten story formulated to teach the belligerent people of today a lesson.

But actually, the story of the merchants is not presented as an intricate intertwining of forgetting, hiding and remembrance. The hidden is just brought out into the open, like the meandering story of the documents themselves. There is however another story, too. It also turns out that the young and somewhat naïve Amitab only knows very little about the habits and beliefs of the people he is living with in Egypt, and they know even less about *his* cultural and religious background in India and in Hinduism. They are each others' hidden stories which produce an abundance of tragi-comical misunderstandings and heated arguments, as is the case with many cross-cultural encounters. They are hidden because of ideological and religious strategies, developed since the merchants travelled the region. The three hidden stories just mentioned: the medieval story of commerce, the routes of the documents and the mutually hidden cultural contexts, unfold in a structure of parallel and intertwined unfinished narratives. This narrative situation is known in other literary garments in literary history, as is the story about the migrating and permanently outplaced protagonist. And the narrative does not change when Amitab leaves to continue his research in the USA. He promises to go back later to wrap up the hidden dimensions left behind as only half-disclosed. But he only partly keeps his promise and does not succeed in getting behind the closed doors of knowledge and memories, but this is more for pragmatic reasons than because of the basic impossibility of this endeavor.

However, the profound driving force behind Amitab's research is another and more complex hidden story than the three just mentioned. He is struck by the recurring name of a slave in the documents, Bomma, always present, but on the margins of both events and narrative. Amitab speculates repeatedly about his role and his fate which is never revealed or verified. But on the other hand, the slave is always there and is obviously given responsible financial and communicative tasks in the networks of merchants, also when they at a certain point have a quarrel over money affairs and are afflicted by some mutual distrust. Bomma has been if not the invisible glue of the story, at least he has always been together with

the merchants, has known their story, has had access to confidential matters, and has acted as a go-between, maybe at times with a better overview over the situation than the merchants themselves.

Having no details of Bomma, Amitab in stead – as a sideline in his academic occupation with medieval trade routes – explores the name of the slave: Bomma. It turns out that it has Indian roots, from around Mangalore, Amitab's own homeplace. This is the only fragment of the slave's story he is able to reconstruct which is hardly an independent narrative, but still the driving force for him. At that point he sums up: "It was as if Bomma finally came of age and was ready at last to become a protagonist in his own story." (Ghosh 1992: 254)

This is, of course, the hidden story of Amitab himself – the peripheral stranger in Egypt, in India and in the research field he is engaged with. But still he is living where the core events of the medieval history actually took place, where the Gulf war that change the life of the small Egyptian village is launched, and where the rare documents are kept. And he continues to contact his friends, calling them from their village when he finally returns and when they are at war or live as migrant workers in Baghdad. But he never really shapes one story out of it all. The final words of the novel refer to his friend Nabeel from the village, now lost in Bagdad, but they are also valid for Bomma and Amitab himself: "Nabeel had vanished into the anonymity of History." (Ghosh 1992: 353)

The hidden story may surface when somebody focuses on it or, as with Bomma's story, on its relation to the process of hiding it, determined by his subordinate social position which is not turned into the general lesson of historical processes – anonymity. To be re-focused requires that somebody invests his own life and engagement in bringing the story forth. The story is then just as much about this engagement as about the more or less problematic visibility of the story itself. Ghosh's strategy using parallel stories in open networks is to produce a *writer's participation* in the process of telling through identification with the hidden. Without this participation the hidden story cannot be told, but the story therefore also cannot be told fully. The subjective filter, open to interpretations, will always remain a part of the hidden story.



## A Cup of Coffee

With *Max Havelaar* we move back to the mid nineteenth century with a postcolonial view on Dutch colonial history in the province of Lebak, just west of Jakarta in Indonesia. Here the Dutch colonial coffee trade was practiced with a more than firm hand to the benefit of the Dutch merchants back in Amsterdam, who did not know – and were not interested in knowing – how the coffee they earned millions on was actually produced. In 1860 there was a public outcry when the book, written by the frustrated former colonial civil servant Edouard Dekker, was published under the penname of Multatuli – meaning in Latin 'I have suffered much'. Before it went into printing it was edited by Jakob van Lennep without the author's consent, and the story of the disappearance and reappearance of the manuscript in various hideouts until the mid-nineteenth century and the subsequent editions and revisions is a hidden story in itself, like the documents in Ghosh's novel. Nevertheless, political measurements were taken after the book came out to make life easier in the colonies for the local population.

But again: this hidden story, as we know from numerous colonial and postcolonial accounts from most other colonies around the world, is not of prime interest 150 years later. The reason why the book is still an enticing read has to do with the fact that the hiding and forgetting never get out of their mutual entanglement.

One day the dry and hypercorrect coffee merchant Droogstoppel receives a huge box with mixed and unedited documents from the former colonial civil servant Max Havelaar, brought to him by an earlier acquaintance who Droogstoppel condescendingly calls Sjaalman, the man with the shawl, meaning a poor and unreliable person who cannot even afford a decent coat. The content of the box is a mess, but Droogstoppel starts making a list of the papers with a brief headline to each, the well organized merchant that he is. By reading some of them it dawns to him that the colonial reality from which he earns his honest money is a moral cesspool. This can, however, not be told straightforwardly if it is to be believed. He has to write a novel – another recurrent device in literature. Reluctantly, though: He hates and profoundly distrusts fiction and poetry. With



the help of a young German apprentice, Stern, his son Frits, and his daughter – and in part also Sjaalman because of documents in the local language where he is knowledgeable – the writing starts.

But here the reader begins to get worried, for the hidden story from the colonies on the life of the honest and therefore dismissed Havelaar cannot be separated from the writing process in all its fragmentary, subjective and arbitrary unreliability. The primary writing in Dutch is carried out by Stern, not even a Dutch citizen, as Droogstoppel hesitantly admits. We never know which papers from Sjaalman's box are taken into account and which are discarded, as we never know if Stern and Frits just invent everything because they like to indulge in imaginary writing, not least to impress various girls when they read aloud from their work. Droogstoppel tries to keep them on track, but the reader is never sure that he actually succeeds. And the young people couldn't care less. Droogstoppel even calls on a priest to sermon on decency, reliability and strict morals to suppress of the suspicious amorous motivations for the writing.

So the more we get to the core of hidden story, the unjust Dutch behavior in Indonesia, the more we doubt: Have the story been told from the right documents? Did the young blood invent half of it? Are the translations from local languages correct? Did Stern possess a sufficient mastery of Dutch? – Here not the writer, but the reader must make his or her own decisions concerning the hidden story, just like Droogstoppel with his nose in the box of papers must find some principles to guide a relevant selection.

At a certain point it is said about Havelaar's poetic power that it makes him trustworthy: "One cannot but acknowledge that Havelaar was a true poet. One cannot but feel that, when he spoke of the rice fields on the mountains, he raised his eyes to them through the open side of the 'hall' and really saw those fields. [...] He invented nothing: he *heard* the tree speak." (Multatuli 1987: 119). Said by Stern, probably. And then we are met with Droogstoppel's opposite view: "Mind you, I've no objection to verses in themselves. If you want words to form fours, it's all right with me! But don't say anything that isn't true. [...] And it is not only verses that tempt young people into untruthfulness. Just go to the theatre, and listen to all the lies that are served up there." (21). So Droogstoppel is more

and more worried about the reliability of his own projects and his helpers' capacity to reveal the hidden story truthfully – and so is the reader. These two positions are never reconciled.

The unsolvable balance between conscious hiding, accidental forgetting and disclosing is told in such a way that the very conditions for the reliability of the narrative process inevitably become an integral part of the story itself, and place the reader on the threshold of hiding and revealing, thus pointing to the reader's interpretative responsibility by identifying him- or herself with those who produce the unreliable but engaging story. It practices a strategy for the *reader's participation* by placing the responsibility on him or her.

### Hidden in the Shadow

One of Hans Christian Andersen's most complex tales is "The Shadow." Shortly after the first volume with fairy tales came out in 1835, he realized that the genre offered more possibilities than pointing to a hidden and fantastic reality behind the realm of the senses and everyday experiences. They also became complex, but still short stories about the conditions of writing hidden stories. They became self-reflexive meta-stories about the creative process itself hidden behind the surface of the story and its events, characters and narrative flow. One such story is "The Shadow."<sup>2</sup>

A learned man from the cold north has settled in the warm south. From his balcony he can see both his shadow on the wall of the house opposite the balcony, and a young maiden inside the house. The shadow separates himself from the man – and age-old literary motif –, enters the maiden's apartment and disappears, while the man continues to write "books about what was true in the world, and about what was good and what was beautiful" – stories which nobody seems to care about. One day the shadow returns, now a fine man of world, rich, successful and powerful. "I just want to see you before you die", he condescendingly tells the old learned man.

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<sup>2</sup> Quotations without page numbers refer to the webtext listed in the bibliography.

It now turns out that in the house opposite the learned man's apartment lived Poesy impersonated as the young girl. The man who had written poetry all his life didn't even recognize her when he saw her. But the shadow came to know everything, just from being in the antechamber in the other house, and he used his advantage to smart his way upwards in society. And the man, who thought he wrote about everything true, now became thinner and thinner, actually more and more shadowlike, and finally is turned into the shadow of his own shadow before he eventually dies. He tries to resist: "I am the man, and thou art a shadow – thou are only dressed up!" But in vain: "There is no one who will believe it!" the shadow returns. "Be reasonable, or I will call the guard." The man, now a shadow, fades away, "for they had deprived him of his life," while a princess gets infatuated with the shadow and marries him.

Poesy without life, as in the shadow, has a hidden power to manipulate the world or to kill its author. Here art and life stay external to each other. The hidden story tells that they are two sides of the same coin. Their mutual interdependence becomes the hidden story. The ontological problem of literature and other arts – where is the boundary between fiction and reality? – is forever hidden because when we tell the story the boundary is always set in motion. The questioning of the boundary always propels a process of repetition and produces *an ontological doubt*, precisely by addressing the issue. In art the ontological doubt is continuously reproduced thus pointing to this doubt as a fundamental part of our experience and knowledge and our capacity to tell about it.

## Hiding and Disclosing in Literature

The three texts have focused on the hidden story of 1) the writer's participation, of 2) the reader's participation, and of 3) the ontological as a constitutive hidden aspect of art, framed in all three cases by literary motifs with a historically dissemination across cultures: the nomadic migrant, the contested reliability of fiction based on occasional documents, and the relation between the shadow and its human subject. In other words, they are embedded in the context of literary history and offer another perspective on how to



fashion it: Neither the sequential story of portraits, works or periods and their mutual influence on each other or the unidirectional influences from center to periphery, nor the randomly organized literary history centered around more or less arbitrarily chosen cultural events.<sup>3</sup>

Instead the focus point could be the historically changing conditions and manifestations of the transformations of the power of the writer to change the view on history, the power of the reader to redirect the conditions for interpretation, and finally the power of fiction to challenge the status of reality. The three texts have stated their case with different means: parallel narratives in Ghosh, fragmented narratives in Multatuli and meta-fiction in Andersen. Those could be nodal points for writing a literary history focusing on the changing conditions of how the hidden disappear and reappear in the cultural history and on the shifting discursive strategies that direct the process of hiding and disclosing. In the individual texts all three are but three dimensions of the same essential creative process: the use of the hidden dimension of stories as a way of creating a *reader responsibility* in the textual meaning production – to secure that we are always reminded of the hidden dimension of all meaning production that makes literature and literary histories an open cultural challenge.

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*When Monsters (and the Portuguese)  
Roamed the Earth: The Production of Alterity  
in the Works of Camoens*

In the Middle Ages, India was depicted as a land of *thauma* (marvels and curiosities). As the farthest geographical zone, it formed a repository for oneiric projections, a place of dreams, inhabited by fantastic men and beasts. India was also portrayed as an earthly paradise, where one could experience bizarre carnal enjoyments and encounter proto-Christians. This ambiguous conception of India continued into the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, well after explorers had reached its shores and actual physical encounters with Indian populations had cast the existence of both the monsters and Indian Christians into doubt. Even new-found knowledge would not force Europeans to relinquish their pre-conceived notions. Explorers traveled eastward with an idea of what they would find. Since they knew their classical authors, Christian encyclopedias, natural science treatises, romances, maps, and miracle letters, it is not surprising that the lands they set out to discover would conform to the world previously configured in this literature. This India, divided into antitheses of the civilized and the barbarian and cohabited with saintly heathens, Christians, and monsters, would continue to haunt western consciousness in various forms for years to come. These various figures appear as embodiments of time, feeling, and place. They incorporate fear, desire, and anxiety. Beckoning from the edges of the world, they provide lessons in morality for secular audiences (Cohen 1996: 18).

The term “*monstrum*” both means “that which reveals” and also offers a warning (from the Latin *monere*) of what a person could become (ib. 4). In contrast, the Indian Christians (either in the form of real St. Thomas Christians or proto-Christian brahmins) provide

an ideal to be emulated. It was believed that the Indian Christian would be an ally upon whom one could rely when western Christian secular and religious powers showed themselves to be weak. Whereas the body of the Indian monster would provide a safe expression in clearly delimited and liminal space for fantasies of aggression and inversion, the Indian Christian could be seen as an intermediary other with some alterity, but often no different than the European self. The alterity of both, once assimilated into familiar space could be reduced, even cancelled, in polysemic play. Imaginary Indian Christians and monsters would provide escapist delight, giving way to fear when either group threatened to overstep its boundaries. They bear witness to the fragility of our classificatory boundaries. When successfully contained, however, they function as our alter egos. They give voice to our fragmented self, as long as we repress any displacement of the interior radical alterity that their presence consistently disavows (Uebel 1996: 282). They ask us, much as does Montaigne's cannibal, to question our cultural assumptions, perceptions of difference, and tolerance towards its expression. In the following discussion, I would like to examine how the Christians and monsters believed to inhabit India appear as secondary bodies through which the possibility of their interpreters' social practices can be explored (ib. 281) and their collective fears articulated. As I hope to show, they can also serve a more sinister process whereby a formerly tolerant society became obsessed with pollution, danger and subversion from both without and within. To illustrate this point, I will today look at a seminal text from this period that wonderfully exhibits this heterological process. In his epic account of the Portuguese imperial venture, Camoens took the image of India delineated in classical and medieval literature and injected it with a potent dose of *Realpolitik*.

Luis Vaz de Camoens was born in 1524, the year that Vasco da Gama died. His family was Galician and of the lesser nobility. They had, however, gained status when his grandfather married into the Gama family. Camoens's father, Simão Vaz de Camoens, had gone to the East as a ship's captain. Off the coast of Goa, he was shipwrecked and died. Despite the early loss of his father, Camoens's youth was nevertheless fortunate. He studied at Coimbra, receiving a

solid grounding in Latin, history, mythology, and Italian literature. These student days comprised the happiest period of his life and were often evoked in his later poetry. They contributed to an idyllic vision of his homeland that would sustain him through his difficult years of exile.

After his studies, Camoens returned to Lisbon in 1544. Due to an unfortunate love affair, he was exiled by royal decree. Another account claims that his banishment was self-imposed. In either case, he went to Ceuta as a common soldier in 1547 where he lost his right eye in combat. Camoens thus experienced first hand at a young age the losses of Portuguese empire building. He was repatriated in 1549. Shortly after his return to Lisbon, however, he was involved in a brawl where he wounded a court official and was thrown in prison. Friends interceded on his behalf and, as a condition of his pardon, he was sent to India in 1553 for what was to be three years of military service and ended up consuming seventeen years of his life. During this time, Camoens served as a common soldier and an administrator. All the while, he was hard at work writing poetry and composing *The Lusiads*, the epic story of Gama's voyage to India and the history of Portuguese exploration surrounding it.

In 1556, he was appointed Trustee for the Dead and Absent in Macao. There, Camoens led a fairly comfortable existence for several years until he was relieved of the post due to the machinations of a compatriot who coveted his appointment. Camoens was then sent back to Goa to face trumped-up charges. On route, he was shipwrecked at the mouth of the Mekong River, barely escaping with his life, as legend has it, while holding the manuscript of his epic poem above his head and out of the water. The poet made his way back to Goa in 1561 where he remained for six more years (several of which were spent in prison) until he was finally exonerated for his alleged administrative malfeasance in Macao. After so many travails, Camoens longed to return home and to see *The Lusiads* and his collected poems (*Parnasso de Luís de Camoens*) published. Thanks to a friendly captain, he got as far as Mozambique in 1567, where he spent two more years, lacking the money necessary to pay for his trip back to Portugal. It was only when his friend, the historian Diogo do Couto, passed through Mozambique, discovered his lamentable state,



and took up a collection to pay his return fare, that Camoens was able to resume his journey home. During the last leg of his trip, the manuscript of his poetry was stolen.

Camoens reached Lisbon in 1570, just as the city was recovering from one of its periodic outbursts of the plague. Upon his arrival, Camoens was shocked to see how what he had envisioned during his many years of exile as the native virtues of his race had wilted under prosperity and how the people at home did not realize at what cost the empire had been built. In this mood of deep disillusionment, Camoens penned the Prologue, Dedictory, and the Epilogue to his epic. *The Lusiads* passed the censor and was finally published in 1572 at which point it met with reasonable success.

The times, however, were catastrophic for Portugal. Between 1542 and 1550, João III had been realistic enough to jettison four of the eight North African strongholds. Sebastião, however, was more of an idealist and religious crusader who proved to be less interested in mercenary pursuits, navigation, and commerce. In an ill-fated decision, Sebastião decided to take on the Moslems definitively. He believed that the North African arena provided the strategic site for this venture and embarked on a disastrous invasion of Alcácer-Kebir in 1578 with 25,000 soldiers and 500 vessels. While this force might have been sufficient to safeguard all of Portugal's holdings in Asia, it was not adequate to confront the Moors in Africa. In merely four hours of pitched battle, 8000 Portuguese soldiers were slain and 15,000 enslaved. Less than 100 survived to bring the news of the defeat back home. This disaster was then compounded the next year when another plague broke out in Lisbon. Such were the dire conditions in which Camoens found Lisbon and Portugal upon his return. He was already physically and spiritually broken from his long ordeal in the East. The misfortunes of his country weighed heavily upon him and aggravated his despair. Camoens predicted that he would not only die *in* the country he so loved, but would also die *with* it. And, indeed, on June 10, 1580, he succumbed, barely missing the ascension of Philip II of Spain to the throne of the united peninsula.

As you well know, the title of the epic refers to the "sons of Lusú," the mythical first settler of Portugal and companion of

Bacchus. The sons of Lusus are, therefore, the Portuguese. Camoens took Virgil's scheme for *The Aeneid* as the model for the development of his own theme: the noble deeds of a people from the beginning of their history to the poet's own time. Just as Virgil had placed part of his story in the mouth of Aeneas, much of the Portuguese saga is recounted by Vasco da Gama to the King of Malindi. Camoens not only chose *The Aeneid* as his model, but as a challenge. Whereas Virgil sang of "arms and men," Camoens claimed to sing of an entire nation of heroes.

Like *The Aeneid*, *The Lusiads* centers on the storm-tossed mariner who ventures into the unknown to found a second Roman empire. Gama's voyage and the Portuguese confrontation with the Infidel serve as the central plot of the poem. The poet proclaims that the Portuguese in the age of discovery are more valiant than the heroes of antiquity. It was the task of the modern bard to sing their epic venture.

The action begins at the geographical point where Bartholomeo Dias had turned back from venturing further eastward. The gods of Olympus discover Gama's ships sailing up the east coast of Africa. In the typical epic fashion, the first canto presents the classical pantheon choosing sides whether to favor the Portuguese venture or thwart it. The Portuguese are thus well under way, after much toil and danger, when the gods of Olympus meet in council to decide if the navigators should be permitted to reach India. Bacchus, in particular, positions himself as Portugal's implacable enemy. He is jealous, lest the Portuguese outshine his own rule in India and eclipse his fame. Venus and Mars support and champion the Portuguese. Venus favors them because their language is similar to Latin and they remind her of her beloved Romans. Jupiter is, at this point, neutral.

In Mozambique, the Portuguese encounter an unknown race for the first time. They ask the initial questions: "Who are these people, what is their race and customs? Whose subjects are they? And their religion?" (1.45) (See Sample 1) The Portuguese are initially impressed with the natives who are cheerful, drink wine, and speak Arabic. When questioned regarding the purpose of their travels, the Portuguese respond that they seek the lands of the East, where the

Indus flows. They inquire about India and its inhabitants. (See Sample 2) The natives answer that they are Moslems and inform the Portuguese that the other natives are pagans and uncivilized. The Moslems claim to have settled in Mozambique and offer to provide the Portuguese with a pilot who might lead them to India. This encounter is presented as congenial. The Moslem governor asks to see their arms out of curiosity, while in fact he is already plotting treachery (1.67). It appears that, as soon as he learned they are Christian, he began to foster an irrational hatred for the Portuguese and to plot their destruction. Although promising to bring the Portuguese into contact with native Christians, the governor, in fact, plans to deliver them to a large contingent of Moslems. Gama thwarts these machinations and escapes from Mozambique. He also succeeds in avoiding a subsequent Moslem ambush orchestrated by Bacchus. Unscathed, the Portuguese arrive safely in Mombasa. The first canto ends with the poet lamenting the fickleness of fate. (See Sample 3)

Canto 2 opens with Bacchus once again plotting the destruction of the Portuguese. The scene of Gama's visit to the Hindu temple had earlier been described in the anonymous first-person log of Gama's first voyage, the *Roteiro*, and Ludovigo de Varthema's *Itinerario*. In the *Roteiro*, Gama misreads the Hindu temple as a Christian church containing a monstrous image of the Virgin. In contrast, Varthema deludes neither himself nor his readers. He describes the temple as it is, replete with standard representations of Hindu deities in their horrific manifestations. Varthema was not constrained by any larger political or religious project. He also did not need to promote any fantasy regarding Christian Indians. Varthema simply describes the scene and questions whether Gama was mistaken regarding what is obviously a Hindu temple or cynically indulging the Samorin in some sort of power-play. Camoens, however, presents the same episodes as a plot perpetrated by Bacchus (2.10–11). In the historical accounts, Gama's initial misprision clearly anticipates all subsequent conflicts. In Camoens, the temple visit and the ensuing animosities result from the trickery of a hostile god not from any fault of the Portuguese. Whereas the travel narratives suggest a strategic misunderstanding of the religious context on



the part of the Portuguese, the epic, in contrast, depicts the Portuguese not as confused or mistaken, but merely deluded by the contrivance of a false altar and a bad painting of the Virgin. Moreover, it is not Vasco da Gama who is deceived, but two convict-sailors whom he had sent ashore. This important initial scene between the Portuguese and the Indians that the historical accounts treat with circumspection – do the Portuguese encounter real, albeit heretical, Indian Christians, are they duped or engaged in an initially dishonest and duplicitous game of their own, or was the reality of the Hindu temple clear for anyone to see – is simply presented in the epic as a case of divine mischief. The epic consistently portrays the Portuguese as adventurers in search of both Indian and Christian allies, not the pirates that appear in the historical records. They are civilized explorers, not soldiers of fortune. This positive depiction is further delineated in cantos 3 through 9, when Gama recounts all the glorious and heroic exploits of the Portuguese to the King of Malindi.

He begins this narrative by relating key episodes from Portugal's history beginning with the tragic story of Inês de Castro and concluding with the poet's ruminations on the power of love. Canto 4 focuses on Portuguese maritime prowess and conquests. King Manuel had always dreamed of reaching the Ganges and the Indus Rivers. Toward this end, he dispatched Covilha to India. When this expedition did not bear the desired fruit, the king then sent forth Gama. This canto ends with the curious scene involving the old man of Restelo, to which we will return later. Canto 5 opens with Gama's voyage proper, presented by Camoens as an achievement without any parallel among the ancients. The initial challenge the fleet encounters is the giant Adamastor who personifies the Cape of Good Hope. Thanks to their cunning, the Portuguese are able to escape the monster's clutches and continue on their journey.

In Canto 6, the King of Malindi assigns Gama a competent and honest pilot who will lead them on the remainder of their voyage to India. Bacchus continues to plot mayhem against them by stirring up a storm that almost causes their total destruction. Venus intercedes once again to bring the Portuguese safely to India. Canto 7 presents the sailor Velosa who relates the tale of the Twelve of England, a



dozen Portuguese noblemen who had journeyed to England to defend the honor of a group of aggrieved English court ladies when no English nobles were brave enough to champion them. It also introduces the Moor Monsaide who instructs the Portuguese on India, its people, and customs (7.37–40). Here, India is reduced to its classic markers—caste, untouchability, and Pythagorian philosophy. In matters of the flesh, we are told, the Indians indulge in monstrous sexual practices.

The scene with the governor or Samorin of Calicut offers a parallel to Virgil's depiction of Aeneas's shield. The Samorin boards Gama's ship and is intrigued by the heroic scenes depicted on its banners and asks for clarification. Gama's description of the scenes depicted on the banners allows the poet to describe further instances of Portuguese bravery. The glorification of Portuguese valor that concludes canto 7 provides a subtle transition to canto 8 and its opening reflection on fame. Just as in the case of the temple visit, Camoens's version of Gama's encounter with the Samorin of Calicut differs considerably from that of the *Roteiro* and Varthema's *Itinerario*. In the *Roteiro*, Gama's men are detained once they bring merchandise ashore. They suspect Moslem treachery. It is only after they exchange merchandise that they can ransom their freedom and rejoin the ships. In contrast, Varthema does not speculate about the animosity of the Moslems. Rather he provides detailed information on the excellent conditions under which trade was conducted in Calicut before the arrival of the Portuguese, suggesting that they alone were responsible for the breakdown of the commercial venture. In the epic, however, Gama is never to blame; he is never outwitted in his encounters with the Samorin nor is his or his crew's nobility, courage, and clear sightedness ever called into question. The middle cantos of the epic punctuate the narration of Portuguese history with a series of meditations on key themes: love (canto 3), hubris (canto 4), collective achievement (canto 5), heroism (canto 7), devotion (canto 7), and fame (canto 8), that all form the subject matter traditional to the epic format.

Camoens's poem now moves toward its conclusion. Canto 9 continues to recount the hostilities: Gama seizes Moslem merchants in order to exchange them for the two Portuguese factors that had

been detained. The Portuguese then beat a hasty retreat, aided by Venus who brings them to the Island of Love as a reward for all their labors. Here Tethys and the Nereids frolic with the mariners. Tethys, herself, is paired off with Gama. The epic concludes with the banquet of the Nereids and the sailors. The nymph Tethys then foretells the Portuguese achievements in Africa, Egypt, Arabia, Persia, India, and Ceylon in the fifty years following Gama's voyage. She leads him up to a mountaintop where she reveals to him the structure of the universe, prophesies the dominion of his Portuguese successors, and offers a view of what the Portuguese will still discover. In this geographical description, she mentions, of course, the monsters one expects to find in all the descriptions of India. Tethys also points out St. Thomas's tomb in Mylapore. She evokes his martyrdom in India as a challenge to those Portuguese who sit at home rather than preaching the faith" (10.119). (See Sample 4) Although the Portuguese are "the salt of the earth," she explains, they corrupt themselves in their own country (10.120). Since "this is a dangerous theme" (*Mas passo esta matéria perigosa*), Tethys decides to move on with her exposition. But, it is exactly this dangerous discussion that is at the heart of Camoens poem. The issue here is twofold: what are the Portuguese doing at home to protect the faith in the face of the Protestant Reformation and what are they doing in India? They have usurped the name of missionaries. However, both at home and abroad they do not preach and live the faith. Quite the contrary. Although Tethys says she will avoid such dangerous discussions, it is clear that Camoens has no intention of doing so himself. In the poem's conclusion he advises his readers, foremost among who is the King of Portugal himself, to look beyond this tale of valor to see a lament of defeat. The epic thus ends with the poet's ruminations on the decline of the heroic temper and the rise of decadence. Camoens exhorts Sebastian to hold in higher regard those who serve overseas and to take counsel only from those who have experience. (See Sample 5)

In order to publish *The Lusiads*, Camoens had to pass the censor. He had first to resolve the problem of the presence of gods and goddesses in a Christian epic that exalted the Portuguese nation and its mission of faith. Fearful lest the mythological references

throughout the poem arouse insurmountable objections from the authorities, Camoens inserted an additional stanza in the last canto. This stanza (10.82) declares that the gods are all fabulous and are introduced as fantasy to render the poem harmonious. They are "but creatures of fable, figments of man's blindness and self-deception" ("Fingidos de mortal e cego engano"). They were used in order to "turn agreeable verses" ("So para fazer versos deleitosos"). In an entire poem whose plot is grounded in the sphere of the marvelous, this addition has appeared to critics and readers alike as the poet's attempt to move beyond the realm of myth. From a dramatic point of view, however, the presence of the gods and goddesses was necessary. Their human emotions, especially their jealousy, venality, and partiality, drive the plot. As gods, they could be more exaggerated and symbolic than human protagonists. The retention of classical mythology also provides a figurative interpretation of nature. The Portuguese story was nothing if not a tale of victory over nature. In addition, the presence of goddesses and the nymphs break up the monotony of what was essentially a male narrative. To an audience familiar with epics in the spirit of Ariosto, exclusively male-dominated action would seem tedious. For this same reason, Camoens added chivalric tales, such as the story of the Twelve of England, Inês de Castro, and the marriage of the mariners and the nymphs. On the level of plot, such scenes lighten the narrative with a romantic overlay. On a symbolic level, episodes such as the nuptials of the sailors and the nymphs figuratively represent Portugal's mastery over the seas.

These chivalric tales also speak of a virtuous Portugal and echo Camoens's own youth spent at Coimbra. He fed his idyllic vision of Portugal by constructing a poem filled with the tales of knightly exploits culled from classical and European epic literature as well as the historical accounts of the age of discovery. The poet was thus able to wed this ideal of Portugal's greatness to the documentation found in the works of his friends, Gaspar Corrêa's *Lendas da Índia*, the scientist Garcia da Orta's *Colloquios dos Simples e Drogas da Índia*, and the historian Diogo do Couto's *Decadas*. By interweaving such elements of history, romance, allegory, and the supernatural, Camoens enlivened what might have seemed a rather monotonous



plot of an ocean voyage. In the midst of this variety, however, one episode stands out as unique. This episode, approximately half way through the poem, has continually baffled readers and seems to call into question the entire meaning of the poem. It is this scene that I would like to look at in greater depth.

As the fleet is about to set sail for India on July 8, 1497, a crowd of citizens has congregated on the banks of the Tagus River, to be exact, on the Restelo beach near the Belém church in a western suburb of Lisbon. Among the crowd, two women are heard expressing their fears – one a wife, the other a mother. They are surrounded by the laments of the elderly and the young. An old man, unnamed like the women, stands out in the crowd. He addresses the men on the ships (*nós no mar*) and condemns as futile their lust for power and desire for worldly renown. Craving power and thirsting for fame are follies. Honor is a fraudulent pleasure to which only vapid souls succumb. It causes people to forsake their loved ones. Power and fame are not illustrious and noble goals, but merit the obloquy of infamy that is justly punished with the loss of peace of mind and earthly belongings, including entire realms. (See Sample 6) The old man then predicts that the promise of gold mines and kingdoms will bring doom to Portugal and its people. (See Sample 7) Just as Adam was exiled from Paradise, so too the Portuguese, as the true sons of Adam, will be driven by this folly that is disguised as enterprise and valor. They are an unhappy race, the heirs of madmen whose sin and disobedience have doomed them to exile from paradise as well as from the divine state of simple and tranquil innocence. Their craving for lucre and glory has transformed Portugal's golden age into the age of iron and destruction.

(See Sample 8) The old man continues to berate the men. If their minds are set on risking their lives in savage warfare for the sake of Christianity, they should continue to fight the Moor at their gates, in nearby North Africa. The Ishmaelite is at hand, he proclaims; they need not go to the ends of the earth to confront him and, in the process, depopulate and wreck Portugal and squander its resources. By mentioning the pompous titles of "Ruler of India, Persia, Arabia and Ethiopia," the Old Man is mocking King Manuel whom along with his successors had actually assumed these grandiose titles. (See



Sample 9) He predicts that those who go forth deserve to suffer in Hell and should never be renowned or even remembered. No poet should immortalize them and their names should die with them. The Old Man then makes allusions to the Argonauts, Prometheus, and Icarus as setting bad examples of excessive boldness. As he is continues to harangue them, the Portuguese set sail.

The reader might rightfully ask what this accusatory diatribe achieves in a poem whose central idea is the celebration of Gama's voyage as an immortal heroic feat. Indeed, commentators have been quick to note that the old man's speech voiced legitimate concerns that had been articulated in general assemblies and royal council meetings during the reigns of João II, Manuel, and João III (Moser 1980: 141). In the epic context, where we only hear the voices of the gods and heroes, the old man as the voice of the common man stands out to admonish the nation and even mock the ambition of the king. He is a very un-epic figure placed in the middle of an epic to vilify those who are about to depart as well as those very actions and deeds the poem presumes to celebrate. Does the old man merely reflect the thoughts that were bruited about in the political fora of the time or does he offer the poet's deconstruction of the entire epic project? A possible answer to this question can be found in Camoens's work as a whole. And, indeed, upon closer inspection of his extant poetry, we discover that complaints similar to those of the Old Man of Restelo were not uncommon in this corpus of work. In fact, when the Old Man condemns the Portuguese military (see Sample 10), he echoes sentiments the poet expressed in descriptions of his experiences as a soldier.

In 1553, Camoens was forced to participate in a retaliatory offensive on the Kingdom of Pimenta for attacking property of the King of Porca, an ally of the Portuguese. In an assault on Chembé, the Portuguese massacred everything in sight. Camoens also took part in forays into the Persian Gulf, where the Portuguese committed acts of piracy on Turkish ships. Here too, he was forced to engage in slaughter, not battle. The Portuguese ruthlessly killed the Turkish crews who had surrendered. In many cases, they fed them alive to the sharks. These forays of unmitigated butchery were more abominable than Chembé, where at least the Portuguese engaged an army in

battle array. In India and in the Gulf, the Portuguese butchered not just sworn enemies, but also merchants, women, children and animals. In contrast to the heroic tone of the rest of the epic, the speech of the old man of Restello offers a forceful reflection on this reality. It communicates Camoens's disgust of his forced service in India and the piratical incursions in the Gulf.

We can also find an echo of Camoens's feelings regarding the wanton brutality of the Portuguese in India expressed in his poems, such as the "Disparates da India" ("Follies in India") (Camoens 1985: 1.95–101), where Camoens forcefully condemns the social and political shame of the Portuguese in India. He specifically attacks those who brought his country to ridicule – "the rich, overbearing, pretentious ne'er do well youth, immoral moralists, hypocrites, and merciless greedy judges" (Hart 1962:124). (See Sample 11) He generally castigates those who have brought dishonor to the proud name of his country. He ends each verse with an apt proverb and thus skewers Portuguese injustice and corruption in India. (See Sample 12) Camoens also condemned Portuguese decadence in India in the *redondilha* "Ao desconcerto do mondo," where he wrote:

Ever in this world saw I  
 Good men suffer grave torments,  
 But even more –  
 Enough to terrify –  
 Men who live out evil lives  
 Reveling in pleasure and in content. (Hart 1962: 111)  
 (See Sample 13)

However, the inner reality of empire for Camoens was most fully articulated in "Cá neste Babilónia, donde mana:" (See Sample 14)

Here is this Babylon, that's festering  
 forth as much evil as the rest of the earth;  
 Here where true love deprecates his worth,  
 as his powerful mother pollutes everything.  
 Here where evil is refined and good is cursed,  
 and tyranny, not honor, has its way;  
 Here where the monarchy in disarray,

blindly attempts to mislead God, and worse.  
Here in this labyrinth, where Royalty,  
willingly chooses to succumb  
before the Gates of Greed and Infamy;

Here in this murky chaos and delirium, I carry out my tragic destiny,  
but never will I forget you, Jerusalem! (Camoens 2005: 72–73)

Lisbon is Jerusalem (Zion), where Camoens was born and loved, the place from which all virtues and fine qualities sprang, the site where civilization was to be found, and the home from which he was exiled to the Babylon of Portuguese India. Here, as in Camoens's memories of his youth, Portugal holds an exalted position. Any memories of its cruelty and vice have dimmed with time and distance. It epitomizes for Camoens what it is to be civilized. However, her unworthy sons have dragged civilization into the dirt, trampling Portugal's glory in Goa with their greed, false pride, and arrogance. In Portuguese India, all lusts reign supreme and pure love lies unsought. Evil waxes worse and all good is spurned. Monarchs seek blind blundering. Tyranny is taken for honor. God is cheated by vain words. It is a chaos that the Portuguese have created for themselves. The poet asks in a longer elegiac version of the same poem how one cannot long for the Zion of Portugal after having lived in such a place and earned one's daily crusts of bread in such conditions. (See Sample 15) In this poetry, Camoens declared war against the vice and corruption that was rampant in Portuguese India. He gave full vent to his resentment and indignation. While Portugal appears as the flower of European nations, Portuguese India is presented as the antithesis of its purported national aspirations.

Given the depth of the poet's disgust with the Portuguese venture in India expressed in these poems, the warning voiced by the old man of Restelo is not incongruous. Camoens's genius was that he chose to articulate these feelings in the midst of an epic dedicated to singing the praise of the Portuguese endeavor. To a certain extent, he used the epic format to write an anti-epic. Whether he set out to write an anti-epic or the anti-heroic sentiments grew out of the process is not something we can answer today. But what we might call the



paradox of an anti-epic epic can be seen in the poet's simultaneous longing for and condemnation of Portugal that resulted from his prolonged personal experience of India and exile.

In *The Lusiads*, Camoens dealt with key scenes described in the Portuguese and Italian travel narratives to India that I have investigated. I have offered a brief *aperçu* of these parallel descriptions. In the episode in the Hindu temple and in his encounters with the Samorin of Calicut, the historical accounts challenge any script that the Portuguese were in control of the situation or even honest and forthright in their dealings with the Indians they encountered. Camoens displaces any overt criticism of their behavior or motivations by placing blame either on the gods or the Moslems. He works within the constraints of the epic whose proper subject is the strife of men. Heroic events effect changes in conscience and in social conditions. Epic, however, does not seek to discover the causes or explain why events occur in human terms. It is the will of the gods. Epic does not abrogate the authority of history. Rather, epic sings, on an albeit heroic pitch, the fateful strife for the realization of a great collective ideal. The epic genre forced the poet to problematize the myths of the past or create new myths. When we take into account the tirade of the Old Man of Restello (its central position in the poem and its radically anti-heroic message), we see that Camoens was already questioning, if not deconstructing, the message of his heroic song. Using the tropes provided by classical and medieval literature, he was already developing a new myth. Camoens was asking us where, in fact, civilization resides and where do we find barbarism? Who are the monsters? Where are the true Christians?

In canto 7, when the Portuguese land in India, we see this new myth of Christian identity foregrounding the narrative. Portugal's brand of Christianity, its devotion to the faith, is what sets it apart from the other nations of Europe. As the seafarers arrive off the coast, the poet launches into a hymn of praise to the Portuguese nation, their small numbers are outweighed by their devotion to the Mother Church and their bravery. The Infidels have not forsaken their aggressive designs against the true faith. It is just that now Europe fails to rise in its defense. Were it not for the Portuguese, all would be lost. The epic poet boasts that although the Lusitanians are



but a very small part of mankind, nothing prevents them from conquering the lands of the infidel. When one compares them to the headstrong Germans, the dour English, and the unworthy French, they are superior in terms of courage and faith (Camoens 1952: 161–62) (See Sample 16) Clearly, for Camoens, Western Christians are no longer defined vis à vis their fictitious Indian counterparts, but in relation to each other.

Nevertheless, to be a Portuguese Christian in the age of discovery is still bound up with the Indian venture. It is ultimately through the conquest of India that the Portuguese distinguish themselves from lesser European Christians. India presents the means by which the Portuguese can prove themselves. What has changed is that the earlier myth of Indian Christians and monsters has shifted to form a new myth of ideal Portuguese Christians and those who have lost their valor. (See Sample 17) In *The Lusiads*, this myth allowed the Portuguese to assert a cohesive social identity and declare their cultural superiority. The social identity activated by this myth affected corollary sentiments of estrangement both from “other” European Christians and those Portuguese in India who had strayed from their heroic and historic mission.

As noted, canto 10 presents the nymph Tethys revealing to Gama the structure of the universe. To relieve the endless catalogue of future Portuguese exploits, Camoens inserts into the narrative a long excursus on St. Thomas’s miracles and martyrdom. His example serves as a reproach to all indolent would-be missionaries and a critique of the entire imperial venture. The Portuguese native virtues are seen to have wilted due to prosperity. The people at home no longer realize at what cost their empire has been built. This is the inner reality of empire of which Camoens foreshadowed in the harangue of the old man of Restelo.

By the time Camoens completed *The Lusiads*, the epic days were over. The poem concludes with a prophetic vision suggesting the demise of the Portuguese Indian empire. Although the Portuguese achievement is presented as part of providential design to win the world for the faith and Camoens presents it as part of God’s purpose for the universe as a whole, canto 10 clearly shows how the Portuguese fight for the faith is ultimately determined by the spiritual

values of Europe. Camoens's need for a new myth suggests that these values are bankrupt and that the forces of evil and darkness will, in fact, prevail. The myth of the Christian ideal, which in the fifteenth century had been displaced to India, experienced a transformation by the mid-sixteenth century. The binary Christian ideal/pagan monster is now relocated within the imperial subject. India, once the site of a possible Christian utopia, has now become the stage for European dishonor and corruption. Let us not forget that when Columbus arrived in "the Indies," he wrote in the famous letter to Sanchez that he did not find the monsters he expected to find there. I think we can safely conclude that those monsters that were absent from Columbus's letter become re-inscribed in the work of Camoens. However, these monsters are no longer the Indian other, but the Portuguese self, spawned not on the edges of the world, but on the banks of the Tagus.

### Samples

- 1 "Que gente será esta? (em si diziam) Que costumes, que leis,  
que rei teriam?" (1.45)
- 2 Os Portugueses somos do Ocidente;  
Imos buscando as terras do Oriente. (1.50)  
A terra Oriental que o Indo rega; ...  
- Se entre vós a verdade não se nega –  
Quem sois, que terra é esta que habitais,  
Ou se tendes da Índia alguns sinais. (1.152)
- 3 Onde pode acolher-se um fraco humano,  
Onde terá segura a curta vida,  
Que não se arme e se indigne o Céu sereno  
Contra um bicho da terra tão pequeno? (1.106)
- 4 Olhai que, se sois sal e vos danais  
Na Pátria, onde profeta ninguém é,  
Com que se selgarão em nossos dias  
(Infiéis deixo) tantas heresias? (10.119)

- 5 No mais, Musa, no mais, que a Lira tenho  
Destemperada e a voz enrouquecida,  
E não do canto, mas de ver que venho  
Cantar a gente surda e endurecida.  
O favor com que mais se acende o engenho,  
Não no dá a Patriá, não, que está metida  
No gosto da cobiça e na rudeza  
Dũa austera, apagada e vil tristeza,  
E não sei por que influxo de destino  
Não tem um ledor orgulho e geral gosto,  
Que os ânimos levanta de contínuo  
A ter para trabalhos ledor o rosto.  
Pos isso vós, ó Rei, que por divino  
Conselho estais no régio sólio posto,  
Olhai que sois (e vede as outras gentes)  
Senhor só de vassallos excelentes! (10.145-46)
- 6 Ó glória de mandar ! ó vã cobiça  
Desta vaidada, a quem chamamos Fama!  
Ó fraudulento gosto, que se atiça  
Cũa aura popular, que honra se chama!  
Que castigo tamanho e que justiça  
Fazes no peito vão que muita te ama!  
Que mortes, que perigos, que tormentas,  
Que crueldades neles exprimentas!  
Dura inquietação d'alma e da vida,  
Fonte de desamparos e adultérios,  
Sagaz consumidora conhecida  
De fazendas, de reinos e de impérios!  
Chaman-te ilustre, chaman-te subida,  
Sendo digna de infames vitupérios;  
Chaman-te Fama e Glória soberana,  
Nomes com quem se o povo néscio engana. (4.95-96)
- 7 A que novos desastres determinas  
De levar estes Reinos e esta gente?  
Que perigos, que mortes lhe destinas  
Debaixo dalgum nome preeminente?  
Que promessas de reinos e de minas

De ouro, que lhe farás tão facilmente?  
Que famas lhe prometerás? Que histórias?  
Que triunfos? Que palmas, que vitórias? (4.97)

- 8 Mas ó tu, geração daquele insano  
Cujo pecado e desobediência  
Não sòmente do Reino soberano  
Te pôs neste desterro e triste ausência,  
Mas inda doutro estado mais que humano,  
Da quieta e da simples inocência,  
Idade de ouro, tanto te privou,  
Que na de ferro e de armas te deitou. (4.98)
- 9 Não tens junto contigo O Ismaelita,  
Com quem sempre terás guerras sobejas?  
Não segue ele do Arábio a lei maldita,  
Se tu pela de Christo só pelejas?  
Não tem cidades mil, terra infinita  
Se terras e rigueza mais desejas?  
Não é ele par armas esforçado,  
Se queres por vitórias ser louvado?

Deixas criar às portas o inimigo,  
Por ires buscar outro de tão longe,  
Por quem se despovoe o Reino antigo,  
Se enfragueça e se vá deitando a longe!  
Buscas o incerto e incógnito perigo,  
Por que a Fama te exalte e te lisonje,  
Chamando-te senhor, com larga cópia,  
Da Índia, Pérsia, Arábia e de Etiópia! (4.100–1)

- 10 Já que nesta gostosa vaidade  
Tanto enlevas a leve fantasia,  
Já que à bruta crueza e feridade  
Puseste nome esforço e valentia,  
Já que prezas em tanta quantidade  
O desprezo da vida, que devia  
De ser sempre estimada, pois que já  
Temeu tanto perdê-la quem a dá. (4.99)



- 11 Que dizeis duns, que as entranhas  
Lhe estão ardendo em cobiça,  
E, se têm mando, a justiça  
Fazem de teias de aranhas  
Com suas hipocrisias,  
Que são de vós as espias?  
Pera os pequenos, uns Neros,  
Pera os grandes, nada feros  
Pois tu, parvo, não sabias  
Que lá vão leis, onde querem cruzados? (Camoens 1985:97)
- 12 Ó vós, que sois secretários  
Das consciências reais,  
Que entre os homens estais  
Por senhores ordinários:  
Porque não pondes um freio  
Ao roubar, que vai sem meio,  
Debaixo de bom governo?  
Pois um pedaço de inferno  
Por pouco dinheiro alheio  
Se vende a mouro e a judeu.
- Porque a mente, afeiçoada  
Sempre à real dignidade  
Vos faz julgar por bondade  
A malícia desculpada.  
Move a presença real  
Ûa afeição natural,  
Que logo inclina ao juiz  
A seu favor. E não diz  
Um rifão muito geral  
Que o abade, donde canta, daí janta? (Camoens 1985:1.100–01)
- 13 Os bons vi sempre passar  
No Mundo graves tormentos;  
E pera mais me espantar,  
Os maus vi sempre nadar  
Em mar de contentamentos. (Camoens 1985: 1.136)

- 14 Cá neste Babilónia, donde mana  
Matéria a quanto mal o mundo cria,  
Cá onde o puro Amor não tem valia,  
Que a Mãe, que manda mais, tudo profana;

Cá, onde o mal se afina e bem se dana,  
E pode mais que a honra a tirania;  
Cá, onde a errada e cega Monarquia  
Cuida que um nome vão a Deus engana;

Cá nesta labirinto, onde a nobreza  
Com esforço e saber pedindo vão;  
Às portas da cobiça? e da vileza;  
Ca neste escuro caos de confusão,  
Comprindo o curso estou da Natureza.  
Vê se me esquecerei de ti, Sião! (Camoens 1985: 1.256–7)

- 15 ás portas da cobiça e da vileza  
estes netos de Agar estão sentados  
em bancos de torpíssima riqueza,  
todos de tirania marchetados.  
É do feio Alcorão suma a largeza  
que tem para que sejam perdoados  
de quantos erros cometendo estão. (Camoens 1980: 3.521)

- 16 A vós, ó geração de Luso, digo,  
Que tão pequena parte sois mundo,  
Não diga inda no mundo, mas no amigo  
Curral de quem governa o Céu rotundo;  
Vós, a quem não somente algum perigo  
Estorva conquistar o povo imundo,  
Mas nem cobiça ou pouca obediência  
Da Madre que nos Céus está em essência;

Vós Portugueses, poucos quanto fortes,  
Que o fraco poder vosso não pesais;  
Vós, que à custa de vossas várias mortes  
A lei da vida eterna dilatais;  
Assi do Céu deitadas são as sortes

Que vós, por muito poucos que sejais,  
Muito façais na santa Cristandade,  
Que tanto, ó Christo, exaltas a humildade!

Vedelos Alemães, soberbo gado,  
Que por tão largos, campos se apacenta  
Do successor de Pedro rebelado,  
Novo pastor e nova seita inventa;  
Vedelo em feias guerras ocupado  
(Que inda co cego error se não contenta!)  
Não contra o superbissimo Otomano,  
Mas por sair do jugo soberano.  
Vedelo duro Inglês ...

Pois de ti, Galo indigno, que direi?  
Que o nome "Christianíssimo" quiesete. (7.2–6)

- 17 Pois que direi daqueles que em delicias,  
Que o vil ócio no mundo traz consigo,  
Gastam as vidas, logram as divicias,  
Esquecidos de seu valor antigo?  
Nascem da tirania inimicicias,  
Que o povo forte tem de si inimigo. (7.8)

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## *Humanism of Rabindranath Tagore*

Rabindranath Tagore who received the Nobel Prize for literature in 1913 primarily for his *Gitanjali* (*Song Offerings*) was a versatile genius. Although Tagore was primarily a poet, and he said on one occasion that he entered into his real self when he wrote poetry, his genius touched every branch of literature – novel, drama, short story, critical essays, travelogues and autobiographical writings. The only literary form that he did not experiment with is the epic. But it would not be wrong to say that through his highly eventful career and inexhaustible creativity spanning eight decades, he virtually lived an epic though he did not write any.

Tagore was not a cloistered artist. This myriad-minded poet was as much a man of contemplation as of action. He was a distinguished educationist and a social thinker. He was a painter who was also a musician. He was an internationalist but he never lost sight of the ground realities of the country. About him it has been said that like Shakespeare and Goethe he could replace a whole culture and in all his writings and actions he left the indelible stamp of humanism. Like the Renaissance humanists he believed that man is at the centre of the universe and all our thoughts and actions should be governed by our sincere solicitations for the welfare of man.

Humanism is the hall mark of the total Tagore. Whether he wrote about the unity of man, or nationalism and internationalism, about the woman question or about environmental awareness, about untouchability and religion or about education, about colonialism or exploitation and violence, about music or painting, dance or drama, about rural reconstruction or cooperative farming it is always marked by the spirit of humanism. As a humanist Tagore believed in the essential unity of man and the universality of the mind. To him the mind was more important than matter and under no circumstances should the mind be fettered by religion, materialism, greed or power etc. He believed: "Uniformity is not unity. Those who destroy the independence of other races destroy the unity of all races of

humanity" (EWT 6: 579). He was critical if not contemptuous of the kind of unity that is claimed by Imperialism. In a sarcastic tone of ruthless banter he remarked: "Modern Imperialism is that idea of Unity, which the python has in swallowing other live creatures" (ib.). It is true that people as individuals have distinctive differences in many respects: in physiognomy, complexion, passions and prejudices but these differences are never inimical to the attainment of the universality of the mind. In other words the universality of mind is manifested in the infinite variety of individual differences. In this connection Tagore had once said to H.G.Wells: "Our individual physiognomy need not be the same. Let the mind be universal. The individual should not be sacrificed" (ib. 8: 1237). And he regretted in "Nationalism in the West": "The history has come to a stage when the moral man, the complete man, is more and more giving way, almost without knowing it, to make room for the political and the commercial man, the man of the limited purpose" (ib. 4: 448).

The same concern for individual freedom is evident in his observations on the freedom of Europe – a kind of freedom which is not conducive to the development of the moral man. Tagore writes in "India and Europe": "The freedom that Europe has achieved today in action, in knowledge, in literature and in art, is a freedom from the rigid inanity of matter. The fetters that we forge in the name of religion, enchain the spiritual man more securely than even worldly ties. The home of freedom is in the spirit of man. That spirit refuses to recognize any limit to action or to knowledge" (ib. 7: 845). His anxiety in the lack of moral links that can hold together the civilization is evident in his letter to Gilbert Murray where he writes:

... I find much that is deeply distressing in modern conditions, and I am in complete agreement with you again in believing that at no other period of history has mankind as a whole been more alive to the need of human cooperation, more conscious of the inevitable and inseparable moral links which hold together the fabric of human civilization. I cannot afford to lose my faith in this inner spirit of Man, nor in the sureness of human progress which following the upward path of struggle and travail is constantly achieving, through cyclic darkness and doubt, its ever widening ranges of fulfillment. (Ib. 6: 455).

This faith is reaffirmed in his letter to Yone Nogichi where he writes: "Humanity in spite of its many failures, has believed in a fundamental moral structure of society" (ib. 8: 1140). Tagore had a feeling that the kind of human civilization that is prevailing in Europe is essentially a political civilization which is scientific but not human. It is based upon exclusiveness.

He says in "Nationalism in Japan":

The political civilization which has sprung up from the soil of Europe and is overrunning the whole world, like some prolific weed, is based upon exclusiveness. It is carnivorous and cannibalistic in its tendencies, it feeds upon the resources of other peoples and tries to swallow their whole future....*This political civilization is scientific, not human.* It is powerful because it concentrates all its forces upon one purpose, like a millionaire acquiring money at the cost of his soul. (Ib. 4: 472. Emphasis added).

To Tagore man is of the highest importance and the welfare of man is the most important thing. And by welfare he means the development of man in his fullness into a complete man. He believed that human society is "the best expression of man, and that expression, according to its perfection, leads him to the full realization of the divine in humanity" (ib. 4: 565). Mulk Raj Anand was right when he pointed out that when Tagore says in his 'Conversations with Einstein' that the truth of the Universe is human truth, "he means that he is interested in concrete human beings and not in abstract man" (In Chaudhuri 6). The human existence, for Tagore, is essentially co-existence. And this co-existence simultaneously operates on two levels; communication and communion. Communication takes place at an external, functional level. But communion that binds man to man and unites people in the universality of mind is inward and is bound not by any material need but by love. Love is an organic desire and it is not only the means of one's communion with others but also the means of fulfilment of oneself, and the fullest realization of the inherent potentialities that find expression in different forms. Tagore writes in "Personality":



The feeling of perfection in love, which is the feeling of the perfect oneness, opens for us the gate of the world of the Infinite One, Who is revealed in the unity of all personalities; who gives truth to sacrifice of self, to death which leads to a larger life, and to loss which leads to a greater gain; who turns the emptiness of renunciation into fulfilment by his own fullness. (EWT 4: 385).

It is not for nothing that the writings of Tagore are replete with glorification of love and paeans sung in its celebration. In one of his famous songs he says: "Why are you sitting alone confined to yourself? Fill your empty life with love... and see how the stream of joy flows around the world". What the contemporary world needs most today is love in a profound sense.

Tagore concedes: "We must admit that evils there are in human nature, in spite of our faith in moral laws and our training in self-control" (ib. 4: 631). Men are children of God, *amrtasya putrāḥ*, and therefore the glory of man consists in his endeavours and ability to transcend the evil and reach the God head and experience the universality of mind. But the parochial notions of nationalism and, more blatantly, colonialism let loose the potential evils which find expression in all kinds of violence. And the great humanist as Tagore is he has been deeply pained whenever there is an act of violence irrespective of the place where it occurs and has raised a strong voice of protest. Thus Tagore reacted sharply when the British force attacked China and was engaged in rampage, looting and arson and devastated three cities. In this connection he wrote in *Naivedya* (1901): "The sun of the century set down in bloody clouds. We hear the clanking of swords in the death dance of insane violence." And again he wrote in *Prāntik* 18 (RR 3: 546) in 1937: "The poisonous snakes are hissing around everywhere; talk about peace will sound like a mockery". Also, in the same year:

The day my sense was liberated from the dungeon of oblivion, it brought me to the brink of the ocean of hell fire in midst of some unbearable, turbulent storm. It was breathing the hot smoke of man's insult and it was polluting the atmosphere with sounds of evil. I saw the foolish and suicidal madness of this age and the signs of ugly perversions. (*Prāntik* 17. RR3:545).



Tagore was a great admirer of Raja Rammohun Ray, an eminent social reformer and was very much influenced by his ideas of social equality and attitude to women. A humanist and a very sensitive soul Tagore saw how the women suffered in the patriarchal Indian society and became victims of various forms of exploitation – economic, social and cultural, and he carried a life – long crusade against the atrocities perpetrated on the helpless women. In his writings – poems, plays and novels – his liberal and humanistic ideas about women are embodied in characters and situations. We hear the voice of female protest in the poem “Sabalā” (The strong woman, 1928). In “Aprakāś” (Unrevealed, 1932) the poet exhorts the woman to tear the veil and come out into the open. In “Kyameliā” (Chamelia, 1932) a young girl when pursued by a young man takes care of herself and the man admits: “That girl herself can take care of herself” (RR 3:49)

In the poem “Niṣkṛti” (Release 1918. RR 2: 543–550) Manjulika, a very young girl is given in marriage to the 55 years old Panchanan, much against the will of her mother. Majulika’s mother, however, had wanted to marry her daughter to one doctor Pulin who was a play mate of Manjulika during her childhood days. Soon after the marriage the girl becomes widow, and returns to her parents’ place. A few years later her mother also dies and she devotes all her attention to the care of her father, a widower now. But after some time his father decides to marry again. The girl does not like it; she protests. But the father stubbornly sticks to his decision and puts forward some scriptural recommendations in support of his decision, and says, “All the scriptures right from Manu to the Mahabharata say that domestic duties remain unfulfilled if one does not marry”. This time the girl who had made a verbal protest earlier takes an action. She marries Pulin during the absence of her father. From the feminist point of view the poem is significant in many ways. It shows the double standard of the society in regard to men and women, the exploitation of women, even when she is one’s own daughter in the household, in complete disregard of her emotional and biological needs. But what is remarkable about Tagore is the courage of conviction in getting the widow married and that too, to a person of her choice in 1918 when Western feminism was still a long way off.

A cursory look at his plays also reveals his concern with the woman question which must be seen as a function of Tagore's humanism. Vasanti in *The Ascetic*, Aparna in *Sacrifice*, Chitra in *Chitra* and Prakriti in *Chandalika* bear testimony to Tagore's insight into the feminine mind and his concern for the position of women in the society. Devjani in *Kacha* and *Devjani* refuses to surrender to male domination. The concern for the 'woman question' also underscores the stories like "The Deal" (1891), "Punishment" (1893) "The Judge" (1894), "Atonement" (1894), and "The Wife's Letter" (1914) Though the last one, "The Wife's Letter" is written in the form of a long letter from the wife to her husband it is included in the collection of stories and it is a serious vindication of the woman's cause.

Another important aspect of Tagore's humanism which has a great relevance to the contemporary global situation is his concern for the subaltern. Tagore carried a life-long crusade against untouchability and the discrimination against the poor and the down trodden. All his writings bear eloquent testimony to his sincere solicitations for them. Taraknath Sen refers to an episode recorded by Nirmalkumari Mahalnobis. Tagore was "telling of his experiences in Bengal villages; and she found him shedding tears as he spoke feelingly of the sufferings of the villagers witnessed with his own eyes, due to scarcity of drinking water" (Sen. 150). In the poem, "The Unfortunate Country" (1911 RR 2: 283-284) he warns them that a time will come for retribution. He writes: "You will have to face the same insult that you have inflicted on others since you have deprived them of their human rights and you have forced them to keep on standing without drawing them into your fold a time is sure to come when you will be equal with them in humiliation."

Tagore believed that God resides in the heart of man. To hate a man is to hate the god in him. In another poem "The Temple of Dust" (1911) Tagore tells the ascetic that there is no point in worshipping God in the closed room of the temple. Tagore says that God does not reside in the temple. God is in the field where the peasant works hard round the year and tills the soil after breaking the earth, and where the workers break the stones to make a path. There God is with them in all the weathers and His hands are full of dust.

He writes: "Leave aside your prayers, worship, penance and supplications. Why are you wasting your time sitting alone in the temple barring the doors? Hiding in the dark whom are you searching so secretly? If you open your eyes you will discover that God is not there in the room. He has gone to the field where the farmer is tilling the soil and cultivating the land He is there where the worker is breaking stones to make a path labouring all the year round. He is there with them in all the seasons. His hands are covered with dust. Discard the sacred cloth and come out like Him to the field"" (RR 2:291).

Obviously Tagore's idea of religion stems from the same belief in the dignity of man and man's rightful place in the world. A radical humanist in the true sense of the term Tagore believed that every individual has a distinct identity, a dignified place in the world and each has a divine spark in him or her. He is reported to have told Humayun Kabir that "just as every cell in the human body has a distinct life of its own and yet shares in the corporate life of the body, each human being has his uniqueness and is at the same time a part of the divine personality" (Centenary Volume 145). In "Religion of Man" Tagore writes: "It is significant that all great religions have their historic origin in persons who represented in their life a truth which was not cosmic and unmoral, but human and good (EWT 5:136). God, to Tagore, is not just an abstract idea, enshrined in an Olympian altitude cut off from the activities of human life in supercilious disregard of the destiny of man but "a Being who is the infinite in Man, the Father, the Friend, the Lover, whose service must be realized through serving all mankind" (ib.). He reminds us the question that was asked by the sages of the ancient India, "Who is the God to whom we must bring our oblation?", and Tagore remarks: "The question is still ours, and to answer it we must know in the depth of our love and the maturity of our wisdom what man is – know him not only in sympathy but in *science*, in the joy of creation and in the pain of heroism" (ib.). Although a great humanist, Tagore was not averse to science as he was neither dogmatic nor obscurantist in his understanding of the contemporary human situation. He combined in a remarkable way the ideal and the practical. He never lived in an ivory tower. He knew that it is on account of the industrial revolution that



the West was able to cater to the material needs of the masses, improve the standard of living and give them comfort and complacency. Hence his acceptance of and emphasis on science. But he knew also that mechanical implantation of science dries up the soul. He observed in "Union of Cultures": "Commodities multiply, markets spread, and tall buildings pierce the sky. Not only so, but in education, healing and the amenities of life, man also gains success. That is because the machine has its own truth. But this very success makes the man who is obsessed by its mechanism, hanker for more and more mechanism. And as the greed continually increases, he has less and less compunction in lowering man's true value to the level of his own machine" (EWT 6:575). We should not allow machine to be our master and control our life. Tagore believed that man, "the angel of the surplus" needs the joy of creation for the sustenance of the soul and fulfilment of the self. Hence his insistence on the creation and promotion of handicrafts which combine the aesthetic and the utilitarian and thereby help the artisan economically. The handicrafts thus serve a number of purposes. It keeps the cultural heritage alive and promotes cultural nationalism. It gives the artisan a joy of creation and it helps him financially. It is with this end in view that Tagore established an organization at Sriniketan to promote handicrafts. The global demand for handicrafts today as valuable cultural artefacts only reaffirms Tagore's conviction of the need for humanistic values. It was Tagore, again, who in order to redress the sufferings of the peasants introduced cooperative farming and was one of the pioneers in community development and cooperative enterprises which have become part of modern existence in the world today.

Another important aspect of the myriad minded Tagore which has also a great relevance to Tagore's humanism is his theoretical and practical ideas of education. Tagore expresses his credo: "The highest education is that which does not merely give us information but makes our life in harmony with all existence" (ib. 4: 401). Incidentally this idea later crystallized in the form of the educational institution at Santiniketan. About his educational mission Tagore said:

I refuse to believe that human society has reached its limit of moral possibility. And we must work all our strength for the seemingly



impossible, and must believe that there is a constant urging in the depth of human soul for the attainment of the perfect, the urging which secretly helps us in our entire endeavour for the good. This faith has been my only asset in the educational mission which I have made my life's work, and almost unaided and alone, I struggle along my path. I try to assert in my words and works that *education has only its meaning and object in freedom*- freedom from ignorance about the laws of universe, and freedom from passion and prejudice in our communication with the human world. (EWT 7:832-833. Emphasis added).

The matchless profundity and incredible vastness of Tagore's writings, his dynamic personality and intensely lived life make it almost impossible to sum up any of his ideas within the length of an essay.

The Romans used to call a poet *vates*, a seer and that is what the writings of Tagore make us feel. A fine figure of a sage with ascetic majesty Tagore had the far reaching vision of a *vates* and the capacity to translate that vision into reality. It is his lifelong pursuit of humanism through his writings and actions that gives substance to that vision.

What Matthew Arnold said about Shakespeare holds equally true about Tagore: "Others abide our question. Thou art free". The brief sketch above can only give a rough idea of his humanism.

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[Note: All the English renderings of the Bengali texts are done by the present author.]

## Gitanjali: *The 'beautiful Poetic Piety'*

“Ever in my life have I sought thee with my songs”.  
[*Gitanjali*; Poem 101]

This year is special to us in India as it marks, (i) the 150<sup>th</sup> birth anniversary of Rabindranath Tagore (1861–1941) who received the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1913, and (ii) the completion of 100 years of the original *Gitanjali* (Song Offerings). Rabindranath Tagore's long life (1861–1941) was marked by ceaseless and torrential flow of creativity manifested in the richness and variety of all kinds of literary and artistic forms. He was both a man of action and a seer, a man of royal grandeur and an ascetic. In his philosophy of life the best of the East and that of the West are reconciled into a harmonious whole. His inclusive mind aspired after the Universal Man shining in the glory of creation and *joie de vivre*. With the passage of time Tagore, our first Nobel Laureate, has only grown in stature and is now recognized as an increasingly significant and rich personality and a genius for all times.

It was *Gitanjali*, a unique bunch of devotional poems, which first brought Tagore to limelight. In these poems which register richly sustaining experiences of the beautiful and sublime, the poet seems to have poured out his heart, his innermost intimate emotions and realizations, revelations and epiphanies in a series of 'offerings'. It is the devotional core that informs and connects the songs which, both individually and collectively, present a form of worship, the poet's 'offerings' to his own God, or '*jīvandevatā*'.

In his essay 'The Religion of an Artist' (1936) Rabindranath wrote: "My religious life has followed the same mysterious line of growth as has my poetical life. Somehow they are wedded to each other, and though their betrothal had a long period of ceremony, it was kept secret from me".<sup>1</sup> *Gītānjali* represented the consummation

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<sup>1</sup> *EWT. Vol 7. p. 934*; was first published as 'Meaning of Art' in 1926.

of this 'betrothal' and the 'song offerings' came out in 1910 as the first unmistakable burst of the beautiful blossoming of this 'wedding'.

### Beginning of the Beginning

*Gītānjali* (1910) and the English *Gitanjali* (1912) invite us to look one decade backwards at *Naivedya* (Offering), that seemed to herald a new turn in Tagore's poetry, which would eventually lead to *Gītānjali*. In the words of Krishna Kripalani, the poet's friend and biographer, "The religious consciousness, the need of establishing a satisfactory relationship with the Divine, which was to find its culmination in the *Gitanjali* period, is beginning to stir within him" (Kripalani 140) around 1887. The decade that followed – and particularly the later years, 1907–8 – brought personal tragedies for the poet, alongside alienation on various fronts, and as a consequence Tagore turned more and more to his own resources and God. *Gītānjali*, a bunch of 157 poems, was the exquisite blossom of this sublimation of personal grief and suffering.

### Gītānjali and Gitanjali

The English *Gitanjali* is not an exact English replication of Tagore's Bengali *Gītānjali*. The poet, while translating in 1912 the poems/songs from the original Bengali collection of 1910, took only 53 from the bunch, and added 50 more from his other anthologies to make it 103; the rest were gleaned from other anthologies of the poet – including 16 from *Gītimālya*, 16 from *Naivedya*, 11 from *Kheyā*, 1 from *Acalāyatan*, 3 from *Śiśu*, 1 from *Smraṇ*, 1 from *Kalpanā*, 1 from *Caitālī*, 1 from *Utsarga*. Two of the poems from *Naivedya* were made into one in the translation.

Regarding translation, however, Tagore had repeatedly insisted that translation of a poem was "essentially a reincarnation, the soul of the source language poem assuming a new body in the target language poem" (Ray 2007: viii). In an interview with *Evening Post* in New York on 9 December 1916 he reiterated:

The English versions of my poems are not literal translations. When poems are changed from one language into another, they acquire a new quality and a new spirit, the ideas get new birth and are reincarnated. (Cited in Ray 2007: viii-ix)

Anyway, eminent critics, from Ezra Pound to Buddhadev Bose (eminent Bengali poet-critic), have put on record their genuine admiration of the poet's auto-translation in the English *Gitanjali*; and St John Perse, while requesting Andre Gide to translate *Gitanjali*, wrote on 23 October 1912: "The English translation of Tagore's, which he himself made...is the only really poetic English language work to have appeared in a long time". (in Ray 1995: 250) Even without entering into the issue of the quality of the translation one may agree with Robert Frost: "Fortunately Tagore's poetry overflowed national boundaries to reach us in his own English. He belongs little less to us than to his own country" (Frost 298).

The actual translation work was started rather casually, during a period of convalescence, in a relaxed mood, while on board his houseboat on the Padma, the great river (now in Bangladesh), that Tagore was so fond of. He continued the work during his ship-journey that followed before long. On arriving at London, he handed over the manuscript to Rothenstein, the English painter and his friend, as he wrote to his niece later, "with some diffidence... I could hardly believe the opinion he expressed after going through it. He then made over the manuscript to Yeats. The story of what followed is known to you..." (in Kripalani 222).

### Reception in the West

Indeed what followed has been almost a legend. Rothenstein reacted with enthusiasm. "Here was poetry of a new order which seemed to me on a level with that of the great mystics. Andrew Bradley, to whom I showed them, agreed: 'It looks as though we have at last a great poet among us again'" (in Kripalani 224), he wrote. Rothenstein was instrumental in getting Yeats read the manuscript. Yeats's response remains registered in his beautiful Introduction to



the limited edition of *Gitanjali*, published in November 1912 by the India Society of London.<sup>2</sup>

The book, although deeply rooted in the Indian devotional tradition[s], had received an instant overwhelming response in the West with the appearance of the English version in 1912. *Gitanjali* was indeed perceived by the West as the opening of a charmed magic 'Oriental' casement which, in spite of all its fascination, was, nevertheless a strange Other, and attractive for that very reason, its 'Otherness' ushering in the note of a 'strange, distant and subtle voice'. The influence of Yeats in introducing *Gitanjali* to England and shaping readers' opinion to an extent cannot be denied. Yeats enthusiastically responded to the poems in September 1912 as "the work of a supreme culture" and "a tradition, where poetry and religion are the same thing" (Yeats 5); Yeats had exclaimed in admiration: "A whole people, a whole civilization, immeasurably strange to us, seems to have been taken up into this imagination; and yet we are not moved because of its strangeness, but because we have met our own image, as though we had walked in Rossetti's willow wood, or heard, perhaps for the first time in literature, our voice as in a dream." (Yeats 6).

On 30 June 1912, before a choice gathering at Rothenstein's Hampstead house, Yeats read out the poems; the audience included, among the celebrities, Ezra Pound, May Sinclair, Charles Andrews *et al.* Charles Andrews, who first met the poet that day, and became a lifelong friend thereafter, wrote about his response to the poems that evening:

... It was an experience something not unlike that of Keats', when he came for the first time upon Chapman's translation of Homer—  
... (in Kripalani 225 )

May Sinclair wrote to Rabindranath:

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<sup>2</sup> Yeats's 'Introduction' (1912) has been reprinted in *EWT, Vol. I*, pp.1–8.

... You have put into English which is absolutely transparent in its perfection things it is despaired of ever seeing written in English at all or in any Western language. (in Kripalani 226)

It was Yeats, from whom Ezra Pound, another illustrious contemporary, first came to know of Rabindranath, at a time when Yeats, as Pound found, was "much excited over the advent of a great poet, someone 'greater than any of us'" (in Kripalani 226). Ezra Pound too enthusiastically put his appreciation on record. What moved him most was the calm poise that the poems (and their author) presented. "But beneath and above it all is this spirit of curious quiet. ... this sense of a saner stillness come now to us in the midst of our clangour of mechanisms..." (ib.). Finally he comes to the 'flaw': "If these poems have a flaw – I do not admit that they have – but if they have a quality that will put them at a disadvantage with the 'general reader', it is that they are too pious. Yet I have nothing but pity for the reader who is unable to see that their piety is the poetic piety of Dante, and that it is very beautiful" (ib. 227).

*Gitanjali* had been translated in many European languages, including German and Icelandic. Halldor Laxness, the renowned Icelandic novelist and Nobel winner of 1955, wrote in his centennial tribute to Rabindranath in 1961 about the impression "this rare species of religious lyrics made ... on the West as a whole" (Laxness 332) and particularly on his country; while recounting his memory of its translation into the 'old poetical language of the Eddas and Sagas' he also seeks to underscore the distinctive Indianness of its perception of God amidst fresh fragrant nature, which the Western spirituality, he assumed, can yet fail to grasp.

In my country, as elsewhere among western readers, the form and flavour of the *Gitanjali* had the effect of a wonderful flower we had not seen or heard of before; ... (Laxness 332)

Laxness's response, though warm and exuberant, helps to underscore the strangeness of these poems to the Western perception: "... We are living in material wealth compared to the eastern world, yet we have very little comparable to the wealth that brings forth an attitude of

mind as expressed in this *Gitanjali* opening of a song: 'When I go from hence let this be my parting word, that what I have seen is unsurpassable'" (Laxness 333). Incidentally it is touching to remember that the personal papers of Wilfred Owen which were forwarded to his mother—after the young poet's death on the front at just twenty-five on 4 November 1918 — contained a quote from Tagore's *Gitanjali*: "When I go from here, let this be my parting word, that what I have seen is unsurpassable". Later Owen's mother located the author of those lines, and sent it to Tagore at Shantiniketan, his ashram in Bengal, and it has been preserved there ever since among Tagore's correspondences at Rabindra Bhavan. This is a memorable evidence of the kind of appeal *Gitanjali* had made to the young minds of Europe in those early decades of the last century.

### *Gitanjali*: the Indian Roots

Though the religious vision and temper of the lyrics of *Gitanjali* had reasonably thrilled great Western minds with its 'strangeness' and freshness, to the Indian reader, however, the vision does not seem that unfamiliar; in fact, *Gitanjali* seems to be deeply rooted in the Indian religious tradition[s], including both the sublime imaginative-intuitive elevation of the Vedic-*Upaniṣad*ic approach and the enthralling sweetness and earthy simplicity of India's folk culture, especially as it had become manifest during the era of the Sufi cult of 'bhakti' or simple devotion, which held God as an intimate friend and beloved. As Tagore himself said in an essay:

In India the greater part of our literature is religious, because God with us is not a distant God ... We feel his nearness to us in all human relationship of love and affection and in our festivities... In seasons of flowers and fruits, in the coming of rain, in the fullness of autumn, we see the hem of His mantle and hear His footsteps. We worship Him in all the true objects of our worship and love Him wherever our love is true. ...Therefore our religious songs are our love songs...

('What is Art?' *EW*T, Vol.4. pp. 354–355)

These lines, while underscoring a persistent theme in the Tagorean oeuvre, seem to carry the echo of so many lyrics in *Gitanjali*.

### 'Thou' and 'I'

Indeed, many of these devotional songs can also be read and sung as exquisite love songs in which the devotee not only longs for a union with God but also believes that God equally longs for a union with the mortal devotee. He can be seen as a lover, set on his voyage to come down to the devotee, his beloved.

The woodlands have hushed their songs, and doors are all shut at every house. Thou art the solitary wayfarer in the deserted street. Oh my only friend, my best beloved, the gates are open in my house – do not pass by like a dream. (Poem 22)

The subtle moods and fine layers of emotions surrounding a superb experience of love can be noted in its fine shades and tunes in these poems: sometimes it is the yearning for the presence of the loved one – “I ask for a moment’s indulgence to sit by thy side” (Poem 5); sometimes it is the longing to submit in total surrender to the beloved – “I am only waiting for love to give myself up at last into his hands” (Poem 17); or the anxious wistful wait for the lover whose arrival is being delayed – “Where dost thou stand behind them all, my lover, hiding thyself in the shadows?” (Poem 41); or the coy beloved shyly yet eagerly looking for some fragrant token of the lover after his departure at dawn – “like a beggar I searched in the dawn for a stray petal or two” (Poem 52).

The Infinite too, as it were, longs for the Finite, and the 'I' is also needed by 'Thou'; the poet sings with deep conviction: “thou who art the King of kings hast decked thyself in beauty to captivate my heart. And for this thy love loses itself in the love of thy lover...” (Poem 56). And “Thou givest thyself to me in love and then feelest thine own entire sweetness in me” (Poem 65). It is a reciprocal and mutually complementary connection; and not the perennially



insatiable longing of the devotee for his Lord who remains, “alas, away!”<sup>3</sup>

Thus it is that thou hast come down to me. O thou lord of all heavens, where would be thy love if I were not? (Poem 56).

The poet envisions his God as the ‘King of Kings’ who would yet come down across immeasurable vista of times and distances to meet the devotee.

I know not from what distant time thou art ever coming nearer to meet me. Thy sun and stars can never keep thee hidden from me for aye. (Poem 46)

So he sings with the quiet joy of deep conviction:

Have you not heard his silent steps? He comes, comes, ever comes. Every moment and every age, every day and every night he comes, comes, ever comes. (Poem 45)

God is such a lover who brings the gift of both the ‘nest’ and the ‘sky’, the comforting assurance of the finite nest as well as the vast expanse and freedom of the infinite sky: “Thou art the sky and thou art the nest as well” (Poem 67); the ‘I’ feels the touch of the wondrous love of ‘thou’ in every beautiful thing around him – be it the dancing light, the sailing cloud, or the gentle breeze; he would declare emphatically, “Yes, I know, this is nothing but thy love, O beloved of my heart – this golden light that dances upon the leaves, these idle clouds sailing across the sky, this passing breeze leaving its coolness upon my forehead” (Poem 59).

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<sup>3</sup> G.M. Hopkins, ‘I wake and feel the fell of dark...’, *Poems of Gerard Manley Hopkins* [ed. H.Gardner], Oxford: OUP, 1956, p.68; Sonnet no 69 line 8.

## Separation and Union

In spite of this conviction, however, there are moments in this extraordinary love-relation when the intense longing for union with 'thou', seems to get subsumed in the deep anguish of separation from the same. For instance,

Clouds heap upon the clouds and it darkens. Ah, love why dost thou let me wait outside at the door all alone? (Poem 18)

The pang of the separation is felt and translated in intense lyricism, as if it were the pang of a poetic heart missing and yearning for his beloved, weighed down and quivering under the very intensity of an ecstatic pain which blossoms into song:

It is this sorrow of separation that gazes in silence all night from star to star and becomes lyric among rustling leaves in rainy darkness of July.

It is this overspreading pain that ... ever melts and flows in songs through my poet's heart. (Poem 84)

If God remained far away, the poet would not seek the comfort of oblivion; he would rather opt for the intense sorrow of 'separation'; hence his prayer not to be allowed to forget:

If it is not my portion to meet thee in this my life then let me ever feel that I have missed thy sight – let me not forget for a moment, let me carry the pangs of this sorrow in my dreams and in my wakeful years. (Poem 79)

Darkness, cloud, rain, and tempestuous black nights are the associations of the suffering caused by separation from 'thou'.

"Light, oh where is the light! Kindle it with the burning fire of desire! It thunders and the wind rushes screaming through the void. The night is black as a black stone. Let not the hours pass by in the dark." (Poem 27)

One can compare this to the dark night of spiritual desolation in G. M. Hopkins's last sonnets. But there is a remarkable difference. It is not the crushing darkness accosting St John or Hopkins in which they grope for light in anguish and bewilderment. It is not punitive; rather the darkness is also a sign of God's compassion. When during a night "black as a black stone" the lamp fails to give a flicker, and outside "it thunders and the wind rushes screaming through the void", the poet can barely suppress the shriek of agony – "Light, oh where is the light?". Yet in the same breath he would remind himself: "Misery knocks at thy door, and her message is that thy lord is wakeful, and he calls thee to the love-tryst through the darkness of night" (Poem 27). This seems to be closer to the vision of God in the *Gītā*, as manifest luminosity transcending all darkness – '*Yā niśā sarbabhūtānāṃ tasyāṃ jagarti samyā*' – or the triumphant declaration of the *Upaṇiṣhadic* sage, '*Vedāhmetāṃ puruṣaṃ mohantam ādityavaraṇaṃ tamasaḥ parastāt*.' Tagore himself had translated this into Bengali as '*jini ādhārer pāre jyotirmay, āmi jenechi tāhāre*' (I have known the One who is the Great Radiance, beyond darkness.). Therefore, the poet is prepared to wait through the 'night' of separation in patience, drawing sustenance from the conviction that morning will follow:

If thou speakest not I will fill my heart with thy silence and endure it. I will keep still and wait like the night with starry vigil and its head bent low with patience.

The morning will surely come, the darkness will vanish, and thy voice pour down in golden streams breaking through the sky. (Poem 19)

Indeed, in Rabindranath's perception 'night' itself involves a silent intense prayer for light, and therefore he would be imitating the night itself to end the night:

As the night keeps hidden in its gloom the petition for light, even thus in the depth of my unconsciousness rings the cry – I want thee, only thee. (Poem 38)

The 'I' looks enchanted at the strange beauty of the 'thou' – a beauty which is manifest in the charm of aesthetic grandeur, but also bursts forth resplendent in its 'terrible beauty' at moments of rare revelation (Poem 53). The beloved is prepared to accept 'this honour of the burden of pain': "Thy sword is with me to cut asunder my bonds, and there shall be no fear left for me in the world" (Poem 52). Be it through the fragrant flower or the dazzling sword, the finite is touched again and again by the infinite, and the rapturous joy of a unique love bursts at every blessed contact.

### The Friend, Playmate, Master

Again, in the poems of *Gitanjali* we get glimpses of a god who is not only the lover but also at once so many things to the speaker. The songs hail god as a playful child, an honoured guest, a friend, a parent, a master, the companion/'playmate' on life's voyage. The poet can imagine the 'Friend' "on thy journey of love" in the stormy night for coming over to his beloved: "By what dim shore of the ink-black river, by what far edge of the frowning forest, through what mazy depth of gloom art thou threading thy course to come to me, my friend?" (Poem 23). In the immediate aftermath of the publication of *Gitanjali* the songs were compared by Evelyn Underhill (*TLS*, 7 Nov, 1912) to the psalms of David. But whereas "David's God smites the enemies, destroys the wicked, protects the good and preserves the virtuous ... He is not eager to share the company of His devotee. Tagore's God is, on the contrary, an intimate companion, with whom the poet can sit quiet, face to face" (Dev 87), and pour out his heart in 'full-throated ease'.

### 'His garment covered with dust'

In many a poem of the anthology, alongside the *Upaniṣadic* resonances, the simple rhythm and core seem to call back to the folksongs of India, sung by common people invoking a dear God – while plying a boat, tilling the land, or just walking along the track by the forest. In tune with this folk-tradition, the poet of *Gitanjali* envisions God as coming down amidst the dust and sweat of work



and labour, instead of holding himself aloof upon some high clean pedestal.

He is where the tiller is tilling the hard ground and where the path-maker is breaking stones. He is with them in sun and in shower, and his garment is covered with dust... (Poem 11)

## Play

The idea of a playful God – not the Aeschylean God, the 'President of Immortals', who would kill humans for 'sport' – but a real joyous happy childlike God, absorbed in his creation like a playing child among its toys, has been familiar to the Indian folk imagination. Among the many forms of God, it is the playful deity – Lord Krishna playing with shepherd boys as another lovely shepherd boy, for instance – who has been held dear by common consent.

It is this idea of 'play' that comes up again and again in these songs of devotion. For instance, Tagore would envision god's creation as the "Playhouse of infinite forms" (Poem 96), where God comes down to meet the devotee as a benign playmate, thus filling life with wondrous delight:

In the early morning thou wouldst call me from my sleep like my own comrade and lead me running from glade to glade... (Poem 98)

The Infinite is never impatient or scornful about the play of the finite; "Thou didst not turn in contempt from my childish play among dust, and the steps that I heard in my playroom are the same that are echoing from star to star" (Poem 43). What could be a better manifestation of the spirit of play than the child? So, children playing unconcerned by the tumultuous sea become the epitome of the playful spirit of the Infinite rippling through the finite world; the sea too seems to join the play "with laughter" as "on the seashore of endless worlds the children meet with shouts and dances" (Poem 60).

Eventually an hour comes "when the playtime is over", but it comes as a beautiful surprise as the mortal playmate now discovers

his divine partner in his sublime grandeur, while "The world with eyes bent upon thy feet stands in awe with all its silent stars" (Poem 98).

### The Master-Singer

God is again imagined as the supreme musician manifest in his cosmic music to which the poet listens enraptured; the music seems to resonate through everything and vibrates in the luminous glory of the light flooding the sky:

The light of thy music illumines the world. The life breath of thy music runs from sky to sky. The holy stream of thy music breaks through all stony obstacles and rushes on. (Poem 3)

It is perhaps only appropriate that the poet should choose music as his mode of worship to this master singer: "I am here to sing thee songs... / When the hour strikes for thy silent worship at the dark temple of midnight, command me, my master, to stand before thee to sing" (Poem 15).

God is also addressed as 'My poet', whose delight is to enjoy the beauty, music and flavour of his creation through the senses of his devotee; in rapturous emotion he articulates his wonder at such kindness: "What divine drink wouldst thou have, my God, from this overflowing cup of my life? My poet, is it thy delight to see thy creation through my eyes and to stand at the portals of my ears to listen to thine own eternal harmony?" (Poem 65). At a moment of intuitive insight the poet would even see himself as the manifestation of God's own "severed self" – "this thy self-separation has taken body in me"; so 'the great painter', the cosmic singer, would paint and sing together with the devotee in a kind of joyous play: "The great pageant of thee and me has overspread the sky. With the tune of thee and me all the air is vibrant, and all ages pass with the hiding and seeking of thee and me" (Poem 71).

## Some Comparable Paradigms

Tagore's occasional use of the contrapuntal paradigms of 'aridity' and 'rain' can be compared to a basic Christian frame of reference in which desert and rain occur as signs of spiritual aridity / 'Despair' and divine grace respectively:

The rain has held back for days and days, my God, in my arid heart /.../Send thy angry storm, dark with death, if it is thy wish, and with lashes of lightning startle the sky from end to end.  
(Poem 40)

This can remind a reader of Hopkins's prayer to the, "Lord of life" to "send my roots rain"<sup>4</sup> – a prayer which runs through the whole gamut of famous poems oriented in the Christian faith, from Coleridge's *The Rime* to Eliot's *The Waste Land*.

Again, in a deeply moving prayer to his 'Lord' the poet implores him to "strike at the root of penury in my heart" and give "the strength to surrender my strength to thy will with love" (Poem 36). This can remind one of Dante's '*In la sua volontade è nostra pace*' (In His will is our peace), or Donne's prayer to the 'three-person'd God' to "batter my heart"<sup>5</sup>, but the difference is made by the 'love' which takes the place of the awe in Rabindranath's European counterparts.

## The Joy

Like this ecstatic sorrow, the ecstasy of divine joy too, the poet feels, cannot be borne by a feeble mind. It is the feeling of a divine joy on the poet's part that ripples over the bulk of poems in *Gitanjali* and lends the tenor and vibrant buoyancy which account for the particular charm of the collection. The poet is thrilled by the joy that brims over from the light's dance, to which "the sky opens, the wind

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<sup>4</sup> Last line of Hopkins's sonnet, 'Thou art Indeed Just Lord...'

<sup>5</sup> Donne's 'Holy Sonnets' (No.xiv). *John Donne: A Selection of His Poetry*. [ed.] John Hayward, (1964) Harmondsworth(UK):Penguin Books. Pp. 171–172.

runs wild, laughter passes over the earth. /.../ Mirth spreads from leaf to leaf, my darling, and gladness without measure. The heaven's river has drowned its banks and the flood of joy is abroad" (Poem 57). He would celebrate this 'joy' pulsating through the world in songs of exquisite ecstasy. Even pain is made part of this joy, which can absorb pain and ennoble it. In one of the best songs of the book the poet ecstatically responds to this joy pervading the world, and informs the cosmic dance of life and death:

Let all the strains of joy mingle in my last song – the joy that makes the earth flow over in the riotous excess of the grass, the joy that sets the twin brothers, life and death, dancing over the wide world, the joy that sweeps in with the tempest, shaking and waking all life with laughter, the joy that sits still with its tears on the open red lotus of pain, and the joy that throws everything it has upon the dust, and knows not a word. (Poem 58)

It is also a "fearful joy", ever rushing onwards "restless, rapid", through seasons- colours-tunes, pouring "in endless cascades in the abounding joy that scatters and gives up and dies every moment", and the poet wonders if it is "beyond thee... to be tossed and lost and broken in the whirl of this fearful joy?" (Poem 70)

### *Upasñiṣad* and Tagore's God

This supreme 'joy' can be traced back to Tagore's early *Upasñiṣadic* orientation; because the *Upasñiṣad* also envisions creation as springing from joy, dwelling in joy, and returning to joy, like the water coming up from the sea as rain-cloud, only to come down in showers and dance along into the sea. Tagore writes, "It has been said in our Upanishads that our mind and our words come away baffled from the supreme Truth, but he who knows That, through the immediate joy of his own soul, is saved from all doubts and fears." (EWT, 7; 936)

The poet, therefore, would not seek deliverance through renunciation, like a typical Hindu ascetic; "Thou ever pourest for me the fresh draught of thy wine of various colours and fragrance, filling



this earthen vessel to the brim,[ and ]... the delights of sight and hearing and touch will bear thy delight" (Poem 73).

## Death

The 'delight'. However, does not blind the poet to the painful reality of suffering and death. Many of the lyrics, and especially the later ones in the collection, reflect a preoccupation with death. Sometimes the anguish is sharp and cutting when the speaker can hardly bear the agony of bereavement. But the consciousness of the Infinite helps him to sublimate the sorrow; finally the grief melts into the 'fullness' of a deep peace; as "seeking her I have come to thy door", "I have come to the brink of eternity from which nothing can vanish – no hope, no happiness, no vision of a face seen through tears" (Poem 87).

Again, death can also be seen as a kind of fulfillment when one has completely surrendered to God. "And when my work shall be done in this world, O king of kings, alone and speechless shall I stand before thee face to face?" (Poem 76). The poet knows the excruciating pain of the inevitable: "my life will burst its bonds in exceeding pain, and my empty heart will sob out in music like a hollow reed, and the stone will melt in tears"; he can imagine the utter 'nothingness' of the end – "Nothing will be left for me, nothing whatever and utter death shall I receive at thy feet"; but at the same time he can also feel, "from the blue sky an eye shall gaze upon me and summon me in silence" (Poem 98). The poet has already known the great anguish of bereavement from his personal experience; he knows the terrible 'nothingness'; yet he refuses to look away; instead he would rather look upon death as 'thy servant', 'thy messenger', and welcome him by "placing at his feet the treasure of my heart" with "folded hands, and with tears". (Poem 86)

Death is also envisioned as the bridegroom. "The flowers have been woven and the garland is ready for the bridegroom." Now, "one final glance from thine eyes and my life will be ever thine own" (Poem 91). Death and God here merge into the image of the desired one, who will claim the bride/devotee for his own; and he invokes death – "O thou the last fulfillment of life, Death, my death, come and whisper to me!" (Poem 91) Death will be the calm beautiful end

of his 'voyage', and though he knows "there are dangers on the way" he has no fears in mind (Poem 94); because "in death the same unknown will appear as ever known to me" (Poem 95).

Death, in the poet's perception, is the ultimate merging of all forms into the "formless, of all ventures into the "deathless", of all music to "the silent", and the poet would calmly surrender to the bliss of this peace of negation: "I shall tune it to the notes of for ever, and, when it has sobbed out its last utterance, lay down my silent harp at the feet of the silent" (Poem 100).

Death which sometimes suddenly strikes the unprepared homestead with its thunderous light in the night of 'storm', is also 'the king', i.e. God. "The thunder roars in the sky. The darkness shudders with lightning... With the storm has come of a sudden our king of the fearful night" (Poem 51).

Again, death is envisioned as the home-coming in which all the music of life will melt into the profound peace of silence. This is the note on which *Gitanjali* closes:

Let all my songs gather together their diverse strains into a single current and flow to a sea of silence in one salutation to thee.

Like a flock of homesick cranes flying night and day back to their mountain nests let all my life take its voyage to its eternal home in one salutation to thee. (Poem 103)

And the poet/devotee's "parting word" will be no complaint, no remorse, but only articulation of a deep gratitude, of surrender, and fulfillment, "that what I have seen is unsurpassable... and if the end comes here, let it come – " (Poem 96).

The perennial charm of *Gitanjali* lies in the magnificent evocation of a 'poetic piety', beautiful at all levels: structure and texture, music and meaning, conception and creation, image-symbols and metaphors.

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*The Universe of the Mind of a Poet:  
Juhan Liiv's Philosophy and Poetics*

Nations whose cultural tradition due to historical reasons is not large, especially smaller nations, cannot display centuries-old academic traditions which philosophy as a field of knowledge and research would presuppose. Luckily philosophy is not merely a faculty of knowledge but represents the field of perception to which poets have contributed since the oldest times – in parallel with philosophical practice in ancient Greece and long before philosophy became established as a university discipline in Western Europe. It would be too much to expect from poets a rational systematization in developing their thoughts. However, it does not mean at all that their thought would have been incapable of penetrating into life's darker zones, with which enlightened knowledge has often instinctively kept its distance.

The Sources of Estonian Philosophy

Kristian Jaak Peterson (1801–1822), generally considered to be the first Estonian autochthonous poet, asks through the mouth of her little sister: “If people have their heavens, then animals or beasts should also have their heavens, because they, too, have their soul in them.” (Peterson 1976: 101)<sup>1</sup> Peterson immediately hits on the frailest and most vulnerable point of the Western philosophical and also theological tradition. The author of the Estonian epic *Kalevipoeg*, Friedrich Reinhold Kreutzwald (1803–1882) leads his hero Kalevipoeg into the somber underworld, the reign of senses and desires. He keeps him apparently on purpose for a long time in the darkness of the forests, which makes even the epic's poetics, based on folksong's repetitions and abounding parallelisms, contradict the rationalized passion of

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<sup>1</sup> Here and in the following translation from the Estonian is mine. (J.T.)



Western enlightened man to haste on and progress and brings into the epic a more feminine conscience than most of epic poets have done before him. Peterson tried to reconcile science and goodness, imagining beside a mental “God-father” (*Jumal-isa*), a material Mother-thing (*Ema-asi*). In Kreutzwald’s Pantheon Taara, a god of the popular-autochthonous belief reigns, though his deeds are in harmony with the spirit of the Christmas-mystery.

Immediately after these two outstanding poets, the next great thinker in Estonian culture is the poet Juhan Liiv (1864–1913). He follows the same path. All three men refute any servile imitation of the centric thought and manner, all of them attempt to fuse into the philosophic discourse a peripheral sensibility open to nature and life’s totality.

The unjustly premature death of the extraordinarily talented Peterson did not allow him to express his universe of the mind more fully than what can be read in the prose fragments of his *Päeva-raamatud* (Diaries). These are but the first touches and guesses towards something greater. The number of his poems remained small, their grasp of reality is mostly limited to what the genre of pastoral poetry had transmitted to the Renaissance and newer times. Death took the poet from this world at the moment when his rapidly accumulating and expanding knowledge and the ensuing opening of the world instilled in him an optimistic faith that by means of education and sciences, a path to noble moral values and virtue would open.

Kreutzwald did no longer share that enlightenment optimism. *Kalevipoeg*’s philosophical symbols are multilayered and complicated, skillfully hidden in the images of the epic. The later interpreters have not been completely successful at deciphering the poet’s thoughts.

Juhan Liiv’s poetry, to the contrary, is apparently simple. His ideas, often made to stand forth in his poetic texts, may easily make one forget Liiv’s ironic hint in “Fragment” 68<sup>2</sup>: according to Liiv,

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<sup>2</sup> In the present essay the numeration of Liiv’s poetic “Fragments” (*Killud*) follows the one used in dating the most complete Estonian edition of Liiv’s philosophically accentuated poems (Liiv 2010).

“easy”, “peasant-like”, “clear”, “over-viewing” do not comprise at all the quality that would help poetry to persist longer than in a tiny and fugitive time particle.

### Thought-stanzas

The subtitle used here does not mean at all that philosophy would be missing in the rest of Liiv's poetry, including his nature poetry, perhaps the largest segment of his total poetic creation. The term “thought poetry” (*mõtteleuule*) which in Estonian above all under the influence of German *Denkpoesie* has been applied as an equivalent of philosophically bent poesy, is not completely fortunate. World poetry which has survived the lifetime of their creators and has been transmitted to posterity, can hardly be separated from a philosophic content. Furthermore, one can assuredly claim that the greatest poets of all time have been at the same time noteworthy thinkers, original philosophers. All of them have hidden their thoughts in different, individual sensual perceptions and image association.

Poetry indeed is highly varied in its modalities. According to the well-known definition of Friedrich Schiller, poetic creation can roughly be called “sentimental” and “naïve”, which nonetheless does not exclude a mixture, a fusion of both modes – for Schiller the highest perfection of poetry. The great German poet called “sentimental” – perhaps paradoxically – the kind of poetry which lays a stress on bringing “forth” an idea or a thought. It is the germ of any expressionist poetry. It embraces all allegoric expression, as well as any bold-lined symbolism. On the contrary, “naïve” poetry in Schiller's interpretation coincides with the principle of impressionism: it is the imitation of reality, a mimesis, in which thought need not be absent at all, but has been so deeply “pressed” into the depicted fragment of reality. Only persons provided with a subtlety of senses and instincts can fully perceive it.

One can say that the major part of lyrical poetry of all times departs from the impressionist principle. In the case of Juhan Liiv, it is represented by far the largest thematic section of his poetic creation, his nature lyrics. Ideally, thought and image in such poetry are born simultaneously. A poet does not know his thought “before-

hand”, and probably also knows that the thought would be senseless, if the state of senses and instincts does not let an image be born at the moment of creation. In a highly concentrated manner, Liiv resumes his poetic ideal in Fragment 71 (Liiv 2010: 155):

If no lightning-bolt of thought

lights your tongue afire,  
if no flash of sense illuminates your word:  
then without a lightning-bolt of thought

you will drag an empty sledge,

if no lightning-bolt of thought  
lights your tongue afire.  
(Trans. by myself and H. L. Hix)

Under the term “thought-stanzas” which I applied in my 2010 selection of Liiv’s poetry, I assembled those poems in which more clearly than in others an “epigraphic” principle is present: it is a short concluding expression of a thought, a truth or a belief – a writing “upon” or “after”. In the manuscript of his 1926 edition of Liiv’s poems, Friedebert Tuglas, indeed first gathered the philosophically accentuated poems under the title of “Epigrams”, but later crossed it out.<sup>3</sup> In a number of poems thought can be given to the poet “in advance”, but in the process of its expression spontaneous associations are born, capable of driving the poet apart from his previously envisaged track; sometimes they bring in lyrical shades. The poet does not maintain his position as a spectator or observer from distance (as it mostly happens in satirically inclined poetry),

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<sup>3</sup> Juhan Liiv spent his life in dire poverty and suffered since 1893 from mental illness. He himself did not manage to publish any books. His poetic canon was almost exclusively established by the writer and critic Friedebert Tuglas, who after Liiv’s death, based on Liiv’s manuscripts, published two selections on Liiv’s poetry (1919, 1926) and two monographs (1914, 1927) on Liiv’s life and work.

does not act as a omniscient prophet, but lets reality enter him with all its anguish and unbeknown.

### Liiv's "Fragments"

The bulk of Liiv's "thought-stanzas" belong to his later work. They include more than a hundred short aphoristic pieces, of which a first brief selection was published by Tuglas, under the title "Fragments" (*Killud*) in the back section of his 1919 edition of Juhan Liiv's poems.

The title was not invented by Tuglas but can be found in one of Liiv's manuscripts, which in comparison with many others is somewhat better arranged, maybe with the purpose of publishing (Fond 163 M 3:3, of the Estonian Museum of Literature). On pages 63 and 64 around twenty small poems appear under the general title "*Killud*". Yet the major part of "Fragments" in the posthumous editions have been picked up and assembled by Tuglas. In his 1919 edition (Liiv 1919) their number was only 20, but in the 1926 edition (Liiv 1926) it was increased to entire 92.

After WWII Aarne Vinkel, a literary historian, started to deal with Liiv's heritage on the basis of the poet's posthumous manuscripts. In his 1954/56 and 1989 edition of Liiv's poems Vinkel did not include all "Fragments" published by Tuglas, but added a number of pieces that were missing in Tuglas' selections. Still, the selection of "Fragments" (as well as Liiv's other poems) is not definite. Thus for my above mentioned book of Liiv's "thought-stanzas" and "fragments" (Liiv 2010) I could find from Liiv's manuscripts eight poems never published before!

### Liiv's Life-Philosophy

Fragment 1 ("...Everyone has a soul") introduces the core of Liiv's life feeling and wisdom. The world is a great whole, no individual possesses its soul. Yet something of the original soul (of Creator, God) and creativity lives in all that exists. The human being who considers himself the crown of nature, would not understand it.

In newer times such a philosophy of the world's interior-spiritual integrity has been called holism (from Greek ὅλος – whole, entire,



complete), but long before Liiv the same kind of reality's perception can be observed in philosophers not belonging to Western philosophy's mainstream, and also in the work of several major writers and poets. Thus Moria's self-praise in Erasmus's *In Praise of Folly* represents a passionate speech by its author in defense of life's integrity. The French thinker Michel de Montaigne was in Europe of the Renaissance era – blinded by the zeal of conquering the world – one of the few intellectuals who dared to assert that the “others” of the New Continent, the indigenous people, since then subjected to the invaders, were by no means an inferior race, but as regards their moral qualities, would be even superior to the Europeans. Thus a crack was revealed in the main pillar of Western conquest philosophy claiming that the duty of the Western man, given his superior reason and soul, was to free the savage peoples from their superstitions and lead them to the true light of Christianity. Montaigne's bulkiest essay, *Apology of Raymond Sebond*, goes in that sense farthest. Montaigne translated into French the work *Theologia Naturalis* by the 15<sup>th</sup>-century Catalan thinker Raymond Sebond (Ramon Sibiunda). The main idea of it was that possessing a soul was not man's privilege, but God had provided all living nature with a soul.

Such a philosophy/theology, deviating from the rationalistic-materialistic mainstream of Western thought, leaves without any moral ground or justification historical violence practiced by human beings (predominantly men/males) in respect of other human beings, claimed as inferior (including in the first place womankind and indigenous peoples), as well as violating and destroying nature, in which humankind at every moment and opportunity in history, to the present day, has been involved.

The great merit of the spiritual vanguard of the romantic era was that they powerfully generated the understanding of the “other”. Since then, it has been absorbed by the social conscience on a much wider scale than before. Juhan Liiv's favorite poet was Heinrich Heine who quite often (like in a longer poem titled “Vitzliputzli”) condemned the destruction and enslaving of American indigenous peoples. Could Liiv had access to the work of the first great American poet Walt Whitman, he would have found there strong support for his own spiritual-philosophical understanding of the world. As is well known, Whitman

claimed the world's integrity, the unity of body and soul, as well as equality of all peoples, beings, and races. According to Whitman there is no reason or science that could justify man's superiority as regards other men and the wholeness of nature.

Differently from the German philosophers Schopenhauer and Nietzsche, whose anthropocentrism, whether on the biological-sexual or volitive-imaginational ground, would inevitably lead to individualistic solutions, Whitman could see the beauty of all existence and love it so that it would not be a privilege of the select or the strong. His love includes the consciousness of death, suffering and pain, admiration of a perfect and beautiful body along with care and tenderness for simple and low leaves of grass. It contained a germ of existential attitudes, but it differs from later existentialism (as a philosophical current) by being more open and sensible to that greater part of nature remaining beyond man and his consciousness.

As was referred to in the introductory part of the present essay, the philosophy of life's integrity and existence in Estonia was not necessarily taken over from the West. The same basic perception of life can be noticed in the work of both Peterson, who lived before Heine and Whitman, and Kreutzwald who was the contemporary of the German and the American poet.

A cue to Liiv's life philosophy could be found in the poems "Meeled" (Senses) and "Schopenhauer". The former appears in my recent edition (Liiv 2010) with some important additions, as compared to the earlier editions by Tuglas and Vinkel, while the latter is published there for the first time.

In the poem "Meeled" Liiv centers on the relation between reason and senses, inevitably the basic question of any philosophy. Liiv starts by letting reason / conscience assert life's contradictory nature, opposing the desires of logic and reason: "what we knew in advance, did not come. / We did manage what we didn't think we could. / What seemed to be achieved, remained impossible."<sup>4</sup> The sphere of reason cannot develop without restrictions and thus grant a new Eden, because biosphere or the cosmic unknown attacks it ceaselessly, as does death that puts a limit to an individual's life (with

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<sup>4</sup> Here and in the following quotations, translation is mine. (J.T.)

every single reason and conscience). At the same time Liiv alludes that even the broadest knowledge obtained by reason cannot provide comfort to the human soul: "But such a life would be impossible." After that conclusion, the poet turns to the senses. In the following assertion, "The guides of the half-blind / are blind themselves!" it is not possible to understand if Liiv meant by the "half-blind" reason and by "blind guides" senses, or vice versa. In any case Liiv claims both reason and senses to be deficient.

The following exclamation, "At least the senses are seers!" (omitted in the editions by Tuglas and Vinkel), nevertheless confirms that without the sense of seeing it would be altogether impossible to perceive the world (either as real or as a dream). Even though senses delude us, the liberation from delusion can anyway take place only at the initiative of the senses ("they themselves betray them.") Liiv thus reconciles the senses and reason ("forgiving is honest"), as the only way to perceive the world's integrity and perhaps also the only way to believe in the meaning of existence. The idea of the poem's last line seems to be: those who are mindful of the deceptive nature of the senses, are not capable of faith – which however is the precondition of feeling life's wholeness.

The poem "Schopenhauer" develops an analogous topic, but covertly enters into a polemic with the main ideas of the German philosopher about life as will and imagination and biological determinism. The introductory line exposes Schopenhauer's main thesis, but the exclamation mark at its end does not mean its acceptance but, on the contrary, a strong doubt. One can impose one's will on "others" only at the expense of "others" and life itself: somebody has more rights than the rest. Liiv shows life's wholeness and unity: "But life has a common ground?" The interrogation mark hints probably at Liiv's reply to Schopenhauer: he cannot imagine how "one" could realize himself in the "other" without the "other" contradicting it ("several hopes on the same thread"). In the line "self-will should be an educated man!" Liiv spaces out "educated", thus referring to Schopenhauer's hope that that subtle (educated) sensibility and the arts could purify the biological-sexual urge. If it is absent, the imposition of one's will on the other ("wanting other")



turns into grotesque (“it is ugly!”), because in doing so “one” inevitably is made dependant on other (“there is no self!”).

The line “Educate and – divide” seems to be ironical. As in a number of poems, Liiv manifests his skepticism as regards the hope that scientific-rational education – which above all means “dividing”, driving one apart from life’s wholeness – could provide any solutions. “Love and forgive” embrace Christian principles, close to the poet’s heart (compassion in Schopenhauer). Nonetheless, also the Christian desire for justice, as Liiv seems to allude, collides in reality with law, manipulated by men of power by means of words / rationality – in their own favor and to the detriment of those who do not manipulate words with the same skill of the law-makers (“it means bending the letter – but some don’t have the letter!”).

Liiv does not accept Schopenhauer’s fear of the biological-sexual urge nor Nietzsche’s exaltation of the same. Both justify violence against nature and human beings, despite their apparent contrariness a germ of nihilism is never absent in them. They can be adapted to inciting ideologies of the male kind and big nations, rather than to supporting small nations or womankind.

Neither is irony absent in the final line of the poem. Truth is the basis of everything, but paradoxically it is identical with the eternal change of substance (“chameleon of matter!”). There is an obvious hint at the aspiration of all ideologies and philosophies to establish rules of general validity for the present as well as the future: life implacably overthrows them. In his final conclusions Liiv seems to recommend the same as Montaigne long before him: to live as fully as possible in one’s time, in harmony with life’s wholeness, to participate in its bodily as well as spiritual gifts.

## Nature, Original Creator, Life’s Wholeness, Man’s Limitations

These are the main themes the variations of which Liiv’s thought-stanzas and “fragments” offer. Liiv celebrates Nature and the Original Creator, in comparison with whom even supreme human creation looks pale. In the poem “Pott ja potissepp” (Pot and Potter;



for the first time published in Liiv 2010; strangely enough not noticed by Tuglas and Vinkel), Liiv reflects the limits of man and his creation, as well as of science and art, similar in his “oriental calm” to the sensibility of Omar Khayyam, the Iranian poet, scientist and philosopher of the start of the 12<sup>th</sup> century.

#### POT AND POTTER

You are a pot, don't be sad!  
 A nice pot that tries to be liked.  
 If you are liked, you will win you master, too.  
 He bows before you,  
 like a pagan before his god.  
 Nonetheless, don't grow proud:  
 one day surely – you will be broken.

You are a potter, don't be sad:  
 you can make nothing better than a pot!  
 You can make anything out of clay,  
 but without clay – a potter would be impossible.  
 You can even become famous,  
 but one day you still – will have to die.  
 Your body must decay into clay –  
 so that others can make from it a pot.  
 (Trans. by myself and H. L. Hix)

Both creation and the creator are turned to clay, so that other creators could make of it new pots. The final aim does not exist: buckthorn exists because of its berries, as berries exist because of buckthorn (“Kitseviinapuu”). The poet's irony is directed against human ambitions and desires in the poems “...Ole sa roomlane” (Whether You Are a Roman), “Aeg” (Time), “Veel kõlab Toome tornist” (Still It Sounds from the Tower of Toompea), “Tuisk” (Blizzard), “Lained” (Waves), “Vulkaan” (Volcano), Fragments 61 and 96, etc.

## BLIZZARD

A blizzard races a blizzard,  
neither can defeat the other;  
now one pulls ahead,  
now it is behind the other.

I watch until my eyes tire,  
the mind's world enters my thought.  
a blizzard races a blizzard,  
neither can defeat the other.

(Trans. by myself and H. L. Hix, in Liiv 2007: 109)

Liiv is ironical about the earthy aspiration of humans to eternity either by accumulating power, wealth or spirit, as he concludes in Fragment 68, alluding to death:

"You will become eternal/ in a twinkling of an eye".

Liiv of course knows well that some noblest work still has its significance: aspiring to elevated goals, living following the calls of heart and love, even without expecting remuneration or pay in material terms, as in Fragment 25: "Koolinoortele" (To Students). Such aspirations can finally make darkness withdraw, as in "Vali on..." (It's Hard...), "Viimne võimalus" (The Last Chance), Fragment 24: "Isamaa" (Fatherland).

## THE LAST CHANCE

Take from beauty ultimate beauty  
and from truth ultimate truth,  
if you must – take from falsity ultimate falsity  
and from grace ultimate grace,  
from the good ultimate good  
and from femininity tenderest tenderness  
and take from pain ultimate pain –  
and the final trial of suffering! –  
Light up such a fire,  
lift up yourself and others.  
(Trans. by myself and H. L. Hix)

One's faith in life can generate love and beauty, help others to resist and aspire to virtue despite the misery of human existence, as in Fragments 104 and 105.

In Fragment 2 Liiv draws a conclusion similar to the one gradually emerging in our present era, in the most recent science and cultural philosophy: letter/script has existed in(side) humans, ever shaping them, since the remotest times. It is not a text outside man enabling him by means of mental efforts to become wiser. Spirit and body, form and matter are mutually inseparable (Fragment 3: "Maailm on õrnalt koos"). In its long history humankind, however, has not understood that simple truth and, as a result, continues to procreate evil and to destroy itself (Fragment 5). Despite humankind's deficiency and deformity it considers itself superior to the rest of nature (ironical Fragments 7 and 8). Every particle of nature needs the other, is supported by it and depends on the larger whole – a theme whose variations frequently appear in Liiv, as in the poems "Lained" (Waves), "Pae" (Limestone) and Fragments 6 ("Kirves ja mets"), 7 ("Üksik kaasik"), 56 ("Elu") and 100 ("Õpetus"). Man is not an exception. He is and remains a part of nature, being submitted to nature's cycles in the short instance of time between individual life's beginning and end.

### WAVES

"Don't push me so hard!"  
said one wave to another.  
"Why do you always push me?"  
Leave me alone."

"I am not pushing anyone,  
I am being pushed.  
The sea is full of us,  
my opposition is futile."  
(Trans. by myself and H. L. Hix; Liiv 2007: 73)

A great part of Liiv's critical charge is targeted at human arrogance, especially at the illusion that humans by a kind of specially de-

veloped reason or science could imagine themselves free from the limits prescribed to living nature in all its manifestations. Now by irony, now in images shaded by the grotesque Liiv grounds the optimism of positivist science and philosophy as they claim that the origins and causes of life could be found and explicated (Fragments 8: “Uriijale“, 14, 38: “Hää ja halb“, 41: “Otsatus“, 65: “Mõtte-teadus“, 66: “Pott”). Similarly with the sceptical French master of sentences La Rochefoucauld, Liiv alludes to the deficiency of the spirit: it fades like the body and can never substitute heart and love (Fragments 9, 26, 29: “Vaim“, 32). He decomposes the Enlightenment illusion that it would be possible to shape, by means of mere knowledge and teaching, man’s spiritual qualities (Fragments 25, 26, 63: “Taeva tuli”). The more crudely man tears himself apart from the rest of nature, the more quickly he moves toward his spiritual degeneration (Liiv’s criticism of routine and torpidity, crowd spirit and stagnation in the poem “Kiil” and in Fragments 12, 15, 43: “You sleep”). Immortality is possible, but paradoxically (as Liiv demonstrates in Fragment 57: “Surematus”) only due to mortality.

### Criticism of Anthropocentrism and Occidentocentrism

Against the background of his philosophy of nature’s integrity and existential feeling of life, Liiv criticizes in effective images the anthropocentric and occidentocentric way of thinking. Liiv insists on the necessity of respecting every single nation and culture, however small and secondary, to understand their right of independence and differing from others. It makes Liiv a predecessor of Yuri Lotman’s philosophy in its late stage: there is no universality that could justify acculturation – the levelling of cultural differences. As creativity, culture cannot act apart from nature – from the biosphere, whose ceaseless change makes “explosions” and “shifts” in artistic creation unpredictable.<sup>5</sup>

Time and again Liiv refutes the imitation of bigger nations and their cultures, as well as a forcible imposition of an alien culture or

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<sup>5</sup> These ideas are especially visible in Lotman’s last book, *Culture and Explosion* (Den Haag – New York, Gruyter 2009), originally published in Russian: Ю. М. Лотман, *Культура и взрыв* (Москва 1992).



its voluntary acceptance. Western aggressive ideology is directly ridiculed in Fragment 51: “Aafriklane eurooplase kriitikas” (an African in European Criticism).

A slavish moor is – crawling like a beast;  
 a rebel moor is – cruel like a beast;  
 a moor is a beast no matter what!  
 (Trans. by myself and H. L. Hix; in Liiv 2007: 141)

One should not necessarily look for Liiv’s interest in Buddhism in Fragment 49, but in any case it embodies a vigorous opposition to the importation of ideologies and religions.

What builds houses in China?  
 Maybe Christian Hymns  
 and perpetual poverty?

Must death scythe  
 a strange culture, like grass,  
 and annex it to Christ –  
 or should they praise Buddha  
 and the meadow be improved?  
 (Trans. by myself and H. L. Hix; in Liiv 2007: 139)

In Fragment 99: “Looja” (Creator) Liiv attacks Estonia’s Germanization and calls for original creation, however difficult the task in smaller nations. In the poem “Puusärk” (Coffin) Liiv adapts to the same context translation, which can easily become a tool of acculturation, quenching the original creation of a nation, and above all, of small nations. The thirst for levelling languages, mentalities and cultures, at which big nations have always excelled, is derided by Liiv in the poem “Estonian Art: Child of Sorrows”

Oh you, the forgotten one, the despised one,  
 oh you deliberately trampled underfoot,  
 oh you smeared with bile,  
 oh you gloated over by asses –  
 Estonian art!

How do they criticize –  
 an ass would not understand Estonian?  
 Not at all: an ass always understands  
 any language, and its hee-haw is ready.  
 An ass doesn't even care to understand:  
 it treads with its hoof and  
                                          judges!

(Trans. by myself and H. L. Hix; Liiv 2007: 137)

In a fable-like poem “Ahvid” (Monkeys) Liiv shows in the role of monkeys humans who mock at the animal in the prison of its cage.

At the same time Liiv does not idealize the “other” as primitive race (the well-known poem “Aafrika mehed”, shadowed by black humor), nor turns into an idyll the relationship between humans and animals (Fragment 32: “Triina kõigest südamest”, also close to black humor), relations inside the family or species (the poems “Koer”, “Leiva pärast”, “Perekonna riid” I–II, Fragment 52: “Moor” I–II) or the idea according to which the relationship between those who organize work and those who work could easily be turned into a peaceful idyll (the poem “...Kes kapitalis nägi vaenlasi”).

## Aesthetics and Poetics

The “Young Estonians” (an influential group of young intellectuals acting between 1905–1915) did not take seriously the “Fragments” of Liiv reflecting his aesthetics and poetics – the general philosophy of artistic creation, as well as what concerns the elements of creating a poem (assembled in Liiv 2010 in Fragments 69 to 90). Tuglas who for the first time included “fragments” about aesthetics and poetics in his 1926 edition of Liiv’s poems was surprised that Liiv stubbornly fought against rhymed poetry. The linguist Johannes Aavik, another leading member of “Young Estonia” went as far as to mention in his brochure *Eesti luule viletsused* (Miseries of Estonian Poetry, 1915) Liiv’s well-known nature poem “Sügise” (Autumn; also known with the title “Nõmm”) as an example of a bad use of metrics. Tuglas, Aavik and other “Young Estonians”, like Villem Ridala, followed enthusiastically the models of French symbolism, which indeed at

the turn of the century and at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century spread like wildfire everywhere, including Eastern Europe and Latin America. They did not understand how Liiv could rebel against the voice of the European intellectual center and do something different, not coinciding with what was demanded by young modernist fashion.

Juhan Liiv, always suspicious of imitating foreign models or any models (Cf. his ironic Fragment 78: "Eeskujud") was convinced that a poet's highest goal was to give birth to something as close as possible to what had been achieved by the Supreme Creator, the Author of the world. A great poet should transcend models and look for his own originality, create his own personal poetics, instead of blindly imitating theories or forms invented at "centers". He refers to the example of German poetry whose originality started when it broke with the French examples (Fragment 76) and alludes to the task of Estonian poetry to abandon the example of the "giants" and find its own originality (Fragment 77: "Saksa kirjandus").

Simple impressionism did not satisfy Liiv. For that reason he could not appreciate Villem Grünthal-Ridala's much praised poem "Talvine õhtu" (Winter Evening; cf. Tuglas's memories of Liiv in *Juhan Liiv mälestustes* 2000: 103). In the cycle "Ääremärkused" (Marginal Notes) in Liiv 1921: 78 he says about Ernst Enno: "Enno's main drawback is that he is without a backbone, without his own character." In the same writing Liiv made an observation about Ridala. "I cannot understand anything of "Igatsuse laul" [A Song of Yearning]. It would be a madman's song. If I could let stay the first four lines and the last six lines, then it would be something." (Ib. 77) Liiv was ironical about any plainly sentimental poetry. In my 2010 edition of Liiv's poetry, departing from Liiv's manuscript, I added to Fragment 73: ("...Kas pressitud lille nägid sa") the final line suppressed by Tuglas: "*mis tärgand on tulest vahel*" (that sometimes was born from fire). It is not at all unimportant: Liiv admits the vigorous authenticity of sentimental poetry, but observes its weakness in a poet's incapability of creating an image that would make the feeling persist. Indeed, the problem of the greater mass of either romantic or symbolist-modernist poetry is that impression-based images have no philosophy to rely upon. Differently from

romantic poetry, symbolist poetry abandoned the direct expression of feeling. However, allusiveness that since then became the great fashion, would neither achieve its goals when there is nothing to allude to.

Liiv himself looked for a deeper spiritual ground for poetry. At the same time he was perfectly aware that by a mere effort of thought, philosophy or will one can never create poetry that would persist in a larger span of time. That idea is in its most concise form expressed in the above quoted Fragment 71. The act of creation in Liiv's experience is symbiotic: thought cannot be separated from feeling, as language cannot be separated from the senses. Ideally, it can become reality at a certain moment, in a certain state of mind; once it is past, the result is what was described by in Fragment 89: "Lüürika" (Lyrics):

See, I am blushing –  
kiss me!  
Later even a hundred kisses  
will be in vain.  
(Trans. by myself and H. L. Hix)

Liiv's idea that great poetry cannot be achieved without inspiration, by means of mere reason on intellect, is resumed in Fragments 74: "Grönlandis" and 90: "...On mõistus üle tundmuse" (Is reason higher than feeling?):

Is reason higher than feeling?  
Oh, inspiration, whatever its source,  
what will you create w i t h o u t i t in the world?  
(Trans. by myself and H. L. Hix; in Liiv 2007: 143)

Liiv spaces out the words "thinking" and "feeling" in Fragment 72, stressing the need for their unity. The same Fragment 72 also refers to the relation between imitation and original creation: a flower would not bloom without itself, but on the contrary: it thinks and feels itself into bloom. It perfectly harmonizes with Liiv's symbiotic-holistic life philosophy.



It goes without saying that Liiv, who set such high demands for his own poetry, did not attribute any value to verse-scribbling inspired by local-political events (cf. Fragment 70). At the same time it is evident in Liiv's poetic work as a whole that he painfully followed everything that was going on in the Estonian society and in the entire world. In Fragment 85: "...Hoia et sa ei luuleta" he shows his reluctance as regards poetry which either out of cautiousness or under the influence of aestheticism makes itself deaf to life's pains and sorrows. In Liiv's philosophy poetry is the kind of creation that should provide the suffering and tired human soul refreshment and comfort (Fragment 88: "...Sa oled kui õhkuv lilleke").

In his first monograph on Liiv (Tuglas 1914: 66) Tuglas writes: "It was quite clear to Liiv that poetry could not exist without matter, meter and rhyme; it was especially clear to him who still bore in his blood instincts of early romanticism." It is obvious that Liiv as a great poet knew much more than Tuglas or Aavik – who in the field of poetry were mere theoreticians – about poetic matter and rhythm. Liiv's poetry as a whole embodies at the same time his poetics in images. However, as regards rhyme, what Tuglas says only shows how the overwhelming contemporary fashion could blind talented young spirits to the extent that they forgot what had already become a proved phenomenon in world poetry: Heine's and Whitman's unrhymed free verse, also, unrhymed odes written by German Enlightenment and Romantic poets, as well as by our own Kristian Jaak Peterson, under the influence of ancient Greek or Roman poetry. The symbolist-modernists at the start of the 20<sup>th</sup> century tended to consider their own method of art and literature eternal. It is more ironic still that only a few years after Tuglas's monograph on Liiv, the vanguard-radical phase of modernism stormily broke out and under the labels futurism, expressionism and, later, surrealism, rhyme in poetry was massively abandoned, so that unrhymed free verse, during the 20<sup>th</sup> century, became established as a universal phenomenon in world poetry.

Liiv indeed wrote the bulk of his poetry in rhyme. However, at the early stage he intuitively understood that in Estonian, whose morphology is characterized by a great variety of individual forms – with declinations and conjugations formed by word-endings – rhyme

cannot be formed in such a natural way as in the case of the Romance languages (the originating area of rhyme in European poetry). To apply full rhymes in a language whose possibilities for rhyme are meager, would mean violating poetry, as Liiv eloquently shows in Fragment 83:

The one who sings in sonorous sonnets,  
in armor entertains himself amid flowers.

Liiv's irony as regards rhymed poetry is best of all manifested in the poem "Vormidesse!" (Into Forms!). In his selection of Liiv's "Fragments" Tuglas published only four initial lines of it. Vinkel restored the complete poem. I have analyzed it in a greater detail (Talvet 2008: 94)<sup>6</sup> Preplanned rhymes do not let the spirit express itself spontaneously, they wither the "lightning-bolts of thought", the true origin of great poetry. For that reason Liiv continuously applies lax rhymes, hardly qualified as good and adequate by verse science. Liiv does not hesitate to repeat the same rhyming word several times in a poem, whenever he feels that the interior rhythm of the poem requires it.

The reception of Liiv's poetic work by the posterity confirms what Liiv anticipated in Fragment 86:

You sang for the sake of rhyme,  
and got a beating because of rhyme.  
You sang from your heart,  
and even now you are thanked for it.  
(Trans. by myself and H. L. Hix)

Adapted to his own poetic work, "Liiv's "now" is fully valid today, a hundred years after the poet's passing away. Most likely it will be heard, at least for some time, in the future.

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<sup>6</sup> In Estonian, the essay was published in the journal *Methis* 1–2, 2008.

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## *Between Traditions and Innovations: Tensions in Modernist Art at the Beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century*

### 1. Centre and periphery

The centre and the starting point of modernism was Paris. The most developed and structurally organized languages of modernism developed in Paris. In other words, Paris was the centre of the semiosphere in a semiotic, as well as a geographical, sense. At the same time, a centre–periphery relationship also existed inside modernism or, more exactly, in modernist language. These movements created several tensions inside modernist art and in society.

Modernism was a contradictory phenomenon, containing several paradoxes and tensions even in the first declarations and works of arts. The roots of these paradoxes existed in romanticism. Charles Baudelaire (1821–1867), one of the predecessors of modernist art, in his work *The Salon of 1846*, stressed the idea that romanticism and modern art were united:

Romanticism and modern art are one and the same thing, in other words: intimacy, spirituality, colour and yearning for the infinite, expressed by all the means the arts possess. It follows from this that there is an evident contradiction between romanticism and the works of its principal devotees. (Baudelaire 2006: 53)

Baudelaire used the term 'romanticism' in a different sense than it is used by contemporary literary researchers. Matei Calinescu explained Baudelaire's opinion as follows:

Romanticism is, in Baudelaire's view, not only the 'most recent, the most contemporary form of the beautiful,' but also – and this point deserves to be stressed – it is substantially different from *everything* that has been done in the past. The awareness of this dissimilarity is actually the starting point in the search for



*novelty*, another cardinal concept of Baudelaire's poetics.  
(Calinescu: 1987: 47)

Baudelaire's words explain exactly the essence of modernist art, and his words also predict what happened years later in art and literature. It seems that Baudelaire sensed very well the essence of the new art or, more exactly, how the new art would establish itself. Baudelaire's ideas are still vital in contemporary times, if we speak of modernity and/or modernism or also postmodernism. One of the most typical modernist characteristics is its experimental quality, which is connected with the condition of living in a modern world (scientific, industrial and technological changes in society). Modernist writers also created innovations in form and content in their literary works. Many groups in Western European countries espoused their innovations and explained their innovative ideas in different magazines through slogans, and several '-isms' represented these innovations. These innovations usually tried to establish new art and new poetic language (dada, imagism, expressionism, surrealism etc.).

Paul de Man has also written about the contradictions between the concepts of 'modernity' and 'traditional', and between 'romantic' and 'historical' (q.v. Man 1996: 145). Paul de Man applied Nietzsche's philosophy (young Nietzsche's work from 1870s, *Of the Use and Misuse of History for Life / Vom Nutzen und Nachteil der Historie für das Leben*) when he explained the relationship and conflict between modernity and history, and he also stressed that Baudelaire's conception of modernity was very close to Nietzsche's conception (Man 1996: 156). It is interesting that Man also talks about strategies of modernism:

As soon as modernism becomes conscious of its own strategies  
[- - -] it discovers itself to be a generative power that not only  
engenders history, but is part of a generative scheme that extends  
far back into the past. (Man 1996: 150)

Calinescu has somewhat different opinion of modernism:

My own opinion is that modernity in general, and literary  
modernity in particular, are aspects of a time consciousness that

has not remained the same through history, and that Baudelaire's theory of modernity cannot be enlarged to account for the whole of literature, simply because modernity is a rather recent invention that has little to say about varieties of aesthetic experience unconcerned with time. [- - -] There is indeed a conflict between modernity and history, but this conflict itself has a history. [- - -] Baudelaire's poetics of modernity can be taken as an early illustration of the revolt of the present against the past (Calinescu 1987: 51–52)

Calinescu's opinion is that Baudelaire's modernity is an aesthetics of imagination, opposed to realism (Calinescu 1987: 55). It seems that similar relation continues also between modernism and postmodernism at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. For example, French philosopher and theorist of postmodernism Jean-François Lyotard expresses the idea that postmodernity and modernity are connected and postmodernity is a part of the modernity (Lyotard 2000: 1427).

Leon Surette, who has analysed modernism and occultism in his work, also sees the connection between romanticism and modernism:

I have argued that modernism continued the Romantic celebration of passion, revelation, and revolution, and found much of its inspiration in many of the same sources as the Romantics – in Neoplatonism, Gnosticism, the Kabbala, and Swedenborg. These sources have been obscured by modernist scholarship's fixation on nineteenth- and twentieth-century archaeology, anthropology, and comparative religion. (Surette 1994: 281)

Modernism also contained the aspect of revolutionary romanticism and rebellion as phenomena which establish something new. Consequently, Baudelaire described the code of modernism, and all Baudelaire's essays described situations in which modernism became the phenomenon of the centre or, in other words, he described how the aesthetic of modernism moved from the periphery to the centre. Romanticism and realism were at the centre before modernism. Although the language of modernism was fixed in the centre, new languages came from the periphery, which is the area of semiotic dynamism, according to Yuri Lotman (q.v. Lotman 2000: 134).

These languages from the periphery extended the area of modernism and added something new to the mainstream and cultural and political centres in West.

## 2. The Lands of Winds

Peripheral languages and cultures, for example Estonian, Finnish and Irish, try to move to the centre. This process was very intensive, because these cultures also form the boundaries of the semiosphere, i.e. they are ambivalent, which separates and unites, according to Lotman:

The boundary is a mechanism for translating texts of an alien semiotics into 'our' language, it is the place where what is 'external' is transformed into what is 'internal', it is a filtering membrane which so transforms foreign texts that they become part of the semiosphere's internal semiotics while still retaining their own characteristics. (Lotman 2000: 136–137)

So, it is understandable that the group *Young Estonia* had the slogan "Let us be Estonians, but also become Europeans!". Although *Young Estonians* reacted against conservative nationalist ideas and influences of German culture, the slogan contains opposites: Estonian and European culture. Estonian national culture and identity was based on peasant and conservative attitudes in the 19<sup>th</sup> and beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. Estonia was a closed community with strong Baltic-German influences under the Russian Empire. The slogan of *Young Estonia* was a call to make Estonian society more European (to be precise, more French):

Anxious to overcome the narrow provincialism that stifled the growth of Estonian culture, the followers of *Noor-Eesti* endeavoured to get into touch with the latest developments in modern West-European literature, especially French literature. In formulating an aesthetic programme of their own, they were particularly influenced by the current of neo-romanticism, which in many respect set itself up as the antithesis of realism. [- - -] It was their aim to evolve an intellectual type of literature, similar

to those of the West, catering for a refined and highly educated public. (Nirk 1970: 157)

The *Young Estonia* movement brought to Estonia cultural translations: French culture through Russian or German translations (the main languages that members of *Young Estonia* read in the original were Russian and / or German).

The poetry of Gustav Suits (1883–1956) is a good example:

Symbolism in its Western form, intellectually searching, with much emphasis on a highly individual, sophisticated style, characterises the verse of Gustav Suits, the real creator of modern Estonian poetry. (Lange 2002: 24).

At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the poetry of Gustav Suits was revolutionary and romantic, with pathos and optimism:

His first collection, *The Fire of Life* (*Elu tuli*, 1905) is the simplest of all his poetry books, the most popular, reader-friendly and appealing, due to its youthful enthusiasm. It was a kind of preparation for the readers of that time for more demanding lyrical works. The manner of the young poet betrays the influences of Friedrich Nietzsche and the Finnish poet Eino Leino, but it also reveals traces of 19th century Estonian national romanticism. (Süvalep 2003: 18)

Some poems were also written in a symbolist style, as “Minu saar” (My Island, 1905) which appeared first in the cycle of love poems:

Still I keep sailing and sailing,  
And seeking an isle in the sea:  
I have sought it long already  
Where the random winds sail free.

The sea has many islands  
And havens expectant with light,  
But I cannot find the island  
I dreamed in the dazzled night.



And still my vessel keeps scudding  
On a swaying circular plain,  
And the clouds above me go swaying,  
And I seek my island in vain.  
(Trans. by W. K. Matthews; Suits 1953)

After the revolution in 1905, Suits' poetry became more serious and melancholy. The title and main symbol of his most influential collection of poetry is *The Land of Winds* (*Tuulemaa*, 1913). This is a very significant title which connects Estonian national romanticism of the 19<sup>th</sup> century with European symbolism. There are at least two meanings of the title *The Land of Winds*. It represents Estonia, the author's homeland, but also the spirit of the poet's soul:

The personal feeling of Suits as someone living away from his native land is also strongly felt. It can be said as well that *The Land of Winds* expresses something universally human or typical of 20th century man: doubts, disappointment in rationalism, feelings of insecurity. The wish to find a place of one's own in the windy world – or to create one's own Land of Winds – nevertheless persists. Contemporary, as well as later, reviewers have paid great attention to the meaning of the image of the Land of Winds. Is this Estonia, suffering in the winds of time, or the refuge of the poet's own mind and spirit? The symbolist image allows both interpretations, being simultaneously a general vision of the whole world and life as an unpredictable and forever changing domain of winds. The only choice is to accept this volatility which, for a man who has distanced himself from nature and traditions, means finding the lost unity again. [- -] It is truly stylish, precise in form, closest to French literature (Gautier, Baudelaire, Verlaine) and Russian symbolism. (Süvalep 2003: 20)

Actually the 'land of winds' is any country with a complicated history and destiny (Finland, Ireland etc.) We can see how traditional patriotism or nationalism is mixed with international and revolutionary ideas and motifs in Suits' poetry. There is a tension with older Estonian national romantic poetry, which was connected with

the tradition of German romanticism, and also with French symbolism and modernism, e.g. the poem *The Grave of Winds* (1913):

I am singing a song after changes  
Clouding sunlit distances of Time.

I am singing my song, and it changes  
With the breakers, the fierce tempests of Time.

The years' spinning-wheel moves, it turns round and round.  
The grave of cold winds buries gleam and sound.

Never ask for my dream or my vision:  
Could they ripen to euphony or song?

Ask the winds for my loveliest vision:  
It lies scattered, and the storm is my song.

Some gusts rang like flutes, but most blasts were shrill.  
My flowers are sparse on the winds' bleak hill.

Was it frail? Was its garden too open  
Among plains, with the people winds?

Was my mind too impatient, too open  
To all calls from the Commonwealth of Winds?

Who would know? Here I water my flower. Cold breath  
From north-east sweeps bare rocks, my years' home of death.  
(Lange 2002: 27; trans. by Ants Oras)

I still believe that the new meaning which was created in this poem is much more significant for Estonians than for the French. Although Suits translated foreign culture, it was still Estonian culture, although with French influences. It seems that, thanks to French culture (symbolism and modernism), Estonian culture discovered its own character, which had been overshadowed.

It is also significant that while the cultural centre in Paris declared the idea of pure art, on the periphery symbolist melancholy might also express political disappointment. At least in the Estonian context the result was paradoxical and innovative; the style in which the sorrow was expressed was innovative.

### 3. Mysticism

Before the *Young Estonia* movement was established, the *Nuori Suomi* group (Eino Leino, Akseli Gallen-Kallele, Jean Sibelius, Robert Kajanus, Pekka Halonen *et al*) existed in Finland. Eino Leino (1878 – 1926), who was one of the main members of the group, was also Gustav Suits' friend and influenced Suits' poetry (q.v. Süvalep 2003: 17 above).

We can find many similarities between Estonian and Finnish literature at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Eino Leino used very old national motifs in his poetry, and there is a tension between the older romantic tradition and his contemporary styles, mostly new-romanticism. By the way,

...both Leino and Yeats spoke of themselves as 'the last Romantics': while in England, France and Germany Romanticism had developed into such movements as Symbolism and Realism, in smaller countries like Finland in east and Ireland in the west Romanticism was predominantly the voice of national aspiration, even when these cultures were touched by the more sophisticated influences. (Branch 1978: 7)

We can find mystical elements from the Finnish epic *Kalevala*, as well as fairy-tales or folk songs, in Leino's poetry. Leino was influenced by the German poet Heinrich Heine. Mysticism is the most important characteristic of Leino's poetry. The Estonian researcher August Anni feels that the strongest features of Leino's works are a hidden style and language: his style is musical, and its sound is very beautiful. His ballads in the collection *Whitsongs* (*Helkavirsiä*, 1903 and 1916) express that musical style best (Leino 1922: 11). Leino's poetry contains a tension between old folk songs

and a contemporary modernist style. It is different from Gustav Suits' poetry, and actually the old ballads and mysticism, combined with the author's originality, make Leino's poetry modernist – this is the paradox of modernism. It seems that modernist art use old motives and fragments, but the most important thing is to interpret these old motives in very individual style, and the personality of the author is very important.

The ballad *Ihalempi* is the first poem from the collection *Whitsongs*. Leino uses actually quite a well known narrative or story from oral tradition of several nations. Michael Branch explains that poem as follows:

In Leino's poem, the girl is carried off by Demon Jack, symbolising death; she is found by the Creator in another world where she has witnessed the plunging of a star into a bubbling spring (a fertilisation symbol). For this reason and because she has experienced other miraculous phenomena the Creator makes her the bearer of a star, a hero, a great man. (Branch 1978: 17)

I think that there would be also parallels with Bible (Mary) and *Kalevala* (Marjatta story). As for the content of the ballad, we can see different conflicting relations between the characters of the ballad: the girl and the god, the girl and her relatives, although she is silent and does not answer to the relatives' questions; girl's relatives and demons:

Her brother set off.  
 Demon Jack lit his lanterns.  
 'Where have you dropped, poor sister?'  
 The boy foundered in marshes.

Her father went to find out.  
 Demon Jack lit his lanterns.  
 'Where have you walked, foolish girl?'  
 Father became Kalma's guest.

Her mother went off in search.  
 Demon Jack lit his lanterns.



Where is my little darling?'  
 Mother knew heaven's welcome.  
 (Leino 1978: 23; trans. by Keith Bosley)

The tension grows step by step in every strophe. The dramatic dialogue in the first part of the ballad is very significant: brother, father and mother ask the questions, but the girl does not answer because she is already in another world. The girl's answer is like a pause in music which expresses the expectation and tension. The only dialogue in the poem is between the girl and God:

The maiden, mother's pet, sat  
 on a heaving swamp;  
 the true God asked her:  
 'Why do your cheeks burn?'

The forest's choice one answered:  
 'A cloud moved high in heaven  
 and the sun stained the cloud red:  
 my cheeks were kindled by it.'  
 [ - - -]

And the Judge of hearts inquired:  
 'Why is your bosom on fire?

The shy one of the woods said:  
 'A golden star plunged  
 down into a bubbling spring:  
 my heart was shaken by it.'

And then the good God declared:  
 'Because the cloud was moving,  
 you, girl, shall be a cloud-girl,  
 because the dew has fallen  
 you shall be a blessed maid,  
 and because the star has plunged  
                   you shall bear a star,  
 a hero of warlike kin,  
 a great man, a sword-lover.'

He said, raised whom he had brought  
to the highest place  
and upon the highest cloud.  
(Leino 1978: 23 – 24; trans. by Keith Bosley)

The language of the ballad is similar to Finnish folk songs: Leino uses alliterative verses and specific words which stress the lyric aspect of the ballad. The end of the ballad is ambivalent and it is also as a symbol of the destiny of human being: the death and happiness are mixed and connected.

But in the context of modernist art it is significant how M. Branch interprets the poem:

If we consider this poem in the context outlined above, it would seem that Leino is opening the collection with a fanfare of clear, strong notes: a fantasy of how he would wish the poet's creative process and his position in society to be. (Branch 1978: 17)

#### 4. Occultism and rebellion

Mysticism and occultism also characterize Irish poet William Butler Yeats' (1865 – 1939) works. W. B. Yeats was an innovator in Irish poetry and drama. He connected national myths and fantasy with a symbolist style, and the main pathos in his poetry is connected with the freedom of Ireland. Yeats' cultural and political nationalism was a reaction to the late Victorian world:

Yeats was one of the main forces in the creation of the Irish Literary Theatre in Dublin in the 1890s. This became the Irish National Theatre Company in 1902, and it found its eventual home at the Abby Theatre in 1904. The theatre's *raison d'être* was the creation of a space for the exploration and celebration of Irish cultural, historical and political identity. (Wilson 2007: 83)

Yeats' aim was to establish a special and original Irish poetry. So, traditional motifs and an innovative style distinct from the European

cultural centre created a new innovative and high-styled poetry, which also carried national meaning. This is a paradoxical phenomenon: nationalism as a traditional and conservative phenomenon is combined with modernism.

Irish mythology, with its heavenly beings, gods and simple peasant culture, creates the tension in Yeats' poetry). The earthly and heavenly, the high and low, are always combined in Yeats' literary works (e.g. *The Cold Heaven*, 1914). Especially at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Yeats used Irish mythology and folklore in his works (e.g. *The Stolen Child*, 1889; *The Man Who Dreamed of Faeryland*, 1893; *The Hosting of the Sidhe*, 1899). His poems are passionate and full of contrasts (e.g. *The Lover Tells of the Rose in his Heart*, 1899). The red rose is a symbol of freedom which occurs again and again in Yeats' poems, for example *The Rose Tree* (1921) where the dialogue between two Irish freedom fighters is:

'O words are lightly spoken,'  
Said Pearse to Connolly,  
'Maybe a breath of politic words  
Has withered our Rose Tree;  
[ - - ]

'It needs to be but watered,'  
James Connolly replied,  
[ - - ]

'But where can we draw water;'  
Said Pearce to Connolly,  
'When all the wells are parched away?  
O plain as plain can be  
There's nothing but our own red blood  
Can make a right Rose Tree.'  
(Yeats 1990: 92)

According to Leon Surette, Yeats was involved in occult ideas: "Occultism sees itself as the heir of ancient wisdom – either passed on from adept to adept or rediscovered in each new generation by mystical illumination." (Surette 1994: 6–79)

Yeats searched for wisdom in old myths and folklore, in tradition. Such old wisdom is cyclical: it returns again and again, like the seasons, and it is connected with mythical thinking; rebirth is the motif which connects old pagan mythologies with Christianity, as well as nations who have the experience of losing freedom, and who hope to regain it.

## Conclusion

On the periphery of Europe (on both the eastern and western edges), one of the common features of all '-isms' and movements was the concept of freedom. However, this was freedom more in terms of social and political life and only secondarily in the artistic work and freedom in life that was common in the centre of Europe. Modernism on the eastern and western periphery was more layered: on the one hand, it tried to go to the centre, to be similar to the mainstream, and tried to create 'pure art', while, on the other hand, it was more influenced by historical and political events: revolutions, wars, the fight for freedom and nationalism. So, modernism in small peripheral countries preserved old traditions more, although the old motifs and elements were applied in a modern style. But romantic elements with rebellious power, tensions and dynamism always existed in modernist art.

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## *Some Aspects of Subversive Rhetoric in Juhan Viiding's Poetry*

0. The aim of the present article is to study some aspects of subversive rhetoric in the poetry of Juhan Viiding (1948–1995), one of Estonia's most admired and cherished poets and actors whose "Complete Poetry" (edited by Hasso Krull) includes texts written between 1968 and 1994, published either in collections (until 1978, under the pseudonym of Jüri Üdi, which translates as George Marrow in English) or separately in newspapers and magazines. It is important to mention that Juhan Viiding often read and sang his texts (accompanied on the piano by Tõnis Rätsep, a friend and colleague from the Estonian Drama Theatre), quite a few of which are recorded on cassette and CD. Üdi/Viiding was and continues to be widely read, quoted, imitated and discussed by his Estonian readers, fellow poets, intellectuals and critics.<sup>1</sup> However, despite the fact that Viiding's poetry has been translated into sixteen languages, according to Aare Pilv's "Juhan Viidingu ja Jüri Üdi bibliograafia" (Pilv 2010: 170–175), Viiding has not achieved the sort of fame abroad which he enjoys in Estonia. Indeed, the volume of articles and essays written in Estonian on Viiding's poetry is not equalled by writing in other languages. Reviews written in English and Russian are mostly by Estonian critics or Russian critics from Estonia (ib. 196–208). Of course, poetry in general does not submit easily to being translated, but in Üdi/Viiding's case we are dealing with a kind of poetic which makes the process even more complicated, perhaps also partly

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<sup>1</sup> The most recent collection of articles, essays and reminiscences *Juhan Viiding, eesti luuletaja* (ed. by Marin Laak and Aare Pilv) was published by the Estonian Literary Museum only in December, 2010. It includes a comprehensive bibliography (compiled by Aare Pilv) which lists of Üdi/Viiding's works, translations of his poetry into other languages, songs performed by him and by others, his theatrical roles, his TV and theatre performances, and articles, reviews and essays written on his poetry.

unachievable. This seems to be the most probable explanation for the asymmetry of Üdi/Viiding's poetic reputation. So, apart from the peculiar charm of his poetry, with its highly intricate poly-semantic spectrum which calls out for discussion of the organising principles of his texts, I am writing this article<sup>2</sup> in the hope that more foreign critics will take an interest in this exceptional poet and more poets who write in other languages will rise to the challenge of translating his texts or providing their own original pieces of creative writing in Üdi/Viiding's wake.

**1.1** Before I discuss Viiding's poetic based on the example of "Selges eesti keeles" ("In clear Estonian"), a collection published in 1974 under the pseudonym Jüri Üdi, I shall give a broad outline of my approach. First of all, there is the question of language and text. The purely formal-structural approach would understand text as a self-contained system of signs with its own hierarchical structure. The text in this case would be a system of its own discourse. Yet a text is not created in, nor does it live in a void, but in a shared cultural sphere; it is the result of dialogue with other poetic texts and also the common (and of course changing) linguistic usage.<sup>3</sup> Therefore we may say with J. Lotman that "the rhetorical structure does not arise automatically from the language structure, but is a deliberate reinterpretation of the latter [...]; the rhetorical structure is brought into the verbal text from outside, giving it a supplementary orderedness" (Lotman 1990: 49). For example, if we take the title of Üdi/Viiding's collection "Selges eesti keeles" (which may be translated as "in clear Estonian," and also as "in plain Estonian" or "in lucid Estonian"), a mindful reader would not understand it as a heading/text *per se*, but as a heading/text in relation to some out-of-this-text

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<sup>2</sup> The present article in part follows my essay in Estonian on the genesis of spaces in Viiding's poetry (Ploom 2010).

<sup>3</sup> Common oral communication also occurs in situations which should be understood as situational texts, but they are not meant to be preserved as the enounced which in the course of re/presentation engender new enunciations; for once the enunciation in this kind of communication has achieved its pragmatic aim, the text will normally be cancelled, or at least not recorded in the sense of written texts, or film or sound recordings, etc.

usage. In fact, "selges eesti keeles" is part of a great number of everyday communicative and pragmatic utterances. Very often a person who says "Ma ütlen sulle selges eesti keeles" ("I am telling you in plain Estonian") means either that he wants to make his point plain and simple or that the person to whom the discourse is directed is somewhat slow or stubborn in understanding. But the phrase also has the connotation of the beauty of the Estonian language, both in the sense of clear and logical, and also in the sense of the phonetic beauty of this particular phrase or, by extension, of the Estonian language in general. In this case, "selges eesti keeles" may even be extended to "sulaselges eesti keeles," which would convey that "the Estonian language is as beautiful as liquid honey."

Therefore many different out-of-this-text utterances "in plain/clear/beautiful/logical/lucid Estonian" may be drawn into dialogue with the enounced "selges eesti keeles," both in the title and in many other textual units contained in the same collection. In the light of this kind of dialogue between this communicative utterance and other communicative and pragmatic utterances (outside of this text), the semantic possibilities of a (poetic) text are not confined to the relationship of the code and the message as something fixed and monolithic. They are both bound to change in the act of communication. Jakobson, in his famous article "Linguistics and Poetics" (1960), certainly stresses the supremacy of the poetic function in poetry, but he also warns against its reduction to the absolute: "any attempt to reduce the sphere of poetic function to poetry or to confine poetry to poetic function would be a delusive oversimplification" (2003: 91). The poetic function which focuses on the message is in interaction with the other linguistic functions also in poetry. Lotman develops Jakobson's views and shows how the message and code relationship in the process of different communication systems (I-I, I-s/he) may bring about a change in both of them with a resulting shift in context (Lotman 1990: 20–22).

In Üdi/Viiding's poetry we witness a deliberate transformation of the code and message relationship already on the level of language. The ordinary linguistic code (the choice is thereby mainly made from among idiomatic expressions which are actually already results of previous code breaks) is questioned and the reader is asked to make



repeated moves onto the metalinguistic level. In the case of "selges eesti keeles," the initial relationship between the code and the message is shattered. From the outwardly simple communicative code and message relationship "in clear Estonian" the reader is called upon to move (because of the intrusion of some other possible utterances quoted above) to a new and altered code and message relationship, even though the out-of-this-enounced textual memories of the addresser and the addressee need not coincide. What they must share, though, is the understanding that other texts have to "translate" this very message, acting as its code; therefore, "in clear Estonian" may become "in plain Estonian" or "in lucid Estonian" or even, absurd as it may seem, "in clear Estonian," which is only seemingly tautological, for this "clear" is no longer the initial "clear."

Thus it appears that the language of the poetic text is not communicative and pragmatic in the sense of easing and simplifying these processes but, on the contrary, it thickens the possibilities of the semantic field. The poetic language of Üdi/Viiding often questions idiomatic codes and breaks them. But it is not for the sake of breaking the codes as such; it is also to focus the dichotomy of things and words, being and language. As some phenomenologists put it, language while disclosing being also closes it (Gadamer 1974). In this light, "in 'clear' Estonian" also hints at some reality beyond the outwardly common, plain and conventional linguistic reality, although its perception by the addresser and the addressee (and here we tackle the difficulty of the implicit "lector" as a textual strategy and the empirical reader drawn into that position) cannot overlap. And they need not. This kind of keeping horizons apart (the difference between *expliquer* and *comprendre*) in hermeneutics has been indicated by Ricoeur (e.g. 1986: 180). Therefore my objective in this article is not to analyse in order to arrive at some final unified understanding of what the author "meant," but to analyse some aspects of the rhetorical mechanism in Üdi/Viiding which may lead to possible ways for a further understanding of his texts.

**1.2** In Üdi/Viiding's poetry the question of the transformation of the linguistic code is closely interrelated with the questioning of other

cultural codes. The simultaneous interplay of different codes which get into contradiction is one of the main devices of Üdi/Viiding's textual rhetoric. Rhetoric, in this context, does not mean the art of prose as opposed to poetics as the art of poetry, nor does it mean ornate discourse, but the principle of text organisation and especially the principle of meaning-generation (cf Lotman 1990: 36–53). I shall underline in Lotman's approach one specific idea which for me seems seminal: the opposition, from the semiotic point of view, of stylistics to semantics, on the one hand, and to rhetoric, on the other (ib. 50). A literary text as a complex of hierarchically organised segments cannot be either exclusively rhetorical or exclusively stylistic, but one of these features may be predominant. According to Lotman, a stylistic effect is produced when one and the same semantic content is expressed in different registers, but the signs within each register belong to that particular register, i.e. "a self-contained and hierarchically bonded group of signs", whereas a rhetorical effect arises when there is a *conflict* of signs relating to *different* registers, and when this conflict leads to a structural renewal of the feeling of a boundary between the self-contained worlds of signs (ib. 50–51). The stylistic effect is formed *within* a hierarchical sub-system (ib. 51). Hence, "stylistic consciousness" derives from hierarchical boundaries as something absolute, whereas "rhetorical consciousness" derives from hierarchical boundaries as something relative (ib.).

On another occasion ("Filmi semiootika" – "Film semiotics") Lotman analysed the mythical figure of Charlie Chaplin. Charlie Chaplin has two opposite semantic halves, the gentlemanly half and the tramp half, but these segments are not separated by a rigid boundary: in his gentlemanliness Chaplin all of a sudden becomes the mischievous Charlie, and amid the dowdiness and mischievousness a gentleman bows and doffs his hat. But in Charlie Chaplin's figure, despite these separate halves and a hint of the one in the other, we may still find a kind of symmetry which we do not have in Jüri Üdi/Juhan Viiding. I do not intend to analyse the figure of Üdi/Viiding, who was, by the way, very keen on hats and old-fashioned elegance, which was in striking contrast with "Soviet fashion," nor his habit of using different voices even in everyday

speech. The object of my analysis is his poetic body, his texts which on the one hand reflect his position as an Estonian poet in a Soviet Estonia which could still reminisce about a past world; on the other hand, there is the contradiction between the rough and the civilised, the savage/free and the cultured/normative, which extends well beyond narrow political barriers and questions the depths of human existence. Secondly, and what constitutes the biggest difference from Charlie Chaplin is the fact that the “I” which should link the different segments into one whole is not congruous or analysable, but manifold and elusive. Therefore, diverse and asymmetrical spaces, not clearly definable, are being generated in one and the same text, even in one and the same stanza, in one and the same couple of verses or in a single phrase. As a result, boundaries move and one finds oneself re-segmenting what seems to have been segmented already.

2. 1 Üdi/Viiding’s collection “Selges eesti keeles” comprises 63 texts all of which I cannot, of course, analyse. My purpose is to draw examples from a number of compositions in order to illustrate a) how his poetic language is built on the interaction of various codes and b) how Üdi/Viiding makes use of a certain rhetoric which generates diverse or even contradictory meanings within and between sub-segments which cannot be easily ordered because of moving boundaries. Under the title “Selges eesti keeles” (“In clear Estonian”) is a footnote which translates as:

When translating this book, please  
alter the title  
according to the language of translation.

Author

This paratextual allusion suggests that the author is very much aware of the “linguistic question” and the difficulty (if not impossibility) of translating his poetry. If this request were acted on, ideally all of the textual specificities which spring from the possibilities of the Estonian language – the specific imagery of its idioms combined with its prosody and rhyme – should be changed according to the

language of translation. Translation, therefore, would mean the transposition of the tension between Estonian figurative language and prosody and Üdi/Viiding's textual language (including the questioning and breaking of its codes), for example, into a tension between English figurative language and prosody with the translator's textual language, which also has to be code-questioning and -breaking.

Estonian sayings and proverbs with their specific prosody and textual transformations very often make the textual *incipit*. In my analysis, I shall explain the idiomatic phrases and sometimes also offer suggestions for possible alternative translations.<sup>4</sup>

võta pikksilm. oota pikisilmi	a) take the long-glass. wait with longing eyes
("Võta pikksilm, vaata pikisilmi")	b) take the spy-glass. spy with longing
öö käest pannakse päeva käele	from the hand of night onto the hand of day is put
koiduni alahoitu	what was preserved until dawn
("Öö käest pannakse päeva käele")	

The Estonian text transforms everyday speech based on metaphoric phrases connected with "hand." E.g. "öö käes" ("in night's hand") has become neutrally communicative and is no longer perceived as a metaphor. In the same neutral way one can say "tuule käes" ("in the wind"), "külma käes" ("in the frost"), and also "päeva käes" ("in the sun"). But the illative case "päeva käele" ("onto the hand of day") is clearly "abnormal" for the Estonian reader. It is not only a question of poeticalness in the sense of personification, but there is a hint of the *unheimlich*, as Freud would put it (cf Freud 1919). The translator should therefore use some idiomatic commonplaces and then subvert them. The same feeling is achieved in the next example.

hirmul on suured silmad	fear has big eyes
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<sup>4</sup> Titles of poems, or the first lines of untitled poems, are given below the quotations in Estonian.



ja kokkusurutud suu                      and a compressed mouth  
 (“Hirmul on suured silmad”)

“Hirmul on suured silmad” is a well-known Estonian saying used in everyday speech to express the idea that when one is frightened, one cannot think logically and tends to see things which do not exist or to exaggerate. But Üdi/Viiding links it to an extension which is never used in everyday speech. The translator’s task is to find an analogous linking pair in which the second element should extend and at the same time question the first element.

I could continue this list with many more examples, but those given should suffice to explain one of the mechanisms of the Üdi/Viiding rhetoric. There is the twofold usage of linguistic spaces: an idiomatic, but out-of-the-poetic-text, normal, correct and “civil” use of language and an extended idiomatic, poetic, abnormal, “incorrect” and savage use. As a result, the first type of normality is questioned and shattered, and at the same time, a new potential idiomatic is created.

**2.2.** Sometimes in the process of transformation the linguistic code is combined with other specific cultural codes (mythological codes, biblical codes, army-life codes, codes of the criminal world, etc.):

laev tuli kaua üle suure lombi  
 the boat took long to cross the big pond  
 (“Meremehe küsimus”)

“Suur lomp” (the big pond) here, of course, stands for the Atlantic Ocean (the pond), but by extension it means the shut-out or mythological or dream world in general, when juxtaposed with Soviet reality.

tuhat korda kulpi löödud  
 a thousand times the hand scooped up  
 (“Sõja eelõhtul”)

me ei tea, mis Luukas kodus teeb we do not know what Luke is up to  
at home  
(“Hobuste laul rändajale”)

ma loodan täna ei saa nuga neeru I hope, I won't get a knife in the  
kidney  
(“Õhtu Valgas”)

Sometimes Üdi/Viiding's poetic language transforms the existing linguistic code completely, e.g.

oma särk on kõige ligedam (instead of “oma särk on kõige ligemal”) (“Oma särk on kõige ligedam”)

one's own shirt is wettest or sweatiest (instead of "one's own shirt is nearest", i.e. dearest)

The common saying for indicating egotism – “one’s own shirt is nearest to oneself” (“one’s own skin is dearest to oneself”) – is transformed into apprehension and weariness. Perhaps the translation could be something like:

one's own shirt is weariest

or something similar; all the more so since the text speaks about shirts hanging on a line and which seem to have an individual existence separately from their wearer.

The same kind of phenomenon is manifest also in:

ma tulin saama kõhtu varju I came to get some shade into the stomach  
 ("Laps")

The Estonian saying "kõht on hele" ("the stomach is light," i.e. "not dark") means that one is hungry. Perhaps the etymology is connected with the sounds made by an empty stomach, as "hele hää" means a "clear and high-pitched voice," but there may be other possibilities. In any case, the poet extends the code, suggesting that "when the stomach is light," it should be filled with "shade."

This described mechanism actually anticipates the leading of the normal linguistic code into crisis and, as a result, the generating of new and unexpected meanings. The message does not "hit home" easily, and so the code is checked and the revised message provides a shift in context. Code- and context-shifting often occur within a single line or within a couple of lines and act as a kind of hinge uniting different, even contradictory, semantic spaces. In the example above, we have the normal "civilised linguistic space," which, although idiomatic, is not present in the text, and the savage "uncivilised" linguistic space, which is present, but which without the other one is not translatable. "Kõht on hele" ("the stomach is light") is "normal" use, "kõhus on vari" ("there is shade in the stomach") is "savage" use. However, as a result, a new meaning is generated which is no mere aesthetic game, if we just think that when hungry, there is even "no shade of food" ("mitte toidu varju") in the stomach.

**2.3** So far we have been dealing only with some prerequisites, albeit very important ones, for semantic rhetoric. One of the essential traits of this kind of textual organisation is that the boundaries between the sub-segments should not hold, as will be seen in the poem "Me ei sõitnud metsast läbi" ("We did not drive through the forest"), one of

the most striking examples of Üdi/Viiding's semantic rhetoric. I shall reproduce the text in Estonian and give an English translation.

\*

me ei sõitnud metsast läbi mina üksi sõitsin	we did not drive through the forest I alone did drive
ajasin end hästi sirgu nägin kõik on hästi	I pulled myself well upright I saw that all was well
kuused kasvanud õigesti lilled õitsenud õieti flowers blossomed blossomwise	spruces grown upright and wise [spruces sprang respectable] [flowers sprang receptacles]
mütoloogias lennanud hiigellind oma tiivaga lehvitas tuult	a giant bird of mythology with its wings waved the wind
mis ma tean sellest Lõhavere linnust valvanud hiigellinnust	what do I know of the bird keeping hold of Lõhavere stronghold
läbi metsa üksinda sõitsin kitkus sulgi õõ minu rinnust	I drove alone through the forest the night plucked feathers from my chest

I have made some slight changes in the translation in order to convey the semantic rhetoric of the poet. Let us first analyse the third couplet, which functions as a kind of hinge opening into two different and asymmetrical spaces:

kuused kasvanud **õigesti**  
lilled õitsenud **õieti**

There is no valid translation, for there is no single valid understanding and interpretation. One could be "spruces grown straight, flowers blossom by blossom." But besides the idiomatic usage, of



which "õigesti" ("straight") is common, and "õieti" ("blossomwise") understandable but rare, there is in parallel an allusion to normativity and grammaticality, for in Estonian "õigesti" also means "in the correct way." "Õieti" means "blossom by blossom," but it may also mean, and is actually widely used in the sense of "correct," though this is not normative or grammatically correct usage.

The "wild" and the "cultured" are thus mixed, and the border is unclear, for besides the naturally wild there is also the linguistically "wild," differing from the normative. Spruces seem to have grown "straight" (wild), why not?, and this is suggested as normal, why not? But flowers seem to have grown "blossom by blossom" (wild), why not?, although it is suggested that this may somehow be outside the norm, which clearly makes it absurd. How can what is natural be incorrect? Both spruces and flowers belong to the natural and the wild, and they grow as they may. Flowers cannot blossom "straight," that would be absurd. But herein lies Üdi/Viiding's semantic anarchy, the possibility of the correctness of language and also its normative power is questioned and subverted. The cultural space of Soviet Estonia was very normative; the same held true for the official grammar of the Estonian language. It was both a defence system against foreign loans and influences and also a symptom of civic narrow-mindedness and political correctness. The normativists of the Estonian language fought against the incorrect form "õieti" ("correct"), but nature – wild flowers – does not allow itself to be shaped by norms. Once again, Üdi/Viiding's anarchy is broader than political anarchy.

Of course, in the poem in question we must juxtapose also other spaces of linguistic and cultural existence – the individual space and the collective space, the mythological dream space and the concrete space of collective activities (linguistic activities, for example). The outer collective space seems to be a normative space, the inner individual place is also a dreamy place, though even here one part of it is collective, for "Lõhavere linnus" – Lõhavere stronghold – is a mythical place associated with the age-old resistance of the Estonians against foreign crusaders. Another hinge which unites and separates these spaces is therefore the isomorph "linnust"; in one instance, it is the accusative case of "linnus" ("stronghold"), and in

the other instance, the ablative case of "lind" ("bird"). So there is the collective myth of a "giant bird which keeps hold of Lõhavere stronghold," but it is the "I" alone from whose chest the bird plucks feathers. It is far from meaningless that in the Estonian original "rinnust" ("chest") rhymes with both the ablative case of "bird" ("linnust") and the accusative of "stronghold" ("linnust"). Therefore, in this "chest of the lyrical 'I'" the collective mythological space and the individual signifying space interrelate. In Dante's "Divine Comedy" wings and writing are associated, e.g. at the end of "Paradise" Dante says, "ma non eran da ciò le proprie penne" ("but my feathers were not cut out for this," XXXIII, v 139). Surely, in Üdi/Viiding's text there is the additional feeling of the *unheimlich*.

**2.4** Another decisive factor of Üdi/Viiding's semantic rhetoric and the asymmetry of the textual sub-segments is the question of the incongruity of the "I". Of course, we may say that the signifying space is united by the writing "I" and through the "grammar" of the writing "I" with "we": we have the Estonian language (collective grammatical space, image space, verse traditions, etc.) and Estonian culture (collective mythologies, historical memory, etc.). So it would seem that the signified promises itself through this collective language as an institution. But it also denies itself, for besides the outer institutionalised and somewhat abstract language-culture space, there is the individual concrete body, the "chest from which the mythological bird plucks feathers," and this subverts the collective and the normative. Therefore, the writing "I" is posited in the collective cultural space, which interrelates with the cultural-linguistic being of the cognising "I" and also with the latter's non-linguistic and non-cultured being which expresses itself in fear, in the *unheimlich*, in the dreamlike.

Hasso Krull, poet and editor of the "Complete Poems," has written in his analysis that the subjective centre of Viiding's poetry remains undetermined (Krull 1998: 558–560). So we cannot speak of the unified lyrical "I" typical of classical lyrical poetry. Viiding's lyrical "I"-s often juxtapose and confront the "we," "he," and "they". Sometimes it seems that there is an attempt at the unification of the "I" with a kind of meta "I," a meta character in the texts:

ma näen seda kõike läbi vihmase  
hommiku  
ühest kõrgest tornist kuhu ronin  
peaegu igal ööl  
("Suveöö piiril")

I see it all through a rainy morning  
from a tall tower onto which I climb  
almost every night  
("On the frontier of a summer night")

But even then, there is the suspicion that we are dealing just with another position, another voice, though on a different level, in a different space, as if observed by another observer. Consequently, these spaces appear very fragmentary and hardly distinguishable, so it is difficult to establish precise frontiers between the to-ing and fro-ing between concrete places and mythological space, dream space, memory space, etc, which the writing "I" creates and then observes from aside with the help of some meta "I"-character making this observation an integral part of the game, a kind of meta-space within the space of representation.

The different spaces which are often hinged together or kept apart through the juxtaposition and confrontation of character-positions need not only be those of "I" and "we"; they can also be "he" and "they," as in the poem "Orkester Glehni lossi pargis" ("The orchestra in Glehn Castle park") where there is also the confrontation of the binary oppositions "wild/natural" – "normal/correct." The second opposition is between rhyme and non-rhyme. But what is important is that these oppositions subvert one another. In the first stanza, the confrontation is between the sub-segment marked "teine viiul" ("second violin") and the sub-segment marked "teised pillimehed" ("other players"):

väikses lavakastis mängib  
ainult teine viiul  
teised pillimehed peavad  
sünnipäeva Hiiul

in the tiny pit is playing  
only the second violin  
other players have a birthday party  
somewhere in the Hiiu zone

Hiiu is actually a nice quiet suburb on the outskirts of Tallinn. "Viiul" and "Hiiul" rhyme, but the sub-segments which they unite have opposing semantics. Only one member of the orchestra is

playing in the pit (normative), but the others are doing something free, wild and fanciful (having a birthday party).

In the second stanza, two rhyming couplets represent phonetic unison, but the lexical meanings do not match at all, and the result is absurd. I shall first give a literal translation (a), then a modified version (b):

a)

igaühel kaasas forte	everyone has his forte
vabandage torte	please excuse the cakes
igaühel mustad noodid	everyone has black notes
lumivalged voodid	beds as white as snow

b)

igaühel kaasas forte	everyone has his forte
vabandage torte	please excuse the torte
igaühel mustad noodid	everyone has black noties
lumivalged voodid	lily-white are throaties

In parallel with the so-called “real” room, an absurd and playful fantasy room is created. (The “forte” might also refer to woman, man’s “better half”). In any case, fantasy relates to freedom, to infantilism, although there is also perhaps some warning in the juxtaposition of “black notes” and “snow-white beds.” Whatever the case, liberty and fantasy are stressed in the third stanza, where some play with the sculpture of a crocodile, while others pick flowers in the “wild and free park.”<sup>5</sup>

However, in the fourth and last stanza, there is yet another confrontation of the “he” and the “they”. The “he” is no longer the “second violin,” but a “tired oboe (player)” that slides into a pool, and it is not actually clear what is happening – drowning due to drunkenness, suicide, or perhaps it is just a dream. What *is* clear is

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<sup>5</sup> Nikolai von Glehn (1841–1923), the founder of Nõmme district, which also includes the Hiiu zone, built a castle with a fanciful park around it which later became known as Glehn Castle and the park of Glehn Castle. The park is still a popular place of recreation.



that the “abnormal,” wild and playful space which almost became “normative” and “natural” is subverted in its turn:

a)

aga kusagil basseinis	but somewhere in a swimming-pool
kuigi see ei loe	though it does not matter
vajub tasakesi vette	silently sinks into water
väsinud oboe	the tired oboe

b)

aga kusagil basseinis	but somewhere into a basin
kuigi see ei loe	though it does not matter
vajub tasakesi vette	slides the overtired oboe
väsinud oboe	and he does not splatter

It is not even clear where this space is. Is it also in Hiiu, in one of the pools at the foot of the hill on which Glehn castle stands? Is he a member of the same orchestra? The poet seems to create, with very neat and concise expedients, an image of a polyphonic world of diverse instruments that do not play the same tune. These voices express both the correct professional space, but also the childish space of fantasy, the space of fear and the fear of death. And the “realities” of the water world are altogether different from those of the dry world. One juxtaposition is almost never enough for Viiding. “They” links with both “he”-s, “the second violin” and “the tired oboe,” whereas the latter remains enigmatic. This “he” is situated neither in a wild and free space, nor in ordered spaces, and is therefore left out of the game, or the game stops, for there is nothing else to say. That world is not analysable.

**2.5.** Let us now discuss some aspects of what is seemingly one of the most binary and “political” texts in the collection – “Palmimaja” (“Palmhouse”), but not political in the ordinary sense of socially or politically biased poetry. It is rather a question of the coming together/remaining apart of different time spaces.

vange kasvatati lillepottides	captives were grown in flowerpots
vabu lõikelilledena müüdi	free ones sold as cut flowers

Paradoxically, potted flowers are living flowers, but only because they are grown in custody, they are prisoners; equally paradoxically, cut flowers are dead, but they were once wild and free. We also witness a splitting of the "I":

mööda jalgu ronin üles nagu roos    I climb along the legs like a rose  
olen roheline, kuid kas enam mina    I am green, but is it still me

Green flowers are known to be living flowers; when flowers are dead, they usually change colour. Therefore the "climbing rose" (the climber) is alive, but dead, for the "I" does not exist any longer. In the juxtaposition of the two "I"-s, here and now, there is also the sensation of time. Time now is different from what it was.

järjest pragunevad vanad lillepotid  
old flowerpots crack one after another

nende põhjast leian vaevalt kadund aja  
at the bottom I hardly find the time which has gone

[at the bottom I find the time which has just gone]

Therefore, "Palmimaja" ("Palmhouse") creates a kind of confrontation of two spaces and times. It is clear that cut flowers are no longer part of life, but neither is the imprisoned life of pot-flowers. Old time spies from behind the cracked pots. We again come close to Üdi/Viiding's genesis of spaces, which might be qualified as the creation of mythological time and space, in a predominantly backward direction. What we seem to have here is a case of initiatic, orphic poetry, of which there are not many examples in Estonian poetry. Perhaps the best example of this kind is "Terve elu" ("The whole life"), where we encounter a confrontation between objective time and subjective time.

ei ta kulu ega kuku aina veereb    it neither wears out nor falls, only  
rolls on

The topic is either life or time or life-time. There are three very common sayings in a row: “aeg/elu kulub” (“time/life wears out”), “kell/aeg kukub” (“the hour strikes”), “aeg/elu veereb” (“time/life rolls on”), but they are in confrontation, the first two are opposed to the third. The two first expressions may be connected with the sense of time, subjective time, and third is the constation of the objectivity of the flow of time. But the objective flow of time is soon to be subverted by the repetition of a line:

huulde hammustan ja tardununa	I bite my lip and gaze in consternation
vaatan	
huulde hammustan ja tardununa	I bite my lip and gaze in consternation
vaatan	

This repetition is extremely important, for between the two lines there is the sense of time.<sup>6</sup> Thus, the first glance at time seems to be an objective one – time rolls on. But the second is subjective. The gaze is turned backwards, in search of a lost time and space.

terve elu mööda pikki tänavaid	throughout life down long streets
ajan taga sinu hiigelkübarat	I chase after your huge brimmed hat
heidan õlapuult ma kitsenahast	I push off my shoulders a goat-skin
mantli	coat
oma õnne sisse jooksen tagurpidi	I run backwards into my happiness
valged toolid ennast punuvad mu	white chairs entwine themselves
ümber	around me
jalad lehtlamulda juuri ajavad	their legs take root in the arbour's soil

Strangely enough, the finding of what is sought after does not occur in this space but somewhere else, and by someone else, not by the seeking “I.”

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<sup>6</sup> The repetition of words also tends to question their “meaning” and empty the signifier of meanings. This could also lead to a reading in an *unheimlich* register.

mida otsisin ma sügisest pargist      what I was seeking in the autumnal park  
seda tormi ajal mere äärest leiti      was found in the storm on the seashore

Therefore, lost time and space are constructed in fragmentary fashion in quite another space, not where they were sought, and somehow these time spaces do not meet. We see a kind of Rimbaud-like "Moi, c'est l'autre." Indeed, in another text "See on võõras andumine" ("It's an alien self-giving"), the second stanza says:

aga mina olen teine	but I am another
ja mu käsi ammu nõrk	and my hand has long been feeble
ajan liblikana taga	I chase like a butterfly
tüdrukut, kel käes on võrk	the girl in whose hand is a net

We may see some resemblance to the so-called troubadour *adynata* (impossibilities), as in Arnaut Daniel ("En cest sonnet coind' e lèri") – "I am Arnaut who catches the wind; /I chase the hare with an ox/ and swim against the current." But there are of course some significant differences. Arnaut's *adynata* are connected with the precision of expressing one's love and the implication that love has taught Arnaut to do impossible things. So, in Arnaut, love unites possibilities with impossibilities, yet the lyrical "I" happily unites these two worlds. The absurd is somehow appeased in the cognising subject. But Üdi/Viiding's semantic rhetoric does not foresee that these worlds meet in the same cognising character.

There is often some ideal world juxtaposed with the real one, and the subjects are alien to one another. The incompatibility of different times, spaces and senses of time is also revealed in the poem "Kokkulepe" ("Contract"), the title of which is emblematic too. A contract is an agreement and suggests the presence of two parties, and therefore a dialogue. Üdi/Viiding's "Contract" is a very unusual dialogue. There is a dialogue, but the voices are not textually marked. If throughout the texts in the collection there is generally very limited use of punctuation, here there is none at all. At the same time, it is important that the "I" form is used by two voices (maybe even three), thus allowing for diverse scenarios:



## PLOOM

näita tube kallis proua palun	show the rooms dear lady show
näita	them please
on see tõsi et meil siin ei teki	is it true that here we shall know no
hirme	fear
jaa kui tarvis võite ahju teha tule	yes and you may light the flame in
	the oven
ümber paigutada kergeid hiina	and move around the light Chinese
sirme	screens

In the first stanza, it is clear that one or perhaps two voices ask for refuge (possibly a couple) in a landlady's house (the first two lines). Whatever the reason for seeking refuge, there is uneasiness and fear. The landlady seems reassuring. In the second stanza, the landlady suggests things that the lodgers may do if they wish, with a hint of irony in the second verse:

jääge sellisteks just nagu olete      remain exactly what you are now

The real and concrete space is at once linked to the mythological space when the landlady asks about the lodgers' provenance. The refuge-seeking man seems not to be from this time and space:

mina proua olen pärimustest	I come my lady from tradition
minu elu on nad jälle teinud tõeks	my life they have made it come true
elan päikesest ja hommikusest	I live on sun and morning dew
kastest	
see mu naine ta on halastajaõeks	here's my wife she is a ward sister

So this "I" is not a normal "I" from the "normal" world – which the landlady may or may not represent, hers is a different world, at least – but somebody from the mythological world of "we/I" which has been aroused at somebody's will, or which is allowed to pass from that mythological and separate space (back) to reality. It is of course possible to read Üdi/Viiding in an ideological register and see a family returning from a deportation camp, but surely it would be far too limiting to suggest only this reading. It is clear that the image of the "house" is of utmost importance here. The house is both "my house" and "a lodging house that provides me with refuge."

depending on the I-function. Thus the "I" here is the organising function in the text on the level of the signifier. On the level of the signified, there are no clear-cut spaces, no clear-cut identities, not of the lady, not of the man coming from some illusionary world, not of the wife, of whom all we know is that she is a nurse, not of the children. In a way, it is reminiscent of Pirandello's "Six characters in search of an author." The uncanny, the *unheimlich* of the house, of the room is evident. In the first stanza, there is the almost a negative question:

on see tõsi et meil siin ei teki hirme	is it true that here we shall
	know no fear

In the last stanza, comfort, uneasiness and fear follow close behind one after another, ending on an existential note.

jääge lapsed minu majja olge üüril	stay my children in my house stay as
	lodgers
kui just kõhedus ei aja liikuma	if of course not driven by uneasiness
on üks kõis seal akna taga müüril	there is a rope behind the window on
	the wall
palun sinna ärge minge kiikuma	please don't go and swing there

The segment of comfort (line one) is linked in opposition to the segment of menace (line three), while the segment of uneasiness (line two) is in harmony with the segment of prohibition (line four). So in one case the rhyme correlates with the lexical segments, in another it does not.

The lack of identification of the inner space of the house is in correlation with the danger of the outer space. But the danger is concealed and expressed only in a hypothetical "if not driven by uneasiness" which correlates with a negative imperative "please don't go and swing there." The offer of shelter correlates with the civic. The resulting effect is that of some fantastic and metaphysical space and a borderline situation. Üdi/Viiding masterfully creates different spaces simultaneously. In English "a rope" does not correspond to the Estonian "üks kõis," which conveys both "a

rope/any rope" and "a certain rope." As a result, there is a concrete house, but it does not seem to be this concrete house. There is an "I," but it seems to come from some other space. There are some refugees, whom the landlady also calls "children" and who are menaced by "a (certain) rope." We cannot say that something is or is not, but that something is and is or is and is not simultaneously.

## Conclusions

Üdi/Viiding's text generating mechanism is that of predominantly semantic rhetoric, which Juri Lotman has distinguished from stylistic rhetoric. It combines the juxtaposition of diverse segments of a text in a subversive way. Very often different segments are in confrontation on the level of language (out-of-this-text's normative use in their textual subversion). Rhyme may serve within a single stanza to both correlate the semantic unity on the level of language or to disrupt this unity, and sometimes there is both unity and disruption. Different fragmentary time spaces are created which are often linked with an "I," but it is not necessarily the same "I"; the "I" functions rather as an organiser of the signifying space. The "I" often emerges at some point of intersection of the collective (Estonian) language and culture and a cognising individual "I" with its own linguistic and non-linguistic being. The effect is often strange, grotesquely comic or uncanny. The poet seems to be quite aware of this kind of semantic rhetoric. Perhaps the best illustration of this is to be found in the text called "avatud laul" ("open song"):

Ei vasak käsi tea, mis tegi parem.	The left hand does not know what the right one did.
See teadmine on kolmandamas käes.	This knowing is in the third hand.

Further on, it appears that the left and the right hand act under a glass globe.

Kuid kolmas käsi kupli tõstab ära ja teised kaks niiviisi ühendab	But the third hand will lift the globe and thus unite the other two.
----------------------------------------------------------------------	-------------------------------------------------------------------------

The third hand may belong to the writing "I" or to someone who takes some meta-position in Üdi/Viiding's space of cognition and writing.

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*A Drama of a Philosophy of Senses:  
Jüri Talvet's Poetry*

Jüri Talvet is an Estonian poet. It means, as it does for all poets with this definition, that he writes poetry in Estonian. He was born on the 17<sup>th</sup> of December in 1945 in the Southwestern Estonian seaside city of Pärnu. Since 1974, he has worked at the department of comparative literature of Tartu University, which is Estonia's oldest and most prestigious university. A professor and head of the department since 1992, his activities have included lecturing, supervising and reviewing degree writings, and numerous other academic, and literary, duties. For decades, he has translated a wide range of classic literary works, both verse and prose, poems, fiction and plays, from Western languages, especially Spanish and English, and also such notable minority languages of the Iberian peninsula as Galician and Catalan. Always devoted to outstanding artistic qualities, he has chosen the kind of kernel texts of the particular cultures that would best widen the outlook of his native readers, and with his methods of versification, and syntactic, lexical and stylistic choices, he has always aimed at his translations becoming landmarks of lasting value.

Translating into Estonian, and writing poems in Estonian, is an unrewarding job. The better its quality, the more unrewarding, in material terms and in terms of reception, it is. The author may put his mind's best powers into it, and all he earns, besides moderate payment, is one shortish review in a magazine or paper. He or she is largely ignored even in their own tiny society. Since their language is an undecipherable gibberish everywhere abroad, no one can even potentially appreciate their efforts and achievements there. The best an Estonian poet or translator can do for foreign readers is to mention their works in their CVs. For a lecturer and professor like Talvet, the extra reward lies in the interest and respect of his devoted students, who are mostly the ones in Estonia who form the happy exception to people's ignorance of him.

If the poet and translator can do nothing to broaden the field of reception of their medium of expression, which is their native language, they can enrich the contents of their writings with the poetic treasures and fine wisdom from all around the world. If they, like Talvet, combine the receptivity to works of other searching spirits from other cultures, with recollections, musings, and images particular to their own individual existence, the fruits can by no means called provincial.

Talvet's eight collections of poetry include *Äratused* (*Awakening*, 1981), *Ambur ja karje* (*The Archer and the Cry*, 1986), *Hinge kulg ja kliima üllatused* (*The Soul's Progress and Surprises of Climate*, 1990), *Eesti elegia ja teisi luuletusi* (*Estonian Elegy and Other Poems*, 1997), *Kas sul viinamarju ka on?* (*Do You Have Also Grapes?*, 2001), *Unest, lumest* (*From Dreams, from Snow*, 2005), *Silmad peksavad une seinu* (*Eyes Beat the Walls of Sleep*, 2008) and *Isegi vihmäl on hing / Oo Hamlet, mu vend!* (*Even the Rain Has a Soul / O Hamlet, My Brother!*, 2010). In addition, there are two English collections: *Estonian Elegy*, 2008, and *Of Snow, of Soul*, 2010, and two Spanish ones: *Elegía estonia y otros poemas*, 2002, and *Del sueño, de la nieve*, 2010.

The poetry of Talvet's youth, in his first two collections, is shyishly passionate and Platonic in imagery. *Awakening* consists of three parts, the first of which, "Puudutused" ("Touches"), comprises nine poems written between 1972 and 1976, and the second, "Puhtused" ("Purities"), written in 1977, includes a single long poem, fully rhymed and in thirteen stanzas. The latter might be seen as the poet's early manifesto, expressing Platonic strivings for an ideal of love and enlightening named *luum*, uniting the meanings of the Latin *lumen*, light, and English *love*, pronounced in the Northern English accent. It is in the third and main part of the book, "Ainsal kevadel" ("An Only Spring"), written in 1978 and 1979, that the reader can extensively learn of the young poet's talents and peculiarities. By and large, the poems divide into two types: long poems with long lines, dense with associative nature imagery, and short poems with short lines, mostly about love and death, also rich in natural references, and employing two-syllable assonance rhymes. In the first type, somewhat irresolute endeavours to follow the bold

paces of Whitman may be detected; but closer to home, they may resemble the long periods in similar poems by the Estonian poet Jaan Kaplinski (born in 1941), in his collection *Tolmust and värvidest* (*From Dust and Colours*, 1967). The assonance rhymes in the second type, used with such scope and deliberation, are a phenomenon almost entirely new in the Estonian poetry of that time. That the writer has grown suspicious of the rhyming potentials of Estonian seems evident even in the first collection. His resorting to assonance rhymes instead certainly has to do with his academic schooling in the Spanish language and literature, whose classic verse methods he was intent on introducing into his native poetry. Even more so, on a more emotional level, the levity of assonance rhymes may have helped his inspiration soar into freer expanses, expressing his devotion to the spirit of the long and proud history of Latin American liberation movements, which was especially wanted in the early 1980s, a period of intellectual lethargy and depression, ethnic and cultural repression, and political stagnation in Estonia. Jaan Kaplinski in his review in the Tartu newspaper *Edasi* suggested that Talvet's spirituality in these poems may be closer even to the early Provençal troubadours, than to Iberian poets (1982: 5) (Kaplinski has translated classic verse from Spanish and French). Quite a few of those early poems leave a poignant impression with their laconicism and the balance of sound and silence in an imagined dialogue.

#### NO MORE WORDS

In my protective paper gown  
I am following you. Everything is still fine  
but there is a quiet voice behind the spell.

I have no more words.

The eyes turn away.  
A sigh breaks out of the two hearts.  
The eyes meet again.

I have no words any more!

The sheet is torn. Fragile lips.

A bare heart on the verge of breaking.  
The purity is in our eyes now.

No more words are needed.  
(*Awakening* 51, trans. L. Pilter)

The elaborate poetic Platonism, and search for fresh rhymes, continued in *The Archer and the Cry*. It is appropriate to call that collection Talvet's first maturity, as it already shows him the man of learning, exquisitely employing rare potentials of his native language, a master of expressing delicate perception. He already responds to voices from world literature (a motto from J. R. Jiménez, a poem called "Faust"), like García Lorca, he sings of the moon; he writes of the birth of his son and the innocent gaze of his little daughter. The four sonnets in the book, "Towering", "Union", "Departure", and "Sonnet", are Petrarchan in form (with the rhyme scheme *abba abba cdc dcd*) and feeling, and of notable density of palpable thought. The collection was gravely misread and misprized by its only reviewer, Ilse Lehiste in *World Literature Today*, who even doubted if there was enough internal support for the title of the collection (1988: 164). On careful reading one can find that while the Archer probably stands for the classic deity of love with arrows, or any symbolic figure aiming at high goals, the Cry quite evidently is of sexual liberation, understood in the pure sense of a mind and a body being united in the self-enforcement of their timely existence in the universe – a sense of the Latin American interpretation of *telurismo*, a concept also widely relied on in Talvet's theoretical writings.

#### UNREASONABLY AND WITH CERTAINTY

The part of body conquered by reason  
after cruel battles  
with life with a woman with love  
after centuries of asceticism  
and the steel clamps of hours pressed  
into the indivisibly pure flesh of nature  
is called civilisation



(there have been very pure longings  
 blood has been friends with reason  
 the soul with the body and the heaven with the earth  
 as in the first awakening  
 in new love  
 in fragile poetry)

But the blind half of the body is silent  
 from time to time breaking out in the nightly stream of semen  
 overwhelming like an ocean  
 the thought which has overreached its limits  
 the ideal which has pined into a formula or a command  
 a signed piece of paper  
 the whole human revolution  
 which has lost its heart  
 the succession of words and phrases clinking empty  
 waking up a new flesh  
 a dream of love

(self-confident self-deceivers  
 who betray love  
 clinging with their slippery fingers  
 to their soul turned into a dish of meat  
 let them know:  
 there have been very pure longings  
 and the human heart will go on beating  
 by the trees forever)

(*The Archer and the Cry* 36–37, trans. L. Pilter)

With the 1990s, political independence came to Estonia, but the country's literary culture remained almost as marginalised and unrecognised in the world context as earlier. Talvet has tried other solutions besides the viable Spanish-American connections in the spiritual emancipation of an Estonian poet from the invisible shackles that writing in a minor and nearly unaffiliated language imposes on its lyrical talents. Having introduced more consciousness of societal developments in the contemporary era into his *The Soul's Progress and Changes of Climate*, Talvet achieved his full maturity as a poet with the fourth collection, *Estonian Elegy and Other Poems*, in 1997. In it, the spectrum of intercultural allusions has

opened into a spacious spiritual domain. The Irish monks in the first millennium of our era, the first writers in the Latin-dominated Europe who began composing poems in their vernacular, would have been Barbarians for the Greek and the Roman authors. In the renewed voice which Talvet found in the *Estonian Elegy and Other Poems*, he has been writing with a full awareness of the *terra incognita* his native literature, because of the small spread and unfamiliar character of its language, still is for those major, but often blindfolded forces that fix the international public attitude to individual literary accomplishments. Aware that the ethnic and linguistic prejudices, the cultural partiality, the frequent disfavour and the disinterest in voices from minor cultures, may go on for centuries, he at times identifies with the early Celtic bards and scholars whose works, unknown outside narrow circles, persisted throughout the Dark Ages.

### OSSIAN'S SONGS

3

To the nicked handrails in the Amsterdam airport  
one wished to shout:

„Answer! Be alive!

The longing at the end of the 20th century to see  
beautiful people  
murderously burdens (as AIDS burdensomely  
murders).

What 500-year-old nodule on nosebridge, what  
furrow

between the brows in London's Queensway  
hides from the eyes of Iseult, Laura, Francesca?

A voice at any rate remains communication.

Everything is a sign, every branch.

Do not expect the crowd to wait for your words,  
when on the counters every crust of beauty,  
every smile, every frail ray of memory stands exposed.

What do you desire, soul, Ossian?

On a high rock, you are no higher than others.

Listen then to the inward forest you carry.

There from leaves is freed, from the day's fatigue,  
 at the moment of departure – *come then, stay,*  
*be always* – the voice of Iseult.

There from moss, from separation, flow into you,  
 faithful – *yes, everything*  
*is as you say* – Francesca's green eyes.

(*Estonian Elegy* 58 – 59, trans. H. L. Hix)

With the *Estonian Elegy and Other Poems* came a broadening of topics, horizons, and associations, all of which can hardly be included in this essay. The towering achievement of "Estonian Elegy", the longest of Talvet's poetic works, which introduces the collection, centers on the tragic wreck of the ferry *Estonia* in the Baltic Sea in 1994, that claimed the lives of 852 people aboard. However, alongside with commemorating the dead and the lost joy of Estonia's newly-won independence, the poem also, for the first time in Talvet's works and as a rare phenomenon in the literature of the time, suggests deep shadows of sorrow at the evaporating brevity of life's meaningfulness in general. The grief is both global and rooted in Estonia's particular realities. With motions of soul that may recall scenes from classic ancient epics, Talvet depicts scenes from the tragedy in the stormy sea:

All words bore the zero-sign when  
 an Estonian stretched his hand to a drowning Russian,  
 when a dry Swede from his scraggy breast  
 withdraw warmth to tender it to a freezing Estonian.

(*Estonian Elegy* 16, trans. H. L. Hix)

A distantly related motif, the dragging into seas of Laocoön in the *Aeneid* and in the ancient Greek group of marble statues, may resemble the pathetic and grotesquely distorted human figures from the scenes of Dante's *Inferno*. Talvet's visualisation of a tragedy is rather more placid. His picture of a Hell simply lies in the endeavour of a human contact in tragic circumstances. Even being rooted in Estonia may refer to tragic circumstances. As he writes in "Estonian Elegy", his native country is "where Europe shakes from herself / the omniscient sludge of evenings / and is a child again!" (19) However,

Of other poems in the first section of the book, the following one may serve as one of the most characteristic examples of what can be denoted as the poet's philosophy of senses:

Steps coming. Going. Every one leaving  
an echo in the evening – the usual way. Like the lonely trickle  
of a water fall – unrepeatable. The shades  
and the light altering. As soon as you felt at home,  
by turning away your eyes from the sun, your hair transformed:  
terribly grey!

By getting used we are gradually rotting.

Until suddenly you press  
your strong white teeth into my ear  
with such a ringing sound that I scream in my sleep!  
Why, in the early evening, the flock of male pigeons  
are all at once in such a hurry, thronging about?  
What refined sign of what pleasure  
is the fatherland storing for itself in the new century?  
The cane of the moon ray groping the simple guideposts  
of the graveyard of night:

The hedge – a greenery arranging the darkness.

noble grains of earth snuggling eagerly  
to one another,  
now that the blind God  
is opening his laughing eye of sunlight  
for children on another planet.

(*Estonian Elegy and Other Poems* 30, trans. L. Pilter)

Here, the beautifully suggestive image of death, or rather, life in death (“noble grains of earth snuggling eagerly”), emphasises the precious value of the endurance of sentient beings.



In the second part of the collection, Talvet included a selection of his earlier poetry, with a few poems that had already appeared in his first book. It is tender love poetry with a touch of impressionist airiness, expressing love to a woman, to his own daughter, and certain romantically significant places. Influences of schools of poetry from the Spanish speaking world are eminent. The free and bold associations may resemble García Lorca. But even in those pieces, echoes of ancient Irish verse may be heard, as it was interpreted and transmitted by W. B. Yeats in his youthful works, with imagery bound in poetic formulas both sincere and ingenious. The relation may seem surprising because Talvet has hinted at the need of detachment of Estonian poets from the tradition of late Symbolism (2010: 6). The explanation may lie in that the late Symbolist in early Yeats, as it often is with the most outstanding representatives of any school, at his best moments trespasses the defining features of his classification.

I'll give my hand to a cloud  
to feel a divine kiss.  
I'll give my feet to the sea  
to perceive the purity of traces.  
I'll give my lips to the sun  
to bear the courage of the lightning.  
I'll give my eyes to you  
when my heart goes mad with love.  
(*Estonian Elegy and Other Poems* 129, trans. L. Pilter)

The second lines of these samples employ assonance in end rhymes, which remain untranslated.

You've taken everything from me,  
I will leave in sadness.

The red dawn of your lips  
is a theft of my blood.

The golden throb of your feet  
is a light from my eyes,

the glowing love in your heart  
is the sign of my wounds!

You've taken everything from me,  
I will leave in sadness.

I will join the wounded soul  
in a pure everglade.

(*Estonian Elegy and Other Poems* 124, trans. L. Pilter)

With the first half of *Estonian Elegy and Other Poems*, and in the collections that have followed, free verse became prevalent in Talvet's lyric meditations. Those poems show him as an international courier between a vast variety of contexts, from dream images of family events and of memorable childhood localities through reflective and introspective travel notes from around the globe to major historical and intercultural discourses. His lines of expression have developed into an intertwining of sensually particularised imagery with ideas of aspirations that should guide humankind. Human failings may evoke satire, but the prevalent tone is of quiet musing. The verses, rich in echoes especially from Spanish, Portuguese, Italian, French, British, and German cultures, nearly always engage in a dialogue with either someone personally close or a distant soul-mate. About five of Talvet's poetic personae, often closely bound together in flowing forms, have evolved: 1) a poet of love, 2) a learned scholar, 3) a world traveller, 4) a satirist, 5) a wanderer in dreams.

Notwithstanding the special qualities of Estonian, Talvet's mature free verse poems include pieces that can be translated into English with a levity of form and gravity of content equal to the original, as the following poem for which he won the prestigious Juhan Liiv Poetry Prize of Estonia in 1997 and which has been translated into seventy languages:

## LOVE

is imperative, Kierkegaard

thought. Better,

I think, to love

without imperative.

Recognition

soul to soul,

correspondence

blood to blood,

flying

up or down,

without knowing

the destination.

(*Estonian Elegy* 66, trans. H. L. Hix)

By binding a keenness of mind with a misty softness of contemplation, Talvet has achieved a scrupulous level of what might be called a dramatic possibility of his philosophy of senses. Any philosophy of senses entails a metaphysics, and metaphysics is about what one cannot *know* – what either delineates a self-containing reason or what leads to mysticism. There can also be, however, a reconciliation of the two, a world-view relying on rational knowledge and trust in the explicability of causes, which is only the stronger by admitting its limits, beyond which a mystic void lies. The latter it tries to grasp by intuition, the medium of esthetic choices. Such a world-view may be called an enlightened mysticism. In his latest book, the double collection, *Even the Rain Has a Soul / O Hamlet, My Brother!*, which appeared in Tartu in December 2010, Jüri Talvet has presented a duality of enlightened mysticism which gains force by the intense dynamics of an epistemological drama. The lyrical self of the first half of the dual collection is rather like one knows Talvet the author from his previous collections, even more suave, calmer, engaging mostly in dream conversations with his dead and living friends and family members:

IS IT LAURA'S NIGHTSHIRT, YOU ASKED,  
 Johanna, my old and gentle housemistress,  
 although you had wandered to the land of the dead  
 long before Laura was born.

Somewhere out there, all our deeds  
 are known. Even your worrying  
 about somebody who is coming afterwards –  
 if she has got a nightshirt – kindness –

to pull on to keep warm at night.

*(Even the Rain Has a Soul 31, trans. L. Pilter)*

In poems like these, the author is recalling times past in a dream world, which is truer than the factual present life, a “double-world” in which only, “voices become / eternal and mild” (Rilke 1977: 101).

I'LL MEET YOU AGAIN, JOHANNA,  
 old housemistress, kindly  
 you feed Laura  
 and Marta-Liisa and even me –

with semolina mousse and milk. Then  
 we are joined by a dog, cannot recall  
 its name, but I was there when it died  
 (how it flinched

and I couldn't help crying!).  
 Let it be the same Bobi, who  
 helped grandpa and me find  
 the way out of the woods

when we had lost our cow at Mõisaküla  
 and had got lost ourselves as well.  
*Whether what is is what it is  
 or is not, who cares?*

Under the approving glance  
 of the old lady



I place a plate with semolina mousse  
for Bobi on the floor, my heart

rejoicing because of Bobi's  
and Johanna's glee and for  
us being just what we are  
in the lifedream at that moment.

(*Even the Rain Has a Soul* 32, trans. L. Pilter)

The author's lyrical double in the second constituent of that book, Jüri Perler, on the other hand, is rather a step backward from the calmness of a poet's late maturity. It is indeed as if Shakespeare, after creating Prospero, whose forgiving cleverness Talvet's own voice resembles, had returned to the ethical restlessness of his youth and given a new life to Hamlet in the rash, trenchant, indignant – but also irresistibly funny – outpourings of cynical scepticism in a lot of of the poems attributed to Perler. Talvet's double, like Hamlet, is a man of Renaissance enlightenment outraged and out-sensed by what is unacceptable, because it is incomprehensible, in his ethical universe. His bursting anger has a ring of Rabelaisian laughter to it. He is provocative, and has entered the realm of pure esthetic legitimacy, disregarding the ethical considerations which he thinks he had been faithfully following but had been deprived of, in the confrontation with evil, and a mystical injustice. Since the duality enfolding that new, rather Pessoaan, lyrical character, is dramatically so vigorous and effective, the rest of this essay will be devoted to insights into the recent double collection, with hindsight into the preceding collections of the previous decade, that possess related characteristics.

Perler's diction doubtless resembles *Hamlet*, and also to some extent, certain of Shakespeare's comedies, with its self-conscious witticisms and puns, and leaps from sour, muted mumblings into bright, sensual, often rather frivolous turns of imagery:

Eventually Logos married  
a spinster called  
Scientia.

(Oh the sweet embrace of the thought,

light skipping of legs!)

(Posthumous dedication to Juan José Arreola)

(*O Hamlet, My Brother!* 8, trans. L. Pilter)

Hamlet was a murderer (the killing of Polonius). Perler's words can nearly kill as well. Under his own name, Talvet, like the Prospero of *The Tempest*, is enacting dreams. Dreams do not kill. Prospero has said: "We are such stuff / As dreams are made of, and our little life / Is rounded with a sleep!" (Act 4, Scene 2; Shakespeare 1975: 17). This is how Talvet's collection ends:

Do what only you can do. Do not waste the time  
which is only yours. Gather the beauty  
generously sprinkled over you by many a day.

Only you  
know the answer.

(*Even the Rain Has a Soul* 68, trans. L. Pilter)

A self-containment like this seems to re-echo the oft-quoted passage of Ezra Pound's famous Canto LXXXI:

What thou lovest well remains,  
the rest is dross

What thou lov'st well shall not be reft from thee

What thou lov'st well is thy true heritage

(Pound 1975: 179)

However, through the harsh message of the preceding lines, "Some eyes casting at you / bowie knives other tongues spitting lightning-bolts", Talvet's conclusion forms a link with Perler's collection. At times, beauty can be indeed, like Rainer Maria Rilke wrote, "nothing / but the start of terror we can hardly bear" (Rilke 1977: 5). Beauty can be cruel. The initial impulse of Perler's poems frequently appears to come from a raw beauty, a foulness in a fair appearance. From the terror of beauty, Talvet hides into the lap of the night, into the breath of rain, his dreaming lives being a past turned more real

than the everyday present. "The world is a prison without love," he quotes Calderón ("*Belief in markets vanished!* In November 2008"). "99.99 percent of population are content with their prison lives," Perler replies in the poem "Hoooooome!" Perler can write mocking satires even at what the common sense hardly finds ridiculous – like the fact that after a highly scientific conference, the participants hunger for a roast meal: "Water / dribbling into the mouth, filling it. / One thought of beef and rabbit then. / One thought of other things no more." ("*Interfacing sciences with humanities*"). The parodied moralisations in poems like "*Zebra-Crossing*", "*A Germanic Poet*", "*Zeus*", also resemble *Hamlet*. "*Supermarket at Spring*" binds a contemporary satire and a serene tradition of the ancient pastoral:

The lass in the supermarket checkout counter,  
 she isn't Jill, they call her Amaryllis.  
 She's looking after it that every head of cattle  
 might get to the shed at night with a full paunch.  
 But herself, freed from the cashier chain,  
 an alert gaselle in the green meadows of Arcadia,  
 is well aware that her entire body  
 becomes the plunder for cruel arrows of love  
 upon every new return of spring.

(*O Hamlet, My Brother!* 36, trans. L. Pilter)

One of the notable peculiarities of Perler's satire is the startling sincerity it expresses alongside with the coarse jests and apparent pretension, which is often also the case with *Hamlet*'s utterances. "*Supermarket at Spring*" is both a parody and a reanimation of the classical pastoral. It requires a person of Talvet's knowledge and appreciation of classical literature to write like that – in Estonia, the poet and scholar Ülar Ploom (born in 1955) stands the closest to him in this respect. While the initial lines really may have a mocking flavour, the conclusion reaches the pure transparency of the pastoral, reminding the readers that even in the age of global urbanisation and supermarkets, the poetry of the human body has essentially remained unchanged.

Direct political satire (even more precisely associated with the context of *Hamlet*) is involved in the poems "*Britain Is Attacked*",

“The Prime Minister’s Concern“, “Old Story“, “Troubled Times“, “Kim“, and “A Deporter“. The times really seem out of joint, though the author knows there is nothing new in the sensation. Like Hamlet over Yorick’s skull, Perler ironically ponders at people’s skeletons (“*Comme il faut*“, “Whose Bone-Traces He Does Not Ask for“). The five stanzas of the short ballad “Victory Cross“, on the odyssey of factual mishaps of a controversial patriotic monument made of glass and of an imposing size, erected by the right-wing state government in Tallinn in 2008, possess a quality of repressed comic. The unlucky story is narrated by the Victory Cross itself. The words, the structure of phrases are strongly similar to the 19th century Estonian school of mostly patriotic, and rather naïve, verse, technically inspired by the poetry of Heinrich Heine and full of archaic associations for the modern reader:

Hardly a week has passed  
when spots are again on my skin.  
Even the pastor does not know  
if that is a disease or a sin.

(*O Hamlet, My Brother!* 54, trans. L. Pilter)

The original of the poem employs regular assonance rhymes, doing it with natural smoothness. Jaan Kaplinski in the newspaper *Edasi* in 1982 had expressed scepticism as to whether the Hispanic assonance rhymes really could be adopted in Estonian verse and accepted as actual rhymes by the Estonian readers (1982: 5). Against his doubts, the fluency of the device in this mature poem of Talvet testifies to its successful domestication, showing it already an integral part of Estonian poetic culture, and remarkably expanding the rhyming possibilities. There are inklings of Heine in the satire elsewhere (“A Sestina: an Afterlife Confession of a Canonical Poet“). Arrows of satire fly both at Russia and the US (“Kalashnikov“). Poems like “Look What Happened“, with the scathing joke about the Swedish banker Pengar (the name means Money in Swedish), are rather similar to the socially critical poems of Hando Runnel (born in 1938), like “*Propusk and bumaga*” (Russian for “Permission and



Paper"), published in 1982, which ridiculed the Soviet bureaucracy and earned the author the reputation of an anti-Soviet dissident (Talvet 1999: 211–212). The one but last poem in Perler's collection, "Evolution", with its bitter humour at the limits of the human spirit, seems related to the witty paradoxes in the Neo-Darwinist vein of the verse of the Welsh poet John Barnie.

The latest, second collection of Talvet's poetry that has been translated into English, *Of Snow, of Soul*, by Harvey Lee Hix in cooperation with the author, includes selections from the Estonian collections *Do You Have Also Grapes?*, *From Dreams, from Snow*, and *Eyes Beat the Walls of Sleep*. All those three books are unified poetic wholes, which means that the reader of the English selection may not get a full impression of the originals. The following brief characterisation is written with both the selection and the original collections in mind. In *Do You Have Also Grapes?*, tonalities of Talvet's early satire prevail, mostly aimed at cultural misperfections. It is, however, also a diary of travels in the European cultural space. *From Dreams, from Snow* brings along an equality in the travel observances in the outer and inner landscapes. Through near oxymorons, the plastic imagery at times reaches highly suggestive points of sensuality, as in the poem "Still I Cannot Get Accustomed": "Under Mozart's glance / children skate / through the sun," or in "Red Wine. 2.": "The rose is dropping / petals in which the blood / rests absorbed in thoughts / down on the desk". *Eyes Beat the Walls of Sleep* is the most introspective of the three. With a division into three sections, "A Poet in New York", "Write a Trace on the Wind", and "Come to My Memory's Snow", the direction is from globality towards domesticity, from expanses into depths. One of the most moving works in this collection is the poem 52, "The wind tugs my sleeve". A personified breeze, like a compassionate acquaintance, meets the speaker who is in a sulky mood, and breaks him joyous news of childlike serenity with the excited youthful mouth of his own daughter. The terseness and laconicism of that poem, similar to the levity of classic East Asian tradition, also resemble the best achievements of the Estonian Juhan Liiv (1864 – 1913). Almost as suggestive, but much less personal, is the poem 49, "Like a big german wolfhound". The secret uncertainties about one's

identity in the Estonian soul are profoundly handled in the poem 54, "Rain sticking to my face". Its final images point at the dangers of possible disintegration of the spiritual tissues of an Estonian upon meeting the Other, a threat of falling off mentally that already even bruised and shaped the diction of Juhan Liiv:

Rain sticking to my face,  
I am looking for a street,  
a direction, once again  
on a foreign soil.  
Evil worms ringing  
in the brain – a Christmas gift from homeland.

In a big lightened hall  
Germans are playing bridge,  
peace in their hearts: all  
the stones in the pavement  
really in their right places.

Under my feet only,  
they crumble apart,  
scatter up quite asunder!

(*Eyes Beat the Walls of Sleep* 68, trans. L. Pilter)

In the whole third cycle of the collection, the poems 39 – 63, one can notice a closer dialogue with nothingness, with the twilight and darkness of the void, than anywhere else in Talvet's poetry. As in "Estonian Elegy", the shadows of a deep sorrow dominate. The passing away of the poet's mother is central to that. The cycle is like a descent into an underworld, which is not Hell but the beginning and end of everything, a principle *ex nihilo*, a life-giving Nothing. Like beneath the vaults of a cellar, the lyrical voice reaches a deeper timbre and resonance here.

Christopher Marlowe's Doctor Faustus, by selling his soul to diabolical powers, even if he had high spiritual and intellectual interests in mind, still approached the goals as if with earthly lust, thus closing the (vicious) circle in which an intellect sacrifices its

abilities to the moment's pleasure of "licking the dust" (Santayana 1910: 160). Goethe's *Faust* is driven by striving and aspirations for essentially Platonic pure ideals, which warrants his salvation.

Even in Marlowe, but definitely ever since Goethe, the Faustian character has inspired poets and writers more as denoting an incessant thirst for knowledge and pithy experience, rather than a dubious pact with the negative element of life; for an ever aspiring individual, life itself performs its negations (Santayana 1910: 147 – 149).

Shakespeare was a poetic dramatist with a multitude of characters and stories, a rainbow of sensations. Goethe, who at the beginning of the second part of *Faust*, compared the true image of life to a rainbow, "am farbigen Abglanz", or "light in many-hued reflection" (Goethe 2001: 6), in his great drama created a massive grand narrative of the dynamic potentials and outer limits of the human intellect. The Portuguese author Fernando Pessoa was a lyrical poet who in a non-theatrical counterpart of Shakespeare's work created a drama of lyrical poetry, with its various personifications and a "splintered" *Faust* (his works do include a long piece of verse writing by that title), a (re)spectralised *Faust* that can be seen as a middle solution between Shakespeare's multiplicity and Goethe's centralisation of focus. If one were to reconstruct a Goethean drama out of Shakespeare's works, his character of Faust would probably be Hamlet, and the width and range of colours of Goethe's single great stream of vision would be seen represented by the variety of spirits, led by Ariel, who serve Prospero in his forced island exile. To further aspirations inspired by such spirits, mostly the souls of his beloved poets, or the living or the dead loved ones in his family, Talvet is also rising in his recent poems.

TO THE HEIGHTS AND DEPTHS  
 of your multiple voices,  
 Fernando Pessoa,  
 I am flying at a wind speed.  
 Towards the fifth empire.

You have to practise  
 the opening accord of the piano concert  
 of the era of world peace,  
 little Marta-Liisa.  
 No time left  
 just for growing up!

(*Even the Rain Has a Soul* 18, trans. L. Pilter)

Among the otherwise heavy satires of Perler's collection, there is a gentle rhymed poem in the sonnet form dedicated to "the Book", whose death the present harsh rule of "hypervirility" (2010: 56) would seem to entail. Perler, however, predicts a revival for the book by the replacement of the Trinity of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost with a livelier trinity of the Mother, the Child, and Love, "truer than the stern science, truer than business vigour", "more persistent than truth" (56). This divination may be about the fulfilment of the Faustian "ever-feminine" that the wide spectrum of voices, modulated to various personal aspects in Talvet's poetry, and the Faustian Hamlet in the persona of Jüri Perler are striving for.

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*“Estonian Elegy” by Jüri Talvet:*

*A Vision of an Ethnical Perspective via  
Forgiveness and Love*

“Estonian Elegy”<sup>1</sup> is a desperate painful cry of the denied right to happiness. This poem, a sensuous elegy for the loss of nine hundred human lives in a passenger ferry, turns into a lament for the past and the present of a nation. Estonia, an ancient country, with an extraordinary history (dating back to 10,000 B.C. to the end of the Late Pleistocene, by found artefacts of the Kunda Culture) (Kevin O’Connor 2006: 39), has had a long and difficult road toward resurrection, after a lot of suffering and humiliation during the past centuries.

Starting with an evocation of a real life event, the poem introduces “an archetypal event” (Stevens 2006: 103), referring to the difficult survival of the nation. There is an image serving as a smooth transition from real life to the archetypal event; the drowning of a passenger ferry, ironically named ‘Estonia’. This ferry is a symbol of the never ending voyage of Estonia through the rough seas of history, its endeavour to defy the ravenous tides which tried to wreck it and the wild stormy winds which destroyed its mast.

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<sup>1</sup> In the original Estonian, the two-hundred-line long poem “Eesti eleegia” was first published in Talvet’s forth collection of poetry, *Eesti eleegia ja teisi luuletusi* (Tallinn: Kupar, 1997). It was reprinted in the bilingual Estonian-Spanish book *Elegía Estonia y otros poemas* (translated by the author and Albert Lázaro Tinaut, Valencia: Palmart Capitelum, 2002), in which the author had decided to introduce a slight change (as compared with the initial publication), suppressing the final refrain line of the poem. In the present essay the poem is discussed as departing from its translation into English by H. L. Hix, first published in the journal *Rampike* (Toronto, Vol. 14, No. 2, 2006) and then in the book *Estonian Elegy. Selected Poems* (Toronto: Guernica, 2008). From the latter, the following quotations of the poem in the present essay proceed.

The sea – death relation does not occur spontaneously, being not related only to the tragic event of 1994. The mutual relation of sea and death is present in the *collective memory* (sometimes consciously and sometimes not), enough to remind us that death often came from the sea along with the invaders. Beside this, there is also a thread of ancient history as a proof of such a relation. According to archaeological data, in the Bronze Age, “stone cist graves and cremation burials became increasingly common beside a small number of boat-shaped stone graves”. (*Estonia: Identity and Independence* 2004: 26)

A close connection between the boat and death evokes the concept of death as a trip to the next world. This is not unfamiliar in the history of mankind. We can recall the Greek myth of Charon, helping the mortals with his boat across the river Lethe to Hades, situated beneath the earth’s surface, or as Talvet puts it: “toward the Earth’s roots”. The ferry turns into “archetype-as-such”, which according to Anthony Stevens “is at once an innate predisposition to form such an image and a preparation to encounter and respond appropriately to the object per se”.<sup>4</sup> (Stevens 2006: 105)

The transition between two images, a) the passenger ferry called Estonia, which unfortunately “sailed” toward the bottom of the sea (death) and, b) Estonia, the country, which has been threatened with extinction throughout its history, carries a powerful symbolic load.

“Estonian Elegy” opens with the verse, “No, it cannot be true”, later to turn into a tragic refrain. The use of negative “No” at the very start of the poem conveys a categorical refusal to something which can never be accepted. It stands for an immediate reaction against something alien, evil.

The delineation of this feeling since the very start of the poem is completed by the use of the modal “cannot”, emphasizing the negativity. “Cannot”, differing from “can not” in connotation, carries more weight being a two syllable word. (The negative meaning in “can not” falls only on “not”, whereas in “cannot” it gets heavier by the use of a two syllable word). The overall feeling that you get is the perpetual effort to come out of a long nightmare where you refuse to believe that the fear you just feel is real.

Cramps of disbelief constricted throats that morning.  
 ("The Estonian Elegy", 12)

The above metaphor can be interpreted in several ways: first is the fact that we have to deal with a suffocating tragic truth which is well-known in literature. Evidence of it is the myth of Laocoon and his sons, "murdered" because of the truth they knew.

The second explanation of "cramps of disbelief constricted throats" can be directly related to the unwillingness to pronounce it, to not give a language form to the truth that really hurts.

There is an evident distance between real time and the evocation period which is clearly expressed by the use of the pronoun "that" in the word cluster "that morning". This distance does not serve as an evidence of the passing pain. No, the pain remains the same. It stays there as a disease to every living cell.

Now, what has just happened? What is the experienced trauma? Talvet reveals the answers in the opening verses, using tragic images to describe an apocalyptic episode.

Legs turned to lead, as if earth were dragging us to its  
 roots,  
 the way water tore them, naked children,  
 suddenly from their dreams to her iron-cold breasts.  
 (Ib.)

"Legs turned to lead" is the first image through which death is related to the tragic event. This is not a natural death which is considered (painfully though) as an end of life's full circle. The proper choosing of the verb "lead" and the internal rhyme connecting it with "legs", creates an association of the subverted image of "head" (noun) and "heads" (verb).

What has just happened is far from being perceived by normal logic, thus unaccepted. Death has embraced kids and innocent angels inflicting so an unworldly pain to the speaker. Through the experienced trauma of the just happened tragic event, the speaking



persona experiences “dissociation, a complete separation from reality” (Pango 2005: 95).

The drowning in itself is the last cup of pain of the overflowing spirit throughout the years.

The speaker evokes via flashback the harsh sailing in the swelling seas of the history of this specific ferry, author’s beloved country, Estonia. He experiences through brief moments tragic images that are retained unaltered in the *collective memory* of his people. These images are proof of the effort to preserve the nation, the ancient existence of which goes hand in hand with the peril of extinction.

Had there not been enough bowing already  
to German Lords, scions of Vikings, Russian wags?  
Enough hauling of stumps and stones at the marsh’s edge?  
(Ib. 13)

Invasion and invaders posed a long remaining threat Estonians had to live with. Sometimes they came one after another, sometimes they shared their trophies. But they all had the same features, irrespective of their names or their fighting ideals. Seizing territories, invading new land, cultural expansion – this is just a matter of naming. What always remained the same was violence, fierceness, brutal means to achieve one’s goals. Unfortunately though, even when their purpose was not strictly material but related to something higher and sublime like the saving of the soul, the means used to draw “the non-believers to the right path of God” remained cruelly identical.

What stupid sophistry about God, sin, the duty of  
fasting!  
Where was Christ when the Knights of the Cross  
killed  
the children of Mary’s Land and raped women and  
girls,  
when barely having roofed the first rooms of our  
own

we found ourselves back on the snow Siberian plains  
gnawing on permafrost  
 (Ib. 13)<sup>2</sup>

The speaking persona can do nothing but recall the injustice and misery his beloved country had to endure throughout centuries. Most lines are not marked with a period, comma or semicolon, but through *enjambment*. (DiYanni 2000: 194). The verse breaks exactly on the words which hold the most significant meaning: *fasting, killed, girls, own, and gnawing on permafrost*. Therefore images provided are more than enough to create a tragic view of Estonia's history.

These images contrasted each other, at other times they are very exclusive.

The commitment to fasting, an effort to cleanse the internal self, an attempt to detach from the material needs and deliver the soul openly to the Creator is strongly contrasted to the verb *killed*. The confrontation between the cleansing ritual and the greatest sin of all, brings forth a tragic contrast.

And the confrontation goes deeper when a third image emerges, *girls*. Life is marked by the feminine figure because it is the female herself that gives birth to life. The verb *killed* stands in a *sandwich position* between two notions, both related to life; *fasting* evokes eternal life and salvation in Heaven whereas *girls* (as in females) give continuity to life as we know it, bearing descendants of the generations to come. The verb *killed* is linked in parallel to those two notions so as to prove that the duel between life and death sees the latter being victorious more often.

The image *gnawing on permafrost* is related to the difficulties the nation had in order to survive. The verb *gnaw* shows pain and sacrifice. The hardship of the job (which must be done in whatever circumstances) is described not only semantically but formally also through the use of the sonorous structure of the word itself (which perfectly refers to the image of suffering, thanks to a wonderful find of the translator, H. L. Hix.)

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<sup>2</sup> Underlining here and in the following quotations is mine. M. K.

The word starts with the consonant *g* (silent when pronounced), followed by a nasal consonant, *n*. Then follows vowel *a*, (combined with *w*), is pronounced *o*: (a long *o*). *A* and *O* are similar to each other in the way that they affect the psychic of the receiver. According to Xh. Lloshi, there are associations between "back vowels (*a*, *o*, *u*) and heavy, gloomy and dark thoughts". (Lloshi 1999: 87)

The adjacent positions of the verb *gnaw* and the name *permafrost* shows that there is no balance between the job done and its provisions. No matter what the amount of energy, sweat and blood are given to permafrost, there is little to expect. If this image represents the difficult history of a nation, then it can easily be deduced that the survival "in the freezing days of the past" is the result of titanic efforts and will. The word *own* connects the above images with the belonging of the speaker. An event related to the history of a nation is told by one of its members.

The above analysis provides results that are not related to a specific period of history, (notorious crusades) but in an interesting way it becomes an evocation of all the tragic past of a nation which is filled with pain, death and the struggle to survive.

Countries like Estonia (or Albania) have fought for their existence through centuries. The war to protect the ethnicity and national values has begun *ab origine*. And the ashes of this war still glow. But there flies the phoenix again, proving that the values of a nation, fighting uncompromisingly against annihilation, extinction, oblivion, can never be wasted away. The images of a continuous struggle against disappearance are prominent in the Narrator's mind and they come alive through memories of the past.

For thousands of years already we have been

Europeans:

early tillers, at a time when others, the stronger,

consumed their neighbors, like an insatiable swarm of  
grasshoppers

(Ib.14)

The use of the numeral *thousands* evokes an indefinite period of time which looks like going back to the very beginning of ancient times.

This very long period serves to establish the European identity of Estonia; they have been Europeans since Europe was called Europe and Estonia was named Estonia.

The adverb *already* indicates a certain insistence to expose the above opinion as strongly as possible, concealing another view of history. Voices arise when what we care most is endangered, when the ground upon which we tread feels like quicksand. It is this adverb, *already*, that serves as a key to understanding what we cannot comprehend directly.

The emphasis put upon the fact that Estonians are part of Europe, witnesses their denied truth about the matter. Belonging to the infamous Soviet Union, unjustly extended to more than one continent, Estonia was neither Europe nor Asia.

The antiquity of the country compliments certain noble features of natives. The predecessors of Estonians were working people (tillers) supplying their decent lives, acknowledging survival as a reward for the job well done. We call all this, civilization.

This feature turns out to be very commendable when opposed to savage barbarian tribes, hungry-ready to ravage new territories not belonging to them.

The most prominent feature ascribed to strangers is usually power. It characterizes the animal world as well, where the big eat the small, just like in Darwin's theories. This trait stands out particularly well when compared to uncontrolled crowds intent on devastation and the swarm of the grasshoppers, an evil which is impossible to fight.

The history of small countries reminds us of a dramatic literary composition, the most acts of which are written by strangers. *Primordial images*, dating back to history and the past, quite surprisingly coincide with Albania. It does not matter how many miles of border Albania shares with its neighbours. All of them, more than once, have owned pieces of its territories. Apart of them, evil winds many times blew from the East; at one time being called Ottomans with their hegemony lasting five centuries and another labelled Communism which completely isolated the country for forty five years (the subjective time lasting longer because of the violence, terror and fear imposed).



The occupation of small countries does not comprise only their physical territories. The cultural invasion is even worse because the war against it becomes more difficult. This is the case where the enemy is "invisible" so the challenge sometimes looks impossible. Fighting against something you do not see, you do not touch, but you feel it as strange, is not that easy. What are the odds of an efficient defence against it? Close to none. The strange matter sometimes takes shape after the "prophets" of thought, the influence of whom is inevitable, and some other times this impact is imposed on you as a way of thinking and living. Though you do not embrace it, you have to accept the laws and rules of an authoritative country imposing it on you.

In this land the breath of prophets put pressure  
on both ears, Hegel, Marx, Lenin, Bakhtin...  
Who from the left hand, who from the right, depends  
on which side of the map you adopt...  
(Ib. 13)

The binomial East-West has always been a companion to Estonia's history and life.

Hegel or Marx, Lenin or Bakhtin, the difference is a matter of names. Each and every one of them consists of an "invader". Their theories give shape to viewpoints, thoughts and sometimes to life itself. The two principal classics of Communism (whose thoughts became the philosophy and the motivation of life for many eastern block countries) stand not so randomly between the brilliant "prophets" of thought like Hegel and Bakhtin. Whatever was the influence of communist theories in Estonia, it was destined to perish due to the fact that such an influence was not coming from within as a free choice, but as an imposition from a foreign government.

Nevertheless, the structure *put pressure* (applicable for every name above) indicates that this imposing was not consumed naturally (you choose it because you like it).

To be an intruder in small countries, to culturally master them, or even worse, total assimilation is a process often used by more powerful countries (sometimes unconsciously, other times politically like in the case of Russians in Estonia, Serbs in Kosovo, etc). This

idea is enforced by the connotation of *breath/on both ears*, which give the impression of an obligation to accept the stranger. The real discontent of this "invasion" is not expressed only semantically. Cacophony, made up from the alliteration of the discordant sounds *th, p, f* in the jarring juxtaposition, is purposely used in the poem to emphasize the effect.

This flux of incoming theories, ideas and respectful names surely overshadows the native cultural values. The gifted, originating from small countries, have "to burn the sky" with their talent in order to break through in the eyes and ears of a strict jury, which takes under serious consideration the nationality concept.

Who would notice Schmidt's sweat and soul  
in the lens, piercing into space, that illuminates  
regardless  
or Martens, among the faithful Russian civil servants,  
in the rear of the regiment, without a necktie?(...)  
Then, Peterson, the Estonian Keats taken too young to  
the grave,  
and the father of our song, Kreutzwald, who  
conducted the hero  
of Mary's land to Tartarus, as Vergil did Dante, to  
find love there (...)  
Or the singer of sunrise, Koidula (...)

The giants of thought and art are purposely put close to each other so as to affirm that in every field of life (science, military strategy, literature, music) the Estonians never fell behind.

The challenge to fight the prejudice of belonging to a small country is exceptionally difficult. First of all you have to overcome the communication difficulties (distance and language) and then come the conventions of what the international public expects.

Nationality is like a brand you carry with you with every step, your whole life.

Labels like *Made in Germany, (Britain, France, Spain, Russia etc)* stand behind successful products through the centuries (it even happens that fake products reach the market using such labels).

This is the circumstance when the "end-user" hangs back surprised while reading the label *Made in Estonia* (or even worse, *Made in Albania*) instead of what he expected to get. In most cases refusal comes up due to the stereotype working in his mind, *well-known means good quality whereas unknown means fake*. There are a few of open-minded people who judge the quality without checking the label first, allowing geniuses hidden under "strange names" to unfold their talent.

Who would learn to pronounce their names, or the  
even less

sonorous, clumsily compound Tammsaare?

Who would care about his earth-colored proofs  
in a language the same as the tongue of Basques,  
the nahuatl of Indians, the nonsense of Celts.

(Ib. 15)

Sometimes, having a "small" language in the long list of top spoken languages of the world does not always have a negative connotation. Very ironically, the language and culture of small countries many times hold a rich ancient history compared to those who play an important role in the international arena.

The defined characteristics of the Estonian language are spectacular: 1) it is ancient, 2) it stood up to every invasion for a thousand of years (quite contrary to some other languages that were lost along the way), 3) it is a special branch of the Finno-Ugric family of languages (the first two characteristics coincide with Albanian language too, while it stands quite alone among the Indo-European family of languages).

The "small" Estonian language matches the tongue of the Basques, the nahuatl of Indians, the nonsense of Celts. *Verbal irony* is used because languages considered inferiorly "small" have a precious cultural value. These ancient languages have retained their linguistic identity unchanged in every circumstance. (Although in some case the speakers are just a few)

Even though a great part of the poem evokes the sour past of ancient Estonia, the voice of the poet does not blow wind to the sails

of hatred; he seeks to declare the injustice induced, the long Calvary that has just ended.

No revenge is sought as in *lex talionis*, (an eye for an eye) because the Estonian soul knows how to forgive. Instead, he rather tries to recover the lost time and reclaim those *dark* long centuries of history (the suffering past of Estonia and the infamous saga of European countries' invasions) in order to gain a new era where humanity is the main feature of mankind.

All words bore the zero-sign when  
an Estonian stretched his hand to a drowning Russian,  
when a dry Swede from his scraggy breast  
withdrew warmth to tender it to a freezing Estonian.

(Ib. 16)

Elimination of differences between human beings (*the passport lost - long live liberty*<sup>3</sup>), defining them by only one characteristic, that of being human, is the perspective Jüri Talvet has for the world. Love, this divine feeling should wrap with her cloak every living organism, because each one of us comes into this world as an offspring of a great love (a divine one).

The poet's position would perfectly find shelter in Ungaretti's periphrasis *M'illumino d'imenso* ("Matina"), a position where negative conventions cease to exist (*enemy, invader, stranger*) and the soul freely roams the unlimited space, where a man is just a man, no other definition needed.

(...) Just so we ask  
of ourselves, we who receive ourselves,  
tenderness (more than a name), love (more  
than blood), light (more than bones)  
(Ib. 20)

The antagonism between tenderness  $\neq$  name, love  $\neq$  blood, light  $\neq$  bones stands as a proof of the difference between two worlds; the

<sup>3</sup> It is a line in Talvet's poem "On Losing a Passport", in *Estonian Elegy. Selected Poems*.



poetic world of dreaming, (where each of us would like to live) and the real world, the painful one, where we wake up in the morning and we lay down to sleep every night. Words, used to create the image of the real world are lined in a descending order: name, blood, bones (from life to death). On the contrary the poetic world of dreaming reaches a climax; words tenderness, love and light are arranged in a continuously ascending order of intensity.

The two final verses of the poem, which may be considered as an advice from the poet to all humanity, are distinctive by the frequent use of the letter *E*, whose linguistic connotation is mostly positive. According to Xh. Lloshi, "acoustic experiments remark the existence of solid associations among front vowels (*e, i*) which give the impression of harmony, clarity and lyrism".<sup>9</sup> (Lloshi 1999: 100)

None of the mentioned past events can ever influence him, because the poet lives above time, relieved from its weight. He is the owner of "hieratic space", which according to Bachelard has some certain symbols; *wings, ascending, flight, purity and the special glow*.<sup>10</sup> (Bachelard 1942: 83f) The frontal arrangement of nouns; tenderness, love, light which stand for the beloved image of the poet (alongside the antitheses name, blood, bones), is a clear expression of the poet's decision to live forever. He has chosen his *Locus Amoenus*, the kingdom of love, relieved and fluid as the light itself.

## Summary

"Estonian Elegy" is a fascinating poem where the boundaries between epic and lyric merge so naturally that it is hard to identify whether the persona speaking is the poet himself, whose mission is to unfold to the reader (of all times and civilizations) the history and the past of his country, or the sensitive spirit of the poet sublimating his pain through the words of his verse. Such integrating relation between them makes the poem sound subtle and deeply felt. There is no more noble pain than that of the country one belongs to. And it is this feeling (though it may sound old fashioned in the view of our global era of today) that serves as a link among the members of small nations, whose pride builds up their national identity when they sense a lurking menace to their nation.

There are several distinctive stages of the poem:

- 1) It starts as an interior monologue, a struggle to sublimate the utmost feeling of despair.
- 2) The silence (that death left behind) was filled with names and events of the recent or long forgotten past of Estonia. The monologue shifts into an inclusive dialog; the poet strives to communicate with the outer world, in order to denounce the centuries of injustice inflicted upon his beloved mother, Estonia. He emphasizes it by the use of who would notice, or who would care, like he is standing face to face with the reader to whom he speaks.
- 3) In the final stage the epic slowly turns into the lyric again, but the derived feeling confronts the pain in the introductory stage of the poem. Verses stem from love for all mankind, trying to leave behind the hatred and the pain. "Presence of the absence" (death) dating back to the beginning of times through to the 20th century drives the poet to love life fully. Like Coelho's Ulysses in his *The Zahir*, the poet needs to forget the past in order to reach to the island of love, where the sky is always blue. *Carpe Diem* is his driving force, because life is short and time is flying.

"Estonian Elegy" is an outstanding poem which sheds light on the past history of Estonia and carries messages of love for the future. It was predestined to be written by a Poet Laureate such as Professor Talvet. In his consciousness (probably in his subconsciousness too) he is an appropriate guide because, due to an old toponym of Tartu (*Yuryev*, *Jurjev* → *Yuri*, *Jüri*), his name strongly holds a bond to the city representing Estonia, his cultural capital city.

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*The Limits of Dreams' Kingdom:  
Contemporary Lithuanian Literature*

I. The identity of a *kingdom* and a *dream*  
in Lithuanian literature

In this article the concept of a *kingdom* is not a metaphor, not a joke nor a paradox, but it is rather an idea, on which the mentality of contemporary Lithuanian literature is based. Maybe I could put it more boldly and talk about culture, art, the nation's mystery, and so on. They would only support the idea. Yet I cannot cover it all. Being rather under the influence of contemporary Lithuanian poetry, I am contented with an abstract picture. The best prose works (written by Valdas Papievis, Giedra Radvilavičiūtė, Danutė Kalinauskaitė and Laura Sintija Černiauskaitė) of recent years would complicate my discourse in some aspects. Other works (by Petras Dirgėla, Leonardas Gutauskas, Antanas Ramonas, Jolita Skablauskaitė and Jurga Ivanauskaitė) would not add anything to my discourse as they very specifically analyze the images of time, a city, a dream and a limit.

Observing the processes of contemporary literature, I trace some ideological lines whose beginnings go back to old religious Baltic imagination, oppose and take the challenges of European history, assimilate and adapt them in texts of modern individual and contemporary world-view. This is a tradition of a similar archetypal message. The prose by Ričardas Gavelis is maybe an example of the most extreme opposition to such a message, but the latter is still relevant and persistent. There is a great persistence in preserving an identity, in seeping into the beginning of the history, the prehistory and a myth of the Old Europe or the Balts, and in adhering to its eclectic, but not amorphous creative individuality. And in this context the works of the mythologists and the archeologists, such as



Marija Gimbutienė, Algirdas Julius Greimas, Norbertas Vėlius and Gintaras Beresnevičius have been important. Also the activities of Lithuanian ethnologists, etymologists, regional studies' specialists, linguists and literary theorists are relevant.

There is a possibility to contradict me, raising the question whether the *kingdom of dreams* anticipates the experience of a *limit*, for *infinity* would be more a more purposeful concept in order to outline an irrational and spontaneous state of dreams. And a limit defines a feeling of a form. But a *limit* of the kingdom or the *infinity* is already a negotiable question. What kind of *kingdom could be limited, have limits and a form*, and what kind of kingdom would point to infinity and liberation? The finalized and tangible Royal Palace in the centre of Vilnius probably does not allow us to question the possibility of disputing the deep question of the Lithuanian kingdom, but the confusion caused by that Palace is accompanied by certain simulacrum and fictitious feelings of the kingdom's *limit*.

The Royal Palace in the centre of Vilnius is a practical verification of a poetic Lithuanian kingdom. It is like Maironis' poetry translated into the language of everyday actions: "Rolling wind-driven breakers ashore from the west, splash my breast with the chill of your waves"<sup>1</sup> ("Nuo Birutės kalno", Maironis 1987: 178). About ten years ago the poet Sigitas Geda feared that if translated into the language of everyday words and actions, the verses which cause a particular poetic vibration would seem to be strangely straightforward and banal. The poet said that despite admitting the trivial part of life, poetry should still strive to give another meaning to the world view, to transfer and sublimate it.

The world of dreams is the language of imagination, and not just this. It is the language of imagination which surpasses and generalizes reality. In Lithuanian literature dreams usually can be associated with messages of deities. It is not important that in romantic poetry the poet according to Maironis (*poeta*) stands for an oracle and a mediator, and in modern, avant-garde, neoclassical and post-classicistic poetry the poet, on the contrary, just impersonates a

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<sup>1</sup> Here and in the following translation of quotations from Lithuanian is mine. A.P.

character or a subject in a mediate state. For Jūratė Miliauskaitė, “it’s just a dream, I tell to myself, just a dream” (“Tai tik sapnas...”) which turns into a repetitive obsession with home and sanctity (Miliauskaitė 1999: 279–280). For Kornelijus Platelis, dream is a tenement of Mnemosis and all archetypes of the Psyche. For Donaldas Kajokas, the logic of dreams is the continuation of the dream as life, its labyrinths, questions and answers. That logic has been analyzed in some of his essays. Or maybe it is just the absence of logic which leads to the secret of a superior logic surpassing the human mind: for example, travelling in life’s labyrinths in order to reach out for awakening.

Maybe we could discover the secret of the poet Kajokas in the Zen- or Shinto-image of emptiness? According to Ken’ichi Sasaki, in the emptiness there are the deities impersonating the centre of the world (Sasaki 2008: 202–211). Different aesthetic and philosophic truths (the Veda, Buddhism and Zen) which either spontaneously or deliberately have been reflected in the poetic work of Miliauskaitė, Platelis and Kajokas, explicitly point to dreams as surpassing and generalizing reality.

In Lithuanian literature the *dream* concept cannot be rivaled by the concept of *reverie*. A Lithuanian *reverie* never appears as the hermetic, closed and mysterious state of a dream. The observation made by Gaston Bachelard claiming that a substance is necessary for reverie, but not necessary for a dream, would be fundamental in order to understand the difference between *dream* and *reverie* (Bachelard 1993: 118–135). According to Bachelard, when linked to a substance, reveries are adding to human imagination the experience of reality, reaching out for personification and thus participating in the continuation of reality. Dreams develop in a hermetic space of spontaneous memory (ib.). Even *vision*, the essentially prevalent version of an intellectual interpretation of *reverie*, is not much present in Lithuanian literature.

For the Lithuanians, dreams would mostly meditate a secret and help to recognize and to contemplate hidden parts of the world. So what is the meaning of such a *dream*? Does it mean just infantile passivity and a gap in reality? Or maybe it means the mystic cycle of life and death, wherein a dream objectifies the meanings of life and

alertness and the meanings of death? There are many good examples illustrating that kind of meaning in the work of Donaldas Kajokas, Jurga Ivanauskaitė and Erika Drungytė, Renata Šerelytė and Marius Ivaškevičius, Rimvydas Stankevičius, Donatas Petrošius and Antanas Šimkus.

It is not surprising to find the *dream* concept and images in the writing of Aidas Marčėnas who was a Buddhist for some time. In his work there are many images of dreams and awakening often means to experience everyday life and also awaken in order to discover the deeper inside world of the self and a clearer "self" in everyday experience. In his multilayered *ars poetica* there are not just easily identifiable signs of writings by poets Henrikas Radauskas, Czesław Miłosz, Więsława Szymborska, there are also signs of Christian iconography, Baltic myths and miracle-fairytales in the symbolism of strange clothes and of becoming God. This symbolism is based on the language of the tradition of modern lyrics and imagination. The dream image in Aidas Marčėnas's work can be associated with the roots of Lithuanian mentality, the origins of traditional thinking and the tradition of literature. It does not matter whether the thirty-years-old poet wakes up as a child or he gets into an even more archetypical reality. It opens itself as authentic trauma and truth, in which the signs of God in the archetypical images of literature and culture are accepted.

The poet Kęstutis Navakas who maybe did not encounter much of the *distilled* (this is the word he used) forms of God experience, perceives his dream world as a version of secession – a parallel to the reality, as a strong burst of imagination and fantasy. But the idea of a dream which has been structured by poets is still more flamboyant in Lithuanian literature. Poetic prose also absorbs this idea. Talking about his writings, the prose writer Antanas Ramonas derives a dream from very similar sources and attributes to it similar equivalents of imagination. In Ramonas's story "Mikelis", a thinker, wanderer and writer Mikelis who always seeks the sense of eternity as a result of passing time, historical events and spiritual power surpassing the destruction of body, on one particular day experiences the great unity of the world and a secret which was unfolded to him



when seeing a strange and a very real vision or a dream. Mikelis compares that secret to a dream:

He wrote when looking at this shine in which divine beauty of the world and the universe unfolded. In this light he saw Great Unity of the World and he felt how he approaches it and how he'll join it now. Just one little step was missing: everything, every leaf of grass, a stone on a road, glimpse of river wave, the evening wind in albescent rye, a spoon on a table, the eyes of a child for the first time knowingly looking at the world which is waiting for him, missing him and suffering without him - they all talk about the Unity of the World. He knew that there is light which only he sees and that in this light he sees things which are hidden from the others; at any cost, even at cost of death and pain, he wanted this light to shine out to everybody who will read his writings, for this light, just like every light unfolds a part and even just a little part of great divine world. (Ramonas 1997: 175)

In the story of Ramonas, Mikelis impersonates a typically subtle and contemplative character who mostly prefers meditation to action. He belongs to an epoch when freedom was absent. Mikelis is similar to characters in the work of Ričardas Gavelis or Jurgis Kunčinas, but at the same time he is different. Ramonas supposes that a character must personally find one's own centre of being, one's own religion – and that is possibly the *alter ego* of the writer himself. As a joint alternative to all known religious experiences, that religion is absolutely individual, eclectic, but honest, there are complicated contents and mixed forms of different experiences in it. The characters of the prose fiction of Gavelis approach philosophical and religious bases of life of an individual as persistently and intellectually as Mikelis in Ramonas's story. But as distinct from the prose by Gavelis, Mikelis handles the philosophical bases of his life in the ecstatic dream experience without any control of time. And even though in this point of view Gavelis is also inclined to avoid the reality we know, it is never a dream. It's rather a hyperreality, a Utopian, fantastic reality. Gavelis' prose is rather an intellectual structure which originates from the secret of the biological mechanism and of life-sustaining substance.



And even though there are no traces of nightly shadows, Psyche and other moments of irrational sense dominate Gavelis' prose. Day-light and intervals of rational time, light and rhythm only sharpen the uncontrolled process of human nature and the chaos of nature, so that nobody can fight against this process or have comfort. History cannot master that chaos (as basilisk, the spores and allurements of Eros). And even a vision which the character in Ramonas' work (just like a character in Gavelis) has at the moment when the main character grasps his material nature, is rather similar to a biological nightmare and maybe even to paralysis. This vision is not a dream of a prophet. At the moment of paralysis, unlike Mikelis in Ramonas' story, a character in Gavelis' work, for example, Vytautas Vargalys in the novel *Vilniaus pokeris* (*Vilnius Poker*, 1989) sees a physically stiff world in which at an untimely minute the soul does not function for some reason. That world cannot be regenerated. Also in the prose fiction of Gavelis there is no element of compassion. It only urges one: think!

On the other hand, it is interesting to pay attention to the fact that both writers, Ramonas and Gavelis, are remarkably concerned with Vilnius, especially its central part, the churches of the old town and monuments. But in Gavelis' writing on the sacred topography of Vilnius one cannot find any spiritual source adding to the spirit of an individual, the community or a nation, sought by the characters in Ramonas' work. And they find it. This spirit has an exhilarating and beneficial impact, it helps to fight against the destructive influence of time and enables one to experience the feeling of eternity. The prose fiction of Ramonas, and specifically the story "Mikelis", undoubtedly embraces the idea of compassion. Even though the story does not relieve anybody from responsibility for own's actions, there is something more, a belief that totality protects the human being in the face of chaos and destruction.

By the way, Ramonas' Mikelis is a thinker and a writer. He wanders and meditates in the atmosphere of Vilnius' aristocratic history. This atmosphere is also half a dream. Mikelis imagines historic characters and together with them he tries to relive the refined and subtle nuances of their individual historic experience. There are events of the royal Vilnius, the Lithuania of royalty, its

atmosphere and the characters experiencing it in all everyday nuances coming to life in half dream-like visions which are parallel to dreaming with one's eyes open (similar to the work of the poet Nijolė Miliauskaitė). Mikelis senses the aristocratic atmosphere of Vilnius as a symbol of values and history-based possibility of harmony.

The writer Petras Dirgėla has essentially reflected on the relations between the royal origins and the present in his writings. His *Karalystė / žemės keleivių epas* (Epos of the kingdom/ of wanderers on earth, 2004) needs some explanation, as it deals with stories and unrealized things which are important to Lithuanian culture and to European history.

Also in this case one is attracted by the free and intellectually noncommittal deviations of Dirgėla's storytelling. When a character of his novel gets confused in complicated circumstances and faces a situation of paradoxical conflicts – even though the novel constantly deals with the situation of Christian death and the Resurrection –, the dreams as a medium zone between death and life are important for the process of storytelling. And also there the character of Dirgėla masters time and space which are not under the control of human being: the ducal hall, a porch or a cellar is replaced by a meadow in moonlight and winter transforms into summer (the novel *Litorina, Litorina!* (Litorina! Litorina!, 1997). Of course, the concept of this epic is more complicated, but the tactics of storytelling's composition reflects a collision of aesthetics and the world-view. From this point of view *Arklių novelės* (*Horses' Novel*, 2005) seems to be more consistent.

However, Ramonas, Dirgėla, Kajokas, Platelis, Miliauskaitė, Marčėnas, Marcelijus Martinaitis, Leonardas Gutauskas, even Sigitas Geda, Kęstutis Navakas, Kazys Bradūnas, Tomas Venclova, Judita Vaičiūnaitė, Vladas Braziūnas and others are not interested in dreaming as such. They are rather interested in the frontier, a limit. Once found, this frontier is a sign for entering the world of deities (but not the nightmarish shadows of Psyche).

## II. Dream: time and place of origin of the *kingdom*

Starting with the poet Maironis there are constant attempts to look for "something more" in Lithuanian literature and all contemporary Lithuanian literature. The power of imagination and objectivity is beyond doubt in Maironis's best verses. He did not speak up for dreaming, sleeping and closing the eyes. To the contrary, Maironis invited grandfathers, fighters and heroes to wake up. But there is an essential apotheosis of power of dreams in this invitation. It enables all nation, not just an individual, to seek imagination, divine creation and action: "Ancestors' country / suffered much / and missed sunny days / wake up and get up, enjoy public face: / my regeneration chant is for you. // My song of patience and hope is for you / After tough night of yesterday!" ("Iš Danutės akių"; Maironis 1987:57).

According to Maironis, reality's action without any shadow of dreams has no figurative meaning and no possibility of poetic impact (no possibility of transformation and deep metamorphosis). Such an action would not have any substance for the reconstruction of a deeper national identity: "I would like to raise from the dead at least one old man / From the glorious past / And to hear at least one live word / From old times! // Maybe I would find new source of poetry / but not that of today / Which got accommodated clothes and spirit, / but it's not its own, not its own" ("Aš norėčiau prikelti"; ib. 53). Maironis perceives reconstructive action not as a simple architectural restoration of the past, not at all! The poet conceptualizes the dream as something more than the pit of Psyche, a path to complexes or distress (though sometimes it is). Maironis perceives the dream as a key to collective experiences of societies. This experience is identical to the religious catharsis. It claims for humans the ability to personify the objective world. In this context a dream is a way and precondition for authentic and metaphysical thinking.

In the poetic world of Maironis a discontinued or intermitted dream means interrupted religious communication: "And what is the glory in a song so exalted? / A shadow that's tuning along! / When man is no more, all the dreams he has haunted / Will fade soon like thick crimson dawn!" ("Išnyksiu kaip dūmas"; ib. 60). We could also say that Maironis imagined the dream world as the highest reality



which colligates the troubles of this life and raises human imagination to a higher level. According to Maironis' logic, a dream is equal to poetry. In his programmatic poem "Poezija" (Poetry) a poet takes the role of the poet who transforms reality in his imagination and the role of the moderator-oracle, the mediator between two spheres ("I saw her when evening / Star was purely shimmering in the sky...", in "Išnyksiu kaip dūmas"; ib.).

Maironis formulates the role of a poet who protects the altars of eternity and historical values in contemporary Lithuanian poetry. This role has been taken over by several Lithuanian poets, especially Justinas Marcinkevičius and Kazys Bradūnas. In such poetry dreaming is like a vision, a spontaneous perception of things which maybe could be seen in the eyes of heroes who have passed away. After Maironis defined the historical role of the poet as the oracle-visionary and reader of dreams, in Lithuanian literature poetry (and also the best poetic prose) is like a national religion throughout the whole history of Lithuanian literature of the twentieth century.

Because such an important status has been attributed to a poet in the discourse on poetry, there is a strong civic-political spirit in the lyrical and epic poetry, as well as drama of Justinas Marcinkevičius. After Lithuania became independent, his political engagement became an object of discussion and there was some ambiguity in its rating until Marcinkevičius published his book "Carmina minora" (2000). It was about returning to nature and meditation, and the reception of this book was more favorable. In "Carmina minora" the agricultural epic is transformed into an archetypical program of life. It accrued meaning in the light of the new epochal events. Actually, the public discussion of Marcinkevičius's work was not worthless, for it made possible to contemplate the limits of the impact of an individual and society, of a poet and a nation.

In tenebrous Soviet times readers in Lithuania took a lot of interest in forbidden literature. In the present day Lithuania, readers are interested in different literature. One of the most important civic and political writing of Marcinkevičius – the trilogy "Mindaugas" (1968), "Katedra" (1971) and "Mažvydas" (1977) first of all relates to Lithuanian history in which the concepts of *kingdom*, *sanctity* and *book* lead to freedom and responsibility. This situation means that an



individual is fully devoted to the nation. These devoted individuals comprehend the concept of the entire nation in a certain dimension, which was defined by Rimvydas Šilbajoris as “half a dream, half a vision” (Šilbajoris 2001:232).

The experience of life which is fragile like a dream in Maironis' poetry (yet life itself is not an illusion) is one of the main sources of creation for Marcinkevičius. He thus continued the tradition. According to Jacques Lacan (Žižek 2005: 57) that kind of experience is the Reality of longing. It is a difficult task to approach and define such a reality. Slavoj Žižek claims that such a reality is a precondition for a true awakening. It has nothing in common with the conception of life which is just an automatic dream or an illusion of non-authentic life (ib.). In Marcinkevičius' lyrics the concept of the dream was formulated step by step. Its semantic completeness was developed in a programmatic totality of a philosophic world-view. Marcinkevičius' concept of the dream unfolds consistently and clearly in his *Raštai* (Papers, vol. 2) which were published in the independent Lithuania (2000). It is about life measured by the power of seeds' cycle and nature's revival. There is an ideology of perpetual regeneration in life's genesis.

Regeneration's ideology which in Soviet times was important due to the efforts and ability to philosophically construe the reality, became notably popular with poets, artists and especially with researchers of regional studies and mythologists. On the other hand, the interwar experience of the Orient and the writings by Vydūnas, Vincas Krėvė and Mikalojus Konstantinas Čiurlionis have been authentic bases in analyzing the world in the light of chthonic metaculture, as defined by Regimantas Tamošaitis (Tamošaitis 1998: 93). Research of this culture was professionally organized in Soviet Lithuania. Its impact and interpretations mixed with the Christian experience coming from allegories containing philosophical signs. It resulted in a Lithuanian version of perpetual regeneration.

At most unexpected moments the dream's genesis unfolded – the idea of *kingdom* which is and constantly emerges from all regenerations of life, surpassing geographical place and historic time: “At an appointed / hour/ of the Sun/ denominational / members / of the God's / horses / under the leadership of / stableman Gediminas / of

fubsy / Vytenis / to the horror of / German captives / began to kill / all / cultivators / from Vilkija / where Gediminas / saw / hawling / iron / wolf / Northern / horses / with emblem / of dragon-flies / were sprinkling / diamond / seed" (Sigitas Geda, "Perversmas šiaurėje 1316"; Geda 1998: 18). In emigration writings, the philosophic focus was much more related to the Christian ideology.

Just because of the possibility of a metaphysical rest, an underlying precondition of philosophy, the semantics of luminous seeds-stars was taken over by the generation of the metaphysical poets of the 1960s: Onė Baliukonytė-Baliukonė, Gražina Cieškaitė and Kornelijus Platelis. Baliukonytė-Baliukonė, first unfolded the feminine secrets (unusual for that time) in her book *Iš kelio dulkių* (From dust of the road, 1982). In *Bokštai* (Towers, 1996) and *Elgetaujanti saulė* (Mendicant sun, 1998) her poetic path led from Christian ascetic life to the eclectic mix of different religious truths, namely the *chthonic metaculture* of Lithuanian paganism, signs of the Vedas and the Tao actively mixed with Egyptian and Christian ideology, thus creating the same idea of the world's regeneration and metaphysical rest.

The gnostic world of Cieškaitė, with its seeds and stars, is related to the Buddhist period of the author. It can be easily recognized as beginning with the book *Skrendu virš labirinto* (I fly over labyrinth, 1989). In her book *Auka žvaigždžių vainikui* (Sacrifice to coronal of stars, 1991) Cieškaitė made stand forth the idea of a volitional vision which also means knowledge. According to the poet, such a vision can overcome the reticence of dream, as if entering the laboratory of the creation of the world. As the secret of eternity has already vanished from there, only one thing is left to do – to state that there is a primary link between eternity and dream: "subsistence – a system or a view, from particles of dream / forever consists of mind's action – a thought" ("Efemerija"; Cieškaitė 1991: 49).

The originality of Gražina Cieškaitė's work consists above all in her striving to contemplate the world, including dreams, intellectually. Quite a few remarkable poets and writers belong to the generation of the fifties: Nijolė Miliauskaitė, Danutė Paulauskaitė, Vladas Braziūnas, Danutė Kalinauskaitė, Giedra Radvilavičiūtė, Valdemaras Kukulas, Gintaras Patackas, Antanas A. Jonynas,

Vytautas Rubavičius, Almis Grybauskas, Edmundas Kelmickas and others. They wrote of dreams in one way or another. Yet only the Oriental subject in the world-view of the *chthonic metaculture* confirms the essence of the Lithuanian dream. It becomes a particular discourse of allegoric language, a deep source of national identity. In addition, there are elements of shamanism in that discourse. In fact, dream is identified with intense an spiritual or inner life. It favors dialogue between different world-views.

### III. Problematic model of history in Lithuanian literature

One could ask if such a conception of time could be referred to as historic. The main element of Lithuanian time and Lithuanian history is the coexistence of several spiritual layers. In this context the experience of memory, the past, old times and the present, a moment and eternity do not connect with history which is a human act in linear time. They do not connect with dynamism either, since they are linked with peace and quietness. We could only talk about dynamism in the sense of inner life's intensity.

The mythic gyre and oval which emerge in the work of Lithuanian poets-mythologists of the twentieth century, especially in Sigita Geda, is just an example of such a time shift: "and once upon a time an oval appeared in a dream!" ("Septynių vasarų giesmės", 1991). Of course, an oval for S. Geda is a component of the mythic gyre of time and in principle its nature is mythic-archetypical. There are more signs of such a mythic archetype in Lithuanian culture. They have been comprehensively analyzed by Nijolė Laurinkienė (Laurinkienė 1990: 130–138).

These archetypes are the basis of Baltic-Lithuanian storytelling. Donaldas Kajokas deals with the substantial forms of time and conservation of energy, but his underlying idea of Zen philosophy can possibly be linked with the same archetype from Lithuanian culture: the idea of cosmos' perpetual renewal.

In the way of comparison, let us look at Polish literature, beginning with Czesław Miłosz or Oscar Miłasz, including Wiesława Szymborska, Zbigniew Herbert, to the youngest mature poets and essayists (also often recognized critics of art or literature), such as



Adam Wiencel or Krzysztof Koehler, Marzena Bogumila Kielar or Anna Pinkowska. A reader of Polish poetry of the twentieth century would not question the undeniable manifestations of linear, historic and Christian time in their work (though it may be more difficult to detect them in Szymborska's poetry).

The time's conception which was formed in Lithuanian literature hardly fits in the framework of linear and historical time. Essentially the poetic narrative (it applies both to poetry and prose) is a standard of contemporary Lithuanian literature: for example, the novel by Leonardas Gutaszkas *Vilko dantų karoliai* (The beads of wolfish teeth, 1991, 1994, 1997) and the novel by Petras Dirgėla *Karalystė* (The kingdom, 2004) analyze the special features of Lithuanian history. The same applies to novels by the youngest authors – Renata Šerelytė, Marius Ivaškevičius and Julius Keleras. Jurga Ivanauskaitė who earlier wrote plot-structured prose, in her book *Sapnų nublokšti* (Swept away by dreams, 2002) turns from the linear conception of time and history to cyclic, dream-like, irrational and recurrent time. The historical, metahistorical or pseudohistorical novel *Žali* (Green, 2002) by Marius Ivaškevičius is quite complicated, too. Though in this novel time has the function of a character and there is the exploration of its nature, it turns out that time is not linear at all and not historical either. The process of time Ivaškevičius constructs is unpredictable, relative and spontaneous: successive moments can progress and return, responding to the laws of pain, happiness and intensity of inner life.

Time was also a basic category in the work of the poet Maironis. According to Zaborskaitė, to assign Maironis' poetry to romanticism is problematic. "First of all there is a question whether it is possible to define a poet belonging to the end of the nineteenth century by categories which were formed on the basis of literature of the beginning of the nineteenth century (---)? Is it possible to analyze Lithuanian romanticism applying the same categories that are used for the description of Polish, Russian or German literatures of the start of the nineteenth century?" (Zaborskaitė 1987: 379). Indeed, at present romanticism has been recognized as the dominant discourse of our culture.



On the one hand, Lithuanian culture never doubted its European origins. It tried to become part of the generally recognized historical process. On the other hand, Lithuanian culture was facing difficulties in defining its individuality in the historical line of time. Yet it seems to be certain that we never doubted our right for individuality.

Also analyzing the process and the heritage of the second part of the twentieth century (Soviet and post-Soviet Lithuanian literature), there are possibly still important gaps. There is still a lot to be said about "silent modernism", the unofficial modernization and other tendencies which reflect European tradition. In this sense, Vytautas Kubilius' historiographic book *XX-ojo amžiaus literatūra: lietuvių literatūros istorija* (Literature of the Twentieth Century: History of Lithuanian Literature, 1995) is possibly the case when a literary theorist has to focus on and to generalize all those things which were deliberately not focused on and not generalized by writers. Instead of taking the stand of an objective critic and developing academic polemics, the Lithuanian literary theorist exercises the functions of a writer who establishes programs and manifestos. No wonder that a reader does not always recognize in the history of literature relevant and expected signs of literature.

Throughout the Soviet period, the Poles promulgated several manifestos and creative programs: the turpizm, avant-garde, neo avant-garde, post avant-garde, linguistic poetry, neoclassicism, "transformed, tragic classicism" (definition by Maria Janion), post classicism, "New Wave", "Orientations of poetic hybrid" (I am using the translation of Polish terms which were presented by the Polish scholar Teresa Dalecka at a conference in 2006). Collections of reviews of contemporary Polish literature and academic interpretations, such as Jan Tomkowski's *Dwadzieścia lat z literaturą 1977 – 1996* (1998); *Literatura polska 1990 – 2000* (edited by Tomasz Cieslak and Krystyna Pietrych, 2002); Tadeusz Drewnowski's *Literatura polska 1994 – 1989. Proba scalenia* (2004) and *Dwudziestowieczność* (ed. by Mieczysław Dąbrowski and Tomasz Wojcik, 2004) are an interesting symbiosis of poetic programs and declarations of writers, academically evaluated. In this context, historiography relates to historical thinking, self-reflection and historical self-awareness.

In Czech history of literature such a tendency is even stronger. It is something natural and commonplace there to mention critics' works which had stimulated discussion and inspired polemics. I am referring to a very popular literary history (its volume comprising over 1000 pages) *Česka literatura / od počátku k dnešku*" (2008) written by four authors: Jan Lehár, Alexandr Sich, Jaroslava Janáčková and Jiří Holý.

In our self-criticism, we should acknowledge that Lithuanian literature has been driven to a particular situation of past and bygone manifestos. Looking from the perspective of European history, history seems to be the weak spot of Lithuanian literature and our history of literature. That is so because of undefined or hardly definable processes in our literary creation. History of literature cannot arbitrarily name movements, if they are amorphous, if they were formed and unformed unofficially, if they had no consolidating signs of self-identification. Exotic *Svetimi* (Strangers) or *Betoniniai triušiai* (Concrete rabbits) are short-lived impulses of self-identification of young artists whose programs do not have succession.

The above said does not lack its positive aspect. For example, taking into account numerous Lithuanian adepts of the Vedas, Buddhism, Zen and others interested in the Orient (besides those already mentioned, the writers Vytautas Povilas Bložė, Vytautas Bubnys, the artists Inesa Kurklietytė, Birutė Mar and others), we could formulate a motive of a wrench in historical time. It has been resumed by a phrase of Donatas Sauka in *Fausto amžiaus epilogas* (The Epilogue from Faust's time): "Who in the bottom of senses, deeper than life's nonsense and presentiment of total solitude retained the doubt about the superiority of metaphysics of Western civilization over the metaphysics of Eastern civilization?" (Sauka 1998: 15).

We could say that Lithuanian literature and especially poetry is quite near to the fundamentals of consciousness of our nation. Instead of focusing on some art rally or movement, during the whole totalitarian period the writers and artists developed the spirit of individualism and an individual philosophy which was based on a personal religion. With no suitable support for spiritual experience in the cultural environment, Lithuanian poetry synthesized different

practices of Eastern and Western world-view and religion, in order to come close to its source of *dreams* – its very essence.

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*“Nos plus belles idées sont comme des airs  
de musique”: musique, mortalité et pensée  
(Proust, Broch)*

Pour la génération d'écrivains et de philosophes allemands des années vingt, la question de la mortalité aurait acquis, selon la formule de Hannah Arendt, “une dignité philosophique sans précédent” (CLC, p. 21<sup>1</sup>). Chez l'un de ces auteurs en particulier, elle peut effectivement donner la clef d'une œuvre en apparence composite, qui comprend un roman “historique” (*Les Somnambules* [*Die Schlafwandler*], 1931–1932), un récit centré sur le monologue d'un poète mourant (*La mort de Virgile* [*Der Tod des Vergil*], 1945), un roman symbolique (*Le Tentateur*, inachevé<sup>2</sup>), des nouvelles – dont certaines, écrites dans les années 1920–1930, ont été rassemblées en 1950 pour former le volume des *Irresponsables* [*Die Schuldlosen: Roman in elf Erzählungen*] –, des pièces de théâtre et des poèmes<sup>3</sup>; sans oublier toute l'œuvre critique, philosophique et théorique, depuis les essais recueillis après sa mort dans *Création littéraire et connaissance* (*Dichten und Erkennen*) ou encore *Erkennen und handeln*, jusqu'à la *Théorie de la folie des masses*<sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> “[...] daß die Todeserfahrung zu einer vorher nie gekannten philosophischen Dignität gelangte”, *DE*, p. 19. Dans ce texte consacré à Broch, Arendt évoque les auteurs de langue allemande.

<sup>2</sup> L'édition française correspond à la première version de ce roman inachevé, publié après la mort de Broch: *Der Versucher* (1953). Une autre édition a été proposée en 1976 par P. M. Lützelers sous le titre *Die Verzauberung*, après la version en quatre volumes de Fr. Kress et H. A. Maier, *Bergroman. Die drei Originalfassungen textkritisch* (1969).

<sup>3</sup> Voir les volumes *Dramen* et *Gedichte* des œuvres complètes (*Kommentierte Werkausgabe*), dont les références sont indiquées en bibliographie, p. 9.

<sup>4</sup> Voir les détails des éditions de référence en bibliographie. Abréviations: *B* pour *Briefe* et *L* pour *Lettres 1929–1951*; *CLC* pour *Création littéraire et connaissance*; *DE* pour *Dichten und Erkennen*; *GI* pour *La Grandeur*



Le jugement – à première vue assez banal – de l'un de ses commentateurs, pour qui "le premier des thèmes concentriques de Broch, et le plus central, est le *temps*, sous ses deux formes premières: l'Histoire et la mort" (Dowden 1988: 3, je traduis), possède ainsi le mérite de souligner l'une des lignes de force d'une œuvre qui s'efforce de mettre elle-même en application l'un de ses credo. Toute action humain visant selon Broch à combattre l'angoisse de la mort, la création littéraire s'inscrit dans une démarche de "libération", comme il le note à propos des œuvres (même les plus réalistes) dans lesquelles le monde est représenté non tel qu'il est, mais "tel qu'on désire ou redoute qu'il soit", et à l'intérieur duquel l'homme peut être victorieux (*CLC*, p. 344)<sup>5</sup>.

Que l'écrivain espère en "la permanence indestructible des formes d'art" (*So*, p. 629), que la "valeur d'éternité" soit "le but vers lequel nous [les auteurs] nous orientons", n'est bien sûr pas propre à Broch (*L*, p. 113)<sup>6</sup>; toutefois, l'une des particularités de son œuvre est bien la récurrence de réflexions sur l'œuvre d'art comme "forme achevée et fermée sur elle-même", donc "[extraite] hors du temps", et qui "porte en elle cette intemporalité qui unit le passé à l'avenir" (*CLC*, p. 348)<sup>7</sup>. "Brusque illumination entre deux zones de ténèbres", elle est présentée comme le «symbole de ce qui est et de l'éternité.

*inconnue*; *LMR* pour *Logique d'un monde en ruine*; *S* et *So* pour *Die Schlafwandler* et *Les Somnambules*; *PS 2* pour *Philosophische Schriften. 2. Theorie* et *SzL 2* pour *Schriften zur Literatur. 2. Theorie*. Les citations sont données en français puis en langue originale (dans le corps du texte ou en note, selon les cas).

<sup>5</sup> "Le Mal dans le système des valeurs de l'art": "die Welt zu schildern, wie sie gewünscht oder wie sie gefürchtet wird" (*SzL 2*, p. 134). C'est ce que Broch nomme l'"irrationalité mystique du but axiologique" ["die mystische Irrationalität des Wertziels"] (*Ib.*).

<sup>6</sup> "[...] in der Unzerstörbarkeit der Kunstformen" (*S*, p. 622) et lettre du 17 juillet 1934 à H. Burgmüller ("[...] jenen 'Ewigkeitswert' besitzt, an dem wir [...] uns immer wieder orientieren", *B*, p. 290).

<sup>7</sup> "Le Mal dans le système des valeurs de l'art": "diese Abgeschlossenheit", "diese Herausgehobenheit aus der Zeit" (*ZsL 2*, p. 137).

Elle est sans cesse libération de l'angoisse." (Ib. 349)<sup>8</sup> Une seconde particularité de l'œuvre brochienne, sentie par ses lecteurs comme «philosophique», est la place qu'elle accorde à la musique, qui sert de référence à la littérature dans son entreprise d'affranchissement de l'homme, et qui est systématiquement associée à la pensée.

La double hypothèse proposée ici est d'une part qu'il n'y a guère que chez Proust, dans *A la recherche du temps perdu*<sup>9</sup>, que l'on peut trouver une configuration équivalente à celle des *Somnambules*<sup>10</sup>, associant littérature, musique et pensée dans la relation au temps; que d'autre part, si l'importance de la musique et l'omniprésence de la théorie sont des éléments connus des lecteurs brochiens et proustiens, leur lien mérite d'être examiné.

### La musique comme "abolition du temps" [*Zeitaufhebung*]

L'idée revient avec insistance dans la diégèse de la trilogie autrichienne. Lorsqu'un personnage exécute une sonate dans le dernier volume, *Huguenau*, "le temps lui-même [est] aboli et [prend] la forme de l'espace [...]" (So, p. 639; "es war die Zeit selber aufgehoben und sie hatte sich zum Raum geformt", S, p. 632<sup>11</sup>); dans

<sup>8</sup> "ein Aufleuchten zwischen zwei Dunkelheiten", "Symbol des Seienden und der Ewigkeit, immer wieder Befreiung von der Angst", SzL 2, p. 138.

<sup>9</sup> Voir les références en bibliographie. Sont cités ici *Du côté de chez Swann* (abrégé en CS), *Sodome et Gomorrhe* (abrégé en SG), *La Prisonnière* (P) et *Le Temps retrouvé* (TR).

<sup>10</sup> Sur la musique dans d'autres œuvres de Broch, voir en particulier, en français, Marianne Charrière-Jacquins, *Structures musicales dans La Mort de Virgile de Hermann Broch*, thèse de doctorat sous la direction de René Gérard, Université d'Aix-Marseille, 1980.

<sup>11</sup> Le présent article développe une piste esquissée dans "La permanence indestructible des formes d'art", ou la consolation de la littérature chez Proust, Broch et Dos Passos", in E. Poulain (dir.), *Littérature et consolation*, Arras, PU d'Arras, 2011 (à paraître); un article plus ancien et très bref ("Littérature, musique et architecture: l'espace dans *Les Somnambules* de Hermann Broch", in J. Vion-Dury, J.-M. Grassin, B. Westphal (dir.), *Littérature et espaces*, Limoges, PULIM, 2003, p. 645-651) avait trop tendance à considérer comme convergentes l'œuvre fictionnelle et les essais de Broch.

*Esch*, un autre musicien remarque qu'il peut "s'ouvrir aux mille apparitions de l'éternité" (*So*, p. 358; "[...] war er der Vielfalt der Ewigkeit [...] hingegeben", *S*, p. 365) grâce à son art qui "abolit le temps pour le recueillir dans chaque mesure, qui abolit la mort pour la faire renaître, toute nouvelle, dans le monde des sons." (*So*, p. 358; "[...] die Zeit aufhebt, um sie in jedem Takte zu bewahren, den Tod aufhebt, um in Klänge neu ihn erstehen zu lassen", *S*, p. 365). Le sentiment d'échapper au temps, de sortir de la temporalité, permet d'occulter la mort. Dans *Pasenow*, enfin, le chant d'un oiseau évoque l'union et la spatialité, chassant un échange sur la solitude de la mort et l'impression de vide laissé par le frère disparu, comme le confirme la fin de la citation:

Et il y aurait certainement eu quelque discussion si au même instant le canari, dans sa cage, n'avait fait jaillir la gerbe jaune et frêle de sa voix. Aussitôt, tous de s'assembler autour de lui comme autour d'une fontaine et pour quelques instants tout fut oublié. Il semblait que le mince ruban jaune de cette voix, fusant, glissant, redescendant, s'enroulait autour d'eux et les liait en cette communauté où résidait le confort de leur vie et de leur mort; ce ruban jaune [...] jetait dans l'espace une frêle arabesque jaune, [...] les rappelait pour quelques instants à leur solidarité et les arrachait à cet effrayant silence dont le fracas et le mutisme dressent entre l'homme et l'homme un bruit opaque [...].[...] aucun d'eux ne songea que Helmuth mort avait reposé là. (*So*, p. 84-85)

"[...] und es wäre sicherlich zu einer kleinen Auseinandersetzung gekommen, wenn nicht der Harzer Kanarienvogel in seinem Käfig die dünne gelbe Garbe seiner Stimme hätte emporschießen lassen. Da aber saßen sie um ihn herum wie um einen Springbrunnen und vergaßen für ein paar Augenblicke alles andere: es war, als ob dieser schmale gelbe Stimmstreifen auf- und nieder gleitend sich um sie schlänge und sie zu jener Gemeinsamkeit vereinte, in der die Behaglichkeit ihres Lebens und Sterbens begründet lag; es war, als ob dieser Streifen [...] ein dünnes, gelbes Ornament im Raum war, [...] er ihnen für ein paar Augenblicke zum Bewußtsein brachte, daß sie zusammen-



gehörten und sie heraushob aus der fürchterlichen Stille, deren Getöse und deren Stummheit undurchdringlicher Schall zwischen Mensch und Mensch steht [...]. [...] dachte keiner daran, daß Helmuth hier aufgebahrt gelegen hatte." (S, p. 87)

Cette mise en relation avec l'espace apparaît d'autant plus nettement dans *Les Somnambules* au lecteur proustien qu'il garde en mémoire les scènes musicales de la *Recherche*, comme celle où Swann se souvient avoir déjà entendu la "petite phrase": "au-dessous de la petite ligne du violon [...] il avait vu tout d'un coup chercher à s'élever [...] la masse de la partie de piano, multiforme, indivise, plane [...]" (CS, p. 205). Il s'agit du début de l'évocation de la sonate de Vinteuil pour piano et violon; mais le passage qui se rapporte à la petite phrase repose sur le même ordre d'images: «elle le dirigeait ici d'abord, puis là, puis ailleurs [...]. [...] au point où elle était arrivée et d'où il se préparait à la suivre [...], brusquement elle changeait de direction [...]" (CS, p. 207)<sup>12</sup>. C'est bien en référence à cette dimension qu'est défini l'effet produit par la musique sur le personnage: "la petite phrase, dès qu'il l'entendait, savait rendre libre en lui l'espace qui pour elle était nécessaire" (CS, p. 233) – et ces images seront confirmées par les impressions du héros-narrateur dans *La Prisonnière*, lors de l'audition du Septuor<sup>13</sup>.

Il ne faut certes pas simplifier l'image complexe que possède la musique dans la trilogie autrichienne; toutes les formes ne bénéficient pas de la même faveur de la part du narrateur des *Somnambules*, qui se montre plus réservé à l'égard des chants associés à l'Armée du Salut. En témoigne aussi l'ambivalence des sentiments d'Esch: "chanter, oui, c'était peut-être ce qu'il fallait faire, chanter l'âme prisonnière [...]. Au fond, ils avaient peut-être raison, ces

<sup>12</sup> Voir aussi p. 215 ("la petite phrase apparaissait, dansante, [...] appartenant à un autre monde"), p. 260 ("![...] et comme dans un paysage de montagne [...]).

<sup>13</sup> Voir P, p. 753 ("je me trouvais en pays inconnu", "Comme quand, dans un pays qu'on ne croit pas connaître [...]"). p. 763 (sur la "patrie perdue" des artistes, et des musiciens en particulier), etc.



idiots de Salutistes” (*So*, p. 370, traduction modifiée<sup>14</sup>). Toutefois, dans ce roman qui associe narration fictionnelle et pensée, un développement du troisième chapitre de la *Dégradation des valeurs* – consacré au style et à l’architecture – fait écho aux remarques convergentes des personnages, en une formule aphoristique: “Même la musique, qui est uniquement dans le temps et qui remplit l’espace, transmue le temps en espace” (*So*, p. 441; “Selbst die Musik, die bloß in der Zeit ist und die Zeit erfüllt, wandelt die Zeit zu Raume”, *S*, p. 445).

L’importance de la musique est bien d’ordre métaphysique, comme invite à le penser une autre formule péremptoire de l’auteur (fictif et fictionnel) de la *Dégradation des valeurs*: “quoi que l’homme fasse, il le fait pour anéantir le temps, pour le supprimer, et cette suppression s’appelle l’espace” (ib. “Denn was immer der Mensch tut, er tut es, um die Zeit zu vernichten, um sie aufzuheben, und diese Aufhebung heißt Raum”, ib.). A l’extérieur de la fiction cette fois, les essais de Broch, en particulier les “Réflexions relatives au problème de la connaissance en musique” [*Gedanken zum Problem der Erkenntnis in der Musik*] de 1934 et “Le Mal dans le système des valeurs de l’art” [*Das Böse im Wertsystem der Kunst*] de 1933, confirment le statut de la musique comme modèle de transmutation, de “transformation” du temps en espace, ce qui valide les théories proposées dans la trilogie romanesque: la musique “abolit le temps dans un rapport immédiat et immédiatement vécu», permettant une «abolition directe de la mort dans la conscience de l’humanité” (*LMR*, p. 110 et 111<sup>15</sup>).

<sup>14</sup> “[...] von der gefangenen Seele zu singen [...]. Sie mochten schon recht haben, die Heilsarmeeidioten [...]”, *S*, p. 377. Des vellétés avaient déjà saisi Esch plus tôt dans le récit (*So*, p. 211; *S*, p. 217). Sans doute le statut de l’Armée du Salut dans *Les Somnambules* rejaillit-il sur cette expression musicale, sans toutefois qu’une condamnation directe soit exprimée: voir les remarques du huitième chapitre de la *Dégradation des valeurs* sur son organisation et son recours à la musique (*So*, p. 587; *S*, p. 582).

<sup>15</sup> “Réflexions relatives au problème de la connaissance en musique”: “die Funktion der unmittelbaren und unmittelbar erlebten Zeitaufhebung”, “die unmittelbare Aufhebung des Todes in Bewußtsein der Menschheit”, *PS* 2, p. 242 et 243).

## La musique comme "mise en forme architecturale du déroulement temporel"<sup>16</sup>

Parce qu'elle fait passer du temps à l'espace – "La transmutation du temporel en un système simultané, perçu comme spatial, c'est la musique en soi" (*CLC*, p. 338<sup>17</sup>) –, la musique devient pour Broch "reproduction de l'affranchissement absolu de la mort" [*CLC*, p. 347; *Abbild der absoluten Todeserlösung*, *SzL* 2, p. 136]. Or ce processus de spatialisation se fait, dans ces essais, en référence à un autre art, central dans la réflexion de Broch, qui utilise le terme d'"architecturisation de l'écoulement du temps" (*CLC*, p. 27<sup>18</sup>) pour évoquer une transformation débouchant sur une juxtaposition totalisante, synonyme de simultanéité. Comme souvent chez lui, ces idées figurent également dans "La Vision du monde donnée par le roman" [*Das Weltbild des Romans*, 1933] à propos de la "suppression des intervalles naturels" en musique, qui équivaut pour Broch à la "suppression du temps" [*CLC*, p. 234; *die Aufhebung der Zeit*<sup>19</sup>] ainsi que dans les "Notes au sujet d'une esthétique systématique" ["Notizen zu einer systematischen Ästhetik"], l'un de ses premiers textes théoriques (1912): "Les deux pôles deviennent *impression de simultanéité* et la forme phénoménale du temps se mue en la *forme phénoménale* de l'espace: l'élément du rythme devient équilibre de *symétrie*." (*GI*, p. 250<sup>20</sup>).

<sup>16</sup> Ib. 111 ("die Architekturierung des Zeitablaufes", *PS* 2, p. 243).

<sup>17</sup> "Le Mal dans le système des valeurs de l'art": "die Umwandlung des Zeitlichen in ein räumlich empfundenen Simultansystem, es ist die Musik an sich", *SzL* 2, p. 128.

<sup>18</sup> Je reprends la traduction d'A. Kohn (*CLC*, p. 27), qui emploie un néologisme intéressant, parallèlement à la traduction récente par Christian Bouchindhomme (*LMR*, p. 111) de la même formule: "die Architekturierung des Zeitablaufes" (*PS* 2, p. 243).

<sup>19</sup> "La Vision du monde donnée par le roman": "die Aufhebung der natürlichen Pausen [...] die Aufhebung der Zeit", *SzL* 2, p. 107.

<sup>20</sup> "die beiden Pole werden zum *Eindruck der Gleichzeitigkeit* und die Erscheinungsform der Zeit wandelt sich in die *Erscheinungsform* des

Le duo littérature et musique, constitué par des comparaisons et analogies récurrentes, devient parfois trio, lorsqu'il est fait appel à ce troisième terme: "Nous savons que là-aussi [dans le cas de la littérature] un contrepoint est à l'œuvre, que l'architecture de l'œuvre littéraire est d'aussi grand poids que celle d'une sonate" écrit ainsi Broch dans "La Vision du monde donnée par le roman" (*CLC*, p. 235<sup>21</sup>). Le choix de l'architecture pourrait sembler évident aux yeux du lecteur familier de la littérature du XX<sup>e</sup> siècle, mais ce serait souscrire un peu vite à une impression de facilité, alors qu'il apparaît particulièrement cohérent dans une œuvre où la relation de l'architecture à la mort est fréquemment mise en avant: ainsi dans l'empressement avec lequel la famille Baddensen aménage sa demeure et la décore en cédant à la manie de la collection, se cache un espoir inconscient d'échapper à la mort, selon le narrateur<sup>22</sup>; le même analyse, dans la *Dégradation des valeurs*, l'absence d'ornement en architecture comme un indice que l'époque moderne est marquée par la mort (So, p. 441 et 461; S, p. 445 et 464). Même si l'équivalence n'est pas aussi stricte que l'affirme Broch – la linéarité d'un texte ne pouvant rivaliser, sur le plan de la simultanéité, avec la polyphonie musicale –, il convient de retenir le *désir* manifesté dès *Les Somnambules* de parvenir à la fois à une simultanéité proche de celle de la musique et à une juxtaposition comparable à celle de l'architecture, les deux domaines artistiques étant fréquemment confondus dans des formules à la densité remarquable. La musique, modèle de l'œuvre littéraire, est ainsi définie comme "la transformation directe

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*Raumes* – das Element des Rhythmus wird zum Gleichgewicht der Symmetrie.", *SzL* 2, p. 17 (l'auteur souligne).

<sup>21</sup> "La Vision du monde...": "Wir wissen, daß auch hier eine Kontrapunktik am Werke ist, daß die Architektur des Dichtwerkes von ebenso großem Gewicht ist wie die einer Sonate", *SzL* 2, p. 108.

<sup>22</sup> "[...] tout collectionneur [...] espère la conquête de son propre absolu et l'abolition de sa mort" (So, p. 78; "[...] daß jeder Sammler [...] die Erreichung seiner eigenen Absolutheit erhofft und die aufhebung seines Todes", So, p. 80). Voir également les notations sur l'impression de sécurité qui se dégage de la résidence des Baddensen en ville (S, p. 35; So, p. 36).



du temps en espace, la transformation du cours du temps en une configuration spatiale et architectonique" (*LMR*, p. 110<sup>23</sup>).

Inutile de développer ici un rapprochement entre cette dernière et la composition de l'œuvre littéraire – ce point a été abondamment étudié, comme dans le cas de Proust, même si l'on a souvent tendance à simplifier cette question en parlant trop rapidement de "structure musicale"<sup>24</sup>. Arrêtons-nous plutôt sur la seconde relation, établie entre architecture et musique. Le lecteur de Proust peut ici se rappeler les expériences du héros-narrateur, qui note dans *La Prisonnière*: "Dans la musique entendue chez Mme Verdurin, des phrases inaperçues, larves obscures alors indistinctes, devenaient d'éblouissantes architectures [...]" (*P*, p. 875). Le rapprochement entre les deux domaines est fréquente dans la *Recherche*, et ce jusque dans les moindres détails. Dès *Swann*, le clocher de Combray est évoqué au moyen d'une analogie filée avec la musique: la grand-mère le rapproche d'un pianiste pour louer ses qualités ("Je suis sûre que s'il jouait du piano, il ne jouerait pas *sec*", *CS*, p. 63); le héros-narrateur note que les pierres éclairées par la lumière, "paraiss[ent] tout d'un coup montées bien plus haut, lointaines, comme un chant repris "en voix de tête" une octave au-dessus." (*CS*, p. 63).

On pourrait multiplier les exemples, telle cette comparaison entre le jeu de la lumière sur le balcon et l'"un de ces crescendos continus comme ceux qui, en musique, à la fin d'une Overture, mènent une seule note jusqu'au fortissimo suprême [...]", qui associe une nouvelle fois – indirectement ici – un élément architectural et un terme musical (*CS*, p. 389). L'analogie, très récurrente, prend parfois des formes plus discrètes. Luc Fraisse a noté de nombreux indices, parfois ténus, du rapport privilégié entre l'architecture et la musique, en particulier avec le chant: ainsi de "la femme à belle voix d'un architecte" (*SG*, p. 402), mentionnée à plusieurs reprises. Les deux domaines sont souvent évoqués de concert: ainsi d'Albertine, qui possède une "sûreté de gout" en architecture, mais un gout

<sup>23</sup> "Réflexions relatives ... ": "die Transformation des Zeitablaufs in ein räumlich-architektonisches Gebilde", *PS* 2, p. 242.

<sup>24</sup> Dans le cas de Proust, voir la salutaire mise en garde de J.-J. Nattiez, *Proust musicien*, *op. cit.*, p. 21 et 31.



“déplorable” en musique (Fraisie 1990: 54–55). Chez Proust et Broch, la musique peut donc être assimilée à une “architecture symbolique”... tout comme la littérature<sup>25</sup>.

Le “symbole sonore de tout le pensé” [*die klingendes Sinnbild alles Gedachten*]

L'intérêt supplémentaire de l'art musical dans cette perspective est son rapprochement avec la sphère rationnelle dans *A la recherche du temps perdu* et *Les Somnambules*<sup>26</sup>. L'essai de Broch sur les “Réflexions relatives au problème de la connaissance en musique” entreprend de clarifier les relations entre connaissance, raison et langage: toute connaissance passe-t-elle par la sphère rationnelle et peut-elle être exprimée par le langage? Quelle relation établir entre l'horizon lointain (une connaissance universelle) et l'activité rationnelle? Comment nommer le type de connaissance qui échappe à cette dernière et “procède immédiatement” (*LMR*, p. 101<sup>27</sup>) de l'activité humaine? La musique apparaît alors comme proche des mathématiques, dans leur “appréhension mystique et irrationnelle de la totalité du monde”<sup>28</sup>, et comme “le plus rationnel des arts» (*CLC*,

<sup>25</sup> Parmi les exemples (non exclusifs) d’“architecture symbolique”, Broch mentionne en premier lieu “sons, mots, figures graphiques, notes de musique” (“Réflexions relatives...”, in *LMR*, p. 106; “Lauten, Worten, zeichnerischen Gebilden, musikalischen Tönen”, *PS* 2, p. 240).

<sup>26</sup> Il serait également possible d'examiner, pour boucler la boucle logique, les analogies entre architecture et abstraction, comme nous y invite une notation sur le clocher de Combray: “Et sans doute, toute partie de l'église qu'on apercevait la distinguait de tout autre édifice par une sorte de pensée qui lui était infuse [...]” (*CS*, p. 63).

<sup>27</sup> “Réflexions relatives...”: “diese Erkenntnis [...] geht unmittelbar aus dem musikalischen Tun hervor”, *PS* 2, p. 237.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 109 (la formule de Broch est employée à propos des mathématiques; “ein mystisch-irrationales Erfassen der Welttotalität”, *PS* 2, p. 242).

p. 346<sup>29</sup>). Or le lien se fait par l'espace, comme l'indique le même passage de la *dégradation des valeurs* qui présente la musique comme une spatialisation du temps; le texte se poursuit immédiatement par un rapprochement avec la l'activité rationnelle [*Denken*]: "toute pensée s'accomplit dans l'espace, et [...] le processus de pensée représente un amalgame d'espaces logiques à multiples dimensions, indiciblement compliqués" (*So*, p. 445<sup>30</sup>).

Que le lecteur accepte ou non les rapports établis par Broch entre littérature, musique, architecture et espace, il ne peut que constater une tentative pour les mettre en relation dans ce qui apparaît comme le versant fictionnel des textes théoriques de Broch, ce roman contenant de l'essai (ou du moins, une forme d'essai<sup>31</sup>) qu'est la trilogie des *Somnambules*. Si l'on suit l'analyse du "Mal dans le système des valeurs de l'art", les valeurs sont menacées par le passage du temps, qui révèle leur relativité: la mise en forme<sup>32</sup> a

<sup>29</sup> "Le Mal..." : "die rationalste Kunst", *SzL2*, p. 136. Broch, pour sa démonstration, n'hésite pas à forcer le trait ici, quitte à distinguer, sur ce point, la musique de la littérature !

<sup>30</sup> «"..." alles Denken im Räumlichen vor sich geht, [...] der Denkprozeß eine Verquickung unsagbar verwickelter vieldimensionaler logischer Räume darstellt", *S*, p. 445. On trouve aussi dans la diégèse une mise en relation comparable: le même personnage qui, dans *Esch*, est porté par la conviction que la musique (comme on l'a vu) "abolit le temps" et "abolit la mort", propose une analogie entre musique et idées, lorsqu'il considère cette dernière comme le "symbole sonore de tout le pensé" [*die klingendes Sinnbild alles Gedachten*], *So*, p. 358 (*S*, p. 365).

<sup>31</sup> A ce sujet, je me permets de renvoyer à l'article "Is the Zerfall der Werte an Essay? Essayismus and its consequences on theory in *Die Schlafwandler* (H. Broch)", in *TRANS*, Internet journal for cultural studies, 2005–2006, n°16 [actes du congrès *IRICS*, "Innovations and Reproductions in Cultures and Societies", Vienne, 2005].

<sup>32</sup> Passer de "l'informé" au "formé" par la création, c'est passer de l'irrationnel (assimilé à la mort) à la connaissance: "L'irrationnel [...] est en même temps ce qui porte la mort en ses flancs et la forme qu'on lui donne et la clarté qu'on y met deviennent abolition de la mort, deviennent un morceau d'avenir éclairé, arraché à la mort, deviennent connaissance en train de s'accomplir [...]" (*CLC*, p. 338; "das Irrationale, [...] ist gleichzeitig das Todesschwangere, und seine Formung und Aufhellung wird

précisément pour but d'ordonner la succession des valeurs pour en faire une simultanéité des valeurs, [de] créer un système" où les valeurs sont disposées selon un schéma où elles "se soutiennent mutuellement", dans une création "spatiale" [*räumlich*]<sup>33</sup>; l'horizon étant toujours de lutter contre la mort (*CLC*, p. 334–335; *SzL* 2, p. 124–125). Or *Les Somnambules*, conçus comme une architecture et une composition musicale, intègrent précisément des passages théoriques plaçant au centre de leur réflexion la notion de valeur, comme l'indique le titre des dix chapitres (*Dégradation des valeurs* [*Zerfall der Werte*]) – en une sorte d'illustration au carré.

Chez Proust, il ne faudrait pas en rester à une simple dichotomie entre rationalité et musique, suggérée par le contraste entre la mémoire volontaire, portée par la raison, et la mémoire involontaire, qui relève de l'irrationnel. On connaît le passage de *Du côté de chez Swann* qui distingue entre les "expressions abstraites" renvoyant au passé de manière superficielle ("son intelligence n'y avait enfermé du passé que de prétendus extraits qui n'en conservaient rien") et le choc né de la petite phrase, entendue fortuitement par Swann: "tous ses souvenirs du temps où Odette était éprise de lui [...] s'étaient réveillés" (*CS*, p. 339). Comme souvent dans la *Recherche*, le dernier volume montre une évolution de ces représentations, où les contraires finissent par s'associer: le héros-narrateur proustien, cherchant à découvrir une "vérité" dans les "impressions obscures" qu'il a jadis éprouvées, évoque ainsi dans *Le Temps Retrouvé* l'hypothèse que "nos plus belles idées [soient] comme des airs de musique qui nous reviendraient sans que nous les eussions jamais entendus, et que nous nous efforcerions d'écouter, de transcrire." (*TR*, p. 456–457). Cette image était déjà annoncée, pour le lecteur attentif, par une remarque de Swann, dont les conceptions ne sont pas (pour une fois) démenties sur ce point: "Swann tenait les motifs musicaux pour de véritables

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zur Aufhebung des Todes, wird zu einem Stück Zukunft, das aufgeheilt und dem Tod entrissen wird, wird zum Bekanntwerdenden [...]", *ZsL* 2, p. 128).

<sup>33</sup> "Le Mal..." in *CLC*, p. 338 ("Und so zielt alle Formung darauf hin, die Wertfolge zu einer Wertgleichzeitigkeit zu ordnen, ein Wertsystem zu Schaffen, [...] in dem die Werte [...] einander stützend in Gemeinschaft miteinander bestehen.", *SzL* 2, p. 128). Cette création des valeurs est un cas particulier de toute activité humaine.



idées, d'un autre monde, d'un autre ordre, idées voilées de ténèbres, inconnues, impénétrables à l'intelligence, mais qui n'en sont pas moins parfaitement distinctes les unes des autres [...]" (CS, p. 343).

Le narrateur donne en effet du crédit à cette association lorsqu'il note à propos de Vinteuil: "En sa petite phrase, quoiqu'elle présentât à la raison une surface obscure, on sentait un contenu si consistant, si explicite, auquel elle donnait une force si nouvelle, si originale, que ceux qui l'avaient entendue la conservaient en eux de plain-pied avec les idées de l'intelligence." (CS, p. 344<sup>34</sup>).

Les trois termes (musique, pensée et architecture) sont finalement réunis par Swann lorsqu'il recrée dans sa mémoire la petite phrase de Vinteuil: "Il s'en représentait l'étendue, les groupements symétriques, la graphie, la valeur expressive; il avait devant lui cette chose qui n'est plus de la musique pure, qui est du dessin, de l'architecture, de la pensée, et qui permet de se rappeler la musique." (CS, p. 206<sup>35</sup>).

L'analogie entre la musique et les passages essayistiques de la *Recherche* et des *Somnambules* serait alors un nouveau point de rencontre entre ces derniers et l'essai au sens strict, genre qu'Adorno rapproche de la musique: "l'essai touche à la logique musicale, l'art rigoureux et pourtant non conceptuel du passage" (Adorno 1999: 27). Lui-même musicologue et auteur d'ouvrages sur Alban Berg, Wagner, Mahler, sur la relation entre musique et peinture, Adorno illustre parfaitement ce principe dans son écriture; on a pu ainsi lire le titre de son ouvrage (*Notes sur la littérature I* [*Noten zur Literatur I*]) dans un sens musical, noter le caractère paratactique de sa syntaxe et parler de "composition" de ses essais, de leurs dissonances et leur harmonie, de la reprise de thèmes, etc. (Good 1988: 19–20). L'essai

<sup>34</sup> Les occurrences des substantifs "notions" et "conceptions" se multiplient en quelques lignes, relayées par "idées" et "premises" (p. 345).

<sup>35</sup> L. Fraisse rapproche sur ce point Proust de Schopenhauer, selon qui la musique peint non un type de joie ou d'effroi, mais les sentiments eux-mêmes, "pour ainsi dire abstraitement" (Schopenhauer 1888: 273; cité dans Fraisse, 1995: 147). Le rapprochement entre la musique et la pensée présente toutefois des limites; la première peut en effet transmettre un message sans recourir au langage, qui se trouve du côté de l'intellect (*ibid.*, p. 148–149).



intégré dans ces romans de Proust et Broch apporterait alors à l'architecture globale des textes l'élément rationnel qu'il contient, les faisant ainsi bénéficier de ses qualités, qualités comparables à celles de la musique et qui le rendent susceptible d'approcher l'éternité.

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<sup>36</sup> Ce volume est la version française de *Briefe, von 1929 bis 1951*, éd. de Robert Pick, Zürich, Rhein-Verlag, 1957, 458 p.

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## *Poetics of Irrationalism in*

### *A. H. Tammsaare's Work*

The article examines the work of A. H. Tammsaare (1878–1940)<sup>1</sup> from the aspect of irrationality that has not been paid much attention to yet. Some elements of irrationalism were pointed out in a few longer articles published on the occasion of the writer's 60th birthday.<sup>2</sup> The merely budding reception shoot was cut off already in 1940 as the topic was scorned during the Soviet occupation.<sup>3</sup> This significant layer in Tammsaare's literary work, however, has been disregarded also in Estonia that has regained its independence.

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<sup>1</sup> Anton Hansen-Tammsaare (1878–1940) is the most famous Estonian writer whose main work, the five-part *Tõde ja õigus* (Truth and Justice) is one of the most significant texts in the Estonian literary Canon. The newspaper *Postimees* (Courier) published his first stories already in 1900. Due to the social crisis – the First World War – he wrote critical articles on current social and political affairs, like his *Thoughts about the War*, for example. Simultaneously with writing original prose he started to translate books into the Estonian and kept on with publishing articles. His first play *Judith* heralded the highlights of his career in 1921. Next year the novel *Kõrboja peremees* (Master of Kõrboja) was published and the best-known *Tõde ja õigus* (1926–1933) followed suit. The 1930s witnessed the publishing of the novels *Elu ja armastus* (Life and Love, 1934), *Ma armastasin sakslast* (I Loved a German Girl, 1935) and the play *Kuningal on külm* (The King Feels Cold, 1936). His last novel *The Põrgupõhja uus vanapagan* (The New Vanapagan of Põrgupõhja; it has appeared in English translation with the title *The Misadventures of the New Satan*, Norvik Press 1978, 2009), written and published in 1940, a year before his death, attracted quite a lot of attention both at home and abroad.

<sup>2</sup> In the present article the most essential ones have been indicated. See: Annist 1938, Palgi 1938.

<sup>3</sup> Erna Siirak's general overview in English about Tammsaare's life and work, carrying some new accents, should still be mentioned in this context: *A. H. Tammsaare in Estonian Literature* (Tallinn: Perioodika, 1978).

To begin with, I would like to make a transient introduction into the relationship of irrationalism and realism.

I define irrationalism as not rational (Latin *irrationalis*); as a concept that considers the cognitive possibilities of thinking and intellect limited. I deal with irrationalism as something beyond intellect (intuition, emotions, and instincts...) through which certain chaos and cosmic (obscure) will are expressed.

Realism in literature is generally understood as a style that seeks to present an unglamorized, unromanticized view of the world in precision of detail with the effect of reality.

In Estonian literary history Tammsaare has mostly been treated as a realist, is it neo realist (Tuglas 1918), critical realist (EKA 1984) or psychological realist (Annus *et al* in 2001). The image of Tammsaare has been, above all, bound with the realistic treatment of life. One can find a few admissions that we should not take him for a "pure realist" (e.g. Tuglas) but generally he has been understood as a writer describing rural life of the peasantry in a realistic panorama. The Soviet literary history specially emphasised his atheism. (It was a compulsory part of propaganda then to stress just that.) And all this may well create an impression that there could not be any irrationality in Tammsaare's work.

True enough, Tammsaare's work is generally realistic both in his characters and plot. But this realistic treatment conceals an unreal dimension; not to be avoided as it is an essential part of human existence.<sup>4</sup> That is why I argue that the poetics of irrationalism has a key position in the writer's work.

Tammsaare has hinted at the relationship between the real life and the "irrational" in connection with Dostoyevsky. In an introductory article<sup>5</sup> he has quoted Dostoyevsky: "In art I do love realism

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<sup>4</sup> According to Heinrich Rickert the empirical reality is "irrational". Not a single real object or process is precisely the same as another, only similar to a bigger or smaller extent; Rickert defines it as the principle of heterogeneity. Thus the transfers are heterogenic as well: the heterogenic continuity dominates everywhere and that is why reality is beyond grasping with notions "as it is", it is irrational.

<sup>5</sup> Written as an introduction to the translation into the Estonian of Dostoyevsky's novel *Sortsid* (The Possessed).



that passes over to fantasy... What else can be more fantastic and unexpected than the real?" (Tammsaare 1988: 648.)<sup>6</sup> It certainly has to do also with the writer himself. Tammsaare was convinced that every idea has to be thoroughly processed and letting the conclusions go to the absurd was the only way to understand the world and the human being in it.

In his study *Dostoyevsky is Realism* Sven Linner presents another quotation from Dostoyevsky that repeats the same idea: "I have my own view of reality (in art) and what most people call almost fantastic and exceptional is for me sometimes the very essence of the real." (Linner 1967:54)

The same "essence of the real" has an important role in Tammsaare's own creation as well. Setting his characters in the rural milieu, the writer stresses the character's inner disharmony and antagonism with the environment. Tammsaare's hero is functioning in realistic environs but he is not realistic. He/she almost never proceeds from what surrounds him, seeing it as he would like to see it after something was done to it and people as he would like them to be. These are characters who are dreaming and planning, not considering the reality. Here the rational wish to keep the environs under one's control and the totally irrational attitude to it has got mixed up. According to Daniel Palgi, the most influential Estonian literary critic of prose in the 1930s, Tammsaare had a great amount of observations about people; he sympathised with them and never got tired of depicting the blindman's buff they were all playing (Palgi 1940: 97–98).

Tammsaare pays serious attention to the fact that building everything on machinery and mind may have changed the people's mode of life but has certainly not changed the human character. The perception of reality based on rationality is subjected to man's irrational urges. That is why it seems more up to the point to concentrate on the irrationalism when we discuss Tammsaare's work, this is the key-word to realism as Tammsaare sees it.

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<sup>6</sup> Here and in the following translation of quotations from Estonian is mine – M. V.

This is also the reason why Tammsaare's work was exceptional among his Estonian contemporaries in the 1920s and 1930s. This period in literary spirituality was dominated by the urge outwards, the striving for enfolding the reality but quite often the aspiration was too much chained to the mundane, and thus only the very common reality was depicted. Tammsaare endeavoured to penetrate the core of man's existence and inner life while the majority of literature at the time concentrated on extensive outside phenomena and topical novelty (Nirk 1985:85).

Tammsaare created the vertical axis next to the horizontal. This enabled him to penetrate the human soul in its hidden nooks and crannies through which he could measure the so-to-say cosmic depth of the soul and the position of the human being in the universe. Friedrich Scholz has seen Tammsaare as one of the first existentialist authors in the world literature (Scholz 2001:136). Rein Veidemann has also written about the existential level of Tammsaare's works (Veidemann 2010).

Irrationalism in Tammsaare's work is not only his personal spiritual perception but was rather typical of the period. The issue of the relationship between the scientific and intuitive perception of the universe was current in the first half of the 20th century society. The scientific mechanisation of the world brought along uncertainty and doubt.

"How long ago, say, was the wireless invented? A few decades earlier everybody would have taken it for a fairytale. Nevertheless, it is a plain fact today. Couldn't numerous fairytales like that still be hidden in nature and in ourselves as a part of the latter?" Tammsaare wrote in 1937 (Tammsaare 1990: 225.) Every next invention and discovery could revoke the previous one, science became relative and its achievements shook its base and the so-called absolute principles. August Annist wrote in 1938: "In this context Tammsaare as a thinker belongs to the great movement that could be called the crisis of intellectualism in all walks of life. The first period of it was already the romanticism at the beginning of the 19th century, the re-appearance being signified by the neo-romantic, mystic, intuitive and some other trends. So it has continued from Dostoyevsky's irrationalism, Nietzsche's imperialism of conations, Bergson's intuitivism,

Hamsun and others' psychoanalysis up to the theology of crisis creating mystery [---]. Looking upon the matter from European perspective, Tammsaare is a philosopher of this great crisis, his main problem being the deficiency of pure intellect (and the individualist-egocentric, why not even hedonistic, culture construed on its basis). He is not a philosopher due to some fashionable trend but because of a deep personal need." (Annist 1938: 2.)

Tammsaare paid a lot of attention to the discourse on the paradoxical character of the mind in his work dealing with current affairs. In the articles published in the 1930s Tammsaare is keen on discussing the relationship between religion and intellect and concludes: "For some time now we have believed that our intellect is the saviour but it seems to be more interested in the tickle of man's urges and the perfection of the war-machines than the earthly happiness, the terrestrial paradise. Some say that intellect has up to now been the stoker at the fire of the hell that life is. Would it not be natural to ask then: who or what could save us from the intellect?" (Tammsaare 1990: 223–224.)

Stressing just this controversy in man's character, Tammsaare describes life in its contrariness and absurdity but does not offer any solutions or evaluations. Endel Nirk says that Tammsaare's diverse life canvas, problems left open and rational solutions refused, all of which gave his novels a sense of incompleteness, was quite new in Estonian literature (Nirk 1985: 80–81).

It is true that Tammsaare gives up rational solutions and prefers to create some mystique, a weird situation that allows the subdued emotions, hidden urges and passions of human nature to emerge or at least peep out for a moment.

It has not been researched in greater detail yet how Tammsaare makes use of this category of irrationalism in the poetics of his novels.

My article concentrates on drawing attention to five key words that expound Tammsaare's poetic methods of using irrationalism in his text. These so-called agents recur in the bigger part of Tammsaare's work. I think that these words are the most essential ones in Tammsaare's description of the man as an irrational being. These key words are *secrets* (A1), *landscape* (A2), *music* (A3), *eternal femininity* (A4) and *a jester-type character* (A5).



## A1: Secrets

Mysterious atmosphere, best revealed in secrets kept between the characters is typical of Tammsaare's work. Daniel Palgi was the first to draw attention to this feature, concluding that creating mystery was the continually developing artistic method in the writer's work (Palgi 1938: 32).

One of the expressions of this mystery is certainly the secretiveness of the characters. They have secrets that can be divided into two groups: first the ones between the characters or secrets of a certain character. These secrets are real and contain nothing unreal in them. However, they can be the starters for the characters' irrational conduct.

The second type is made up of unexplained secrets about which Tammsaare has remarked: "Might there be something really mysterious in the man himself, something that we know nothing about, just like we do not know several things in nature?" (Tammsaare 1990: 225.) This mysteriousness is perceived by the characters in themselves and in their environment but they can neither explain nor realise it as it is expressed in phenomena that they cannot control even if they try to.

The different types can sometimes blend and the characters may not be able to acknowledge why they are hiding something or, vice versa, want to expose it. Or why, after having taken a decision, they still behave contrary to it.

On condition that we take truth as rational, based on the intellectual world image and secrets as irrational and unexplainable, we can see the secrets of Tammsaare's characters as a crossroads of intellectual paradox: the intellect strives for explaining the world and the truth but simultaneously creates new secrets and puzzles, rejecting one explanation after another. Thus the secrets become mainsprings for actions and starters for events, even when the characters try to keep their life and destiny under control. These secrets may be mundane but the stress caused by concealing them creates a peculiar atmosphere and brings about situations where the characters do not behave rationally at all.

It is significant that secretiveness appears to be one of the main characteristic features of Tammsaare's heroes. Thus, for example



Tiina, whose character is woven into the fabric of the whole novel-saga *Tõde ja õigus* (Truth and Justice), would not reveal her secret that becomes an essential part of her. Karin, whose maid Tiina is, contemplates about her: “/.../ there it is, you live with the person a whole year under the same roof /-/ but you do not know that she has a secret that she shares with nobody. Karin would so much have liked to learn such a secret that somebody had shared with nobody.” (Tammsaare 1983: 218.)

Almost all Tammsaare's heroes and heroines have their own big secrets that often determine their destiny. The birth or revelation of the secret often means a turning point in the plot, the beginning of new events.

One of the most fateful secrets in the novel *Tõde ja õigus* is connected with the main hero Indrek and his mother Mari.

Indrek is Mari's first child fathered by Andres, the master of the Vargamäe farm, who asked Mari to help him with his children after his wife's death. Mari went to the farm and stayed there, causing Juss, her husband, to commit suicide. That is why for Mari Indrek was always connected with death. Indrek has perceived his mother's feeling of guilt and the stone he inadvertently throws at his mother becomes the symbol of this guilt for him. Owing to this the adult Indrek agrees to give his suffering mother a lethal dose of painkiller, as the most severe pain is just where the stone had hit her.

The secret so carefully kept – the stone and the matricide – is revealed in the hope of redemption only to his wife, the above-mentioned Karin. This secret is a sort of sacred foundation for Indrek and Karin's marriage. As the marriage has run upon the rocks, Karin reveals the secret to a stranger. Affected Indrek shoots at his wife and is taken to court.

This is only one of the examples of the complicated relationships between the characters, shaded by secrets and guilt. The example gives us at least three starts of events:

- Mari's secret conviction that Indrek is the child of sin due to Juss' suicide induces in Indrek an unexplainable feeling of guilt. Indrek becomes even more convinced of his guilt when the stone he throws causes his mother pain.
- Indrek's secret guilt makes him help his mother to die.

- Sharing the secret of his mother's death with Karin who reveals it brings on the shooting.

The domino effect that caused so many fatal events was actually a trifle – throwing a stone in a burst of frustration. It all happened in a realistic atmosphere, the characters and plot are true-to-life and alluring. But the episode gives birth to secrets that cause the next dominoes to fall in turn. This is a good example of Tammsaare depicting various levels in human life that are not subjected to the *ratio*.

The next example comes from the novel *Ma armastasin sakslast* (I Loved a German Girl). The turning point in Erika and Oskar's love is the moment of their meeting in the park. Erika is ready to compromise herself for the sake of love but Oskar does not want to do it. Erika has a secret on that evening that she refuses to share and that is revealed only in the letter she writes to Oskar before her death. She says, "[---] I do believe that if I then, when you were kneeling in front of me in the park, trying to beg and entice me to be sensible would have honestly told you what we had been talking about with grandfather and what we had agreed upon, you would have taken me up into your room and I would never have been so ashamed and humiliated as I was then and will probably be until I die. [---] Nobody, a third person, should have stood between us two, not even God or Jesus Christ. [---] But I could not forget and had no heart to break my promise and so everything followed that had to." (Tammsaare 1984: 190.)

The culmination of the love is thus a situation when the secret remains hidden, indicating the moment when the fate of the young people becomes resolved. Erika married another man and died when giving birth, having just before it written down the secret she was so sorry about not revealing before. The secret becomes a kind of metaphor in the writer's treatment of the subject – a seemingly random matter becomes fatal. Erika's grandfather sums it up, saying, "[---] I rather blame myself that I, at my old age, smelling of the dirt already, still attempted to guide life and love." (Tammsaare 1984: 173.)

More similar examples could be found in Tammsaare's other novels. What is essential about all these concealed secrets, though, is the fact that they formulate "the truly secretive in the man himself". It is the human dimension that signifies the limits of the rational self and cognisance.

Mystery is also present in the landscape (A2) of Tammsaare's work.

## A2: Landscape

Landscapes are an essential part of Tammsaare's work. The main venue of the novel *Tõde ja õigus* – *Vargamäe* – (two farms on an elevation amidst bogs and swamps) has become a meaningful and comprising keyword in Estonian culture. Although the plot carries the characters to urban environment even more than to the rural landscapes, the latter have obtained an especially powerful meaning.

"Everybody, however, is born in a certain landscape and atmosphere that create a special environment. [...] The postpartum environment of growing up gives roots to the inner being of a man, his spiritual, mental and corporal self," Tammsaare writes (Tammsaare 1990:18). The scenery he describes is often a reflection of the hero's state of mind or may be presented as factors that determine his fate; they are certainly an embodiment of some cosmic power or will that the human being is unable to control.

I am going to concentrate now on the two main toponyms in Tammsaare's fictional landscapes – Kõrboja and Vargamäe.

## Vargamäe

Vargamäe has become the stage for an archetypal Estonian to perform on. Toomas Liiv has compared Vargamäe to biblical landscapes, where the first people are Andres and Krõõt who start to make order in the chaos (Liiv 1997). Andres has been seen as Abraham, the forefather of the Jews, but also as Jacob who is fighting with his God. Thus Vargamäe is not only a real but also a sacral landscape with its so-to-say eternal people. We could take Vargamäe also as a kind of *michelfoucault-like* heterotopia that contains other



localities; as a place that contains all the past times and is beyond the time in a universal archive where the accumulation of time has no end (Foucault 1997).

Vargamäe is definitely not only a landscape but also an essential character in the first and fifth part of *Tõde ja õigus*. Tammsaare has given the first part of the pentalogy the subtitle "Man's fight with the land". This shows that Vargamäe is a symbol of the forces that cannot very well be dominated by man. The fight of Andres is not merely a fight that the farmer has to carry out with stones, boulders and excess water in his fields but much more – it is man's fight with irrational forces.

We could take Andres of Vargamäe for a mythical figure, a hero in a landscape that he wants to subordinate and change. His plans are practical – to dig ditches, dredge the river and irrigate the soil. His starting position is that the land has been given to man to make use of for obtaining necessary resources. Yuri Lotman considers Prospero in *The Tempest* by Shakespeare as the concentrate of this type hero. He is the ruler of natural forces who is to do away with the chance (Lotman 2007:74). Prospero managed to do it thanks to his awareness of the future. Andres tries to avoid the happenstance with his plans for the future, "trying to foresee what the soil, the dwarfed birch or pine and the scrubby spruce would be like when there are so and so many ditches in this and that direction." (Tammsaare 1981:13.)

Andres cannot control the happenstance or exile the future. He soon becomes aware that his will does not matter much and there is always something more hidden at Vargamäe the existence of which he had not even guessed. Good examples are the stones that Andres is picking up in the fields where new ones keep rising as if from nowhere.

The landscape has become the man's great opponent, like fate or God.

## Kõrboja

*Kõrboja peremees* (The Master of Kõrboja) might be called a landscape novel as well, that is a novel, where the topical connected



with the landscape gives the main message. Tammsaare himself compared Kõrboja with the Republic of Estonia that just recently had gained its independence. The land of Kõrboja in the novel has acquired a sacral undertone that is rather common when speaking about one's homeland.

The point is that instead of the real landscape imagined ideal landscapes are seen. Villu, the son of the Katku farmer, imagines how his hard work would put the farm in order; the owners of Kõrboja have only been dreaming and planning without realising any of their plans. The differences between the real and the ideal landscape are best revealed in the dreams of Rein, the master of Kõrboja.

"He has been dreaming of Kõrboja as of some wondrous fairyland with limitless possibilities and he has totally forgotten about the stones and swamps that are still waiting for being broken or irrigated. He has always felt better on the farm of his imagination than at real Kõrboja." (Tammsaare 1980: 31.) Both characters, Andres of Vargamäe and Rein of Kõrboja, treat their efforts and ideas about arranging the landscape more than merely aesthetic or having a practical purpose. For them it contains the meaning of life, furthermore – the redemption of the human being even.

The supernatural character of the landscape is emphasised in rather mystic components, like the heath and the lake. The heath is a sort of middle zone, where the characters are in between their real life and expectations or imaginations. They go there when they are bothered about their restlessness. Anna of Kõrboja, on the other hand, remembers that her aunt-in-law, the bride of her Uncle Oskar never went to the heath "as if it were the sojourn of wraiths and spirits" (ib. 5). The weird atmosphere connected with the heath influences the whole tone of the novel. The same mysterious veil hides the true story of Villu's eye – "Villu's first eye was gone in an intriguing and mysterious way. [...] And it becomes more important when the reader understands that it happened accidentally and Anna of Kõrboja was to blame." (Palgi 1938: 25.)

The heath being almost timeless, the lake would be a catalyst between different periods. The novel's most decisive events and the transformations of the main characters (as well as their relationships) take place at the lake.

Both components of the landscape emphasise the mysteriousness of nature, the purpose of which is to reflect the human character – the landscape stresses and reveals the unexplainable urges in human spirit, be it Villu's restlessness that drives him to drink and fights, Anna's insensible obsession that Villu must become the master of Kõrboja or Rein's image of the ideal Kõrboja.

In his article Toomas Haug treats the landscape in the novel as a sacral one "that is an Estonian backdrop to the birth of the Redeemer" (Haug 2010: 37). Haug attempts to prove it with a quotation from the end of the novel where the landscape becomes alive. The music that Rein of Kõrboja hears adds more mystery to the *genius loci* – "Kõrboja itself is chiming, the heath is sounding its pine trumpet on a spring evening; even the bog is ringing [---]. And the lake seems to echo it all, so that there is nothing else to do than go walking and listening how everything is stirring and ringing." (Tammsaare 1980: 134)

The third agent carrying the poetics of irrationalism is the sound of music.

### A3: Music

Music (*resp.* sound/resound) has a fixed meaning in Tammsaare's poetics. It signifies harmony between the inner and the outer. He has emphasised that in Goethe's work, for instance. "Goethe's realm kept expanding, becoming more spacious, reaching beyond the borders of the temporal, so that the outer sound of the language and the inner sound of the spirit fused evermore." (Tammsaare 1988: 225.)

In the novel *Kõrboja peremees* the ringing sound appears together with the image of the farm's rebirth. Rein is dreaming of how his entire farm would ring the sound reaching up to his heart and fill it. It could happen only when the inner (Rein's ideal landscape) and the outer (reality) would fuse and form a harmonious whole. It does happen at the end of the novel when "the golden days of Kõrboja begin" (Tammsaare 1980: 134). The Italian literary historian Celia Conterno Guglielminetti wrote about the novel in 1976, "I would not like to call the work a novel but a song, an

ancient folk song that has been revived by the author. This was my impression when I was reading the elegantly translated pages.” (Teder 1978: 734.)

In *Tõde ja õigus* the bogs and swamps are often alive with the ringing sound.

The motif of music appeared quite early in Tammsaare's work and it is especially noticeable in his *Miniatuurid* (Miniatures, published in 1915 as a book). Here music is connected to myths and the Bible and this might be seen as an attempt to get closer to the human being's mythical way of thinking that is not so much language- but symbol-centred. In the symbolist miniatures the writer strives for the world beyond the language, the world that tells it with music. Music becomes a poetic means for the writer to depict an elusive cognition or situation, as it cannot be explained how it influences the human soul. We might even say that in his miniatures Tammsaare experiments with transforming music as a transcendental phenomenon into literature.

Considering music as a motif, the best examples can be found in the story *Varjundid* (Nuances) that was produced in the same creative cycle as the miniatures. Anton Petrovich, one of the main characters of the story, who also has several features in common with the author himself, sketches a scheme that could represent Tammsaare's own philosophy of music. “He spoke about the wondrous influence music had over the sick and the healthy, over the humans and the animals. [---] Or could you really think that the realm of stones is deaf to music? Sprinkle some sand onto a thin plate then draw the bow over the edge of the plate and you will see what happens to the sand. What a miraculous rhythm it obtains when shifting! [---] But what is our Earth amidst all the other worlds in the universe if not a tiny speck of mud a piece of grit that begins to dance to music? Or what are the Sun, the North Star, the Pleiades, Ursa Major, and the Milky Way if not a piece of grit or a collection of specks of dust? Why then shouldn't they also be dominated by sounds of their cosmic music, their symphony, the music that makes the very space and everything in it shivers rhythmically. [---] Only music with its refinement and variety, its uncountable nuances can be used to explain the diversity of the visible world, the unique varie-



gation of the stones on my palm. Music was ringing in the space when our Earth had not been born yet and it will ring on after the human beings and their abodes will have been destroyed and gone, the Sun cooled down and the lodestar shifted..." (Tammsaare 1979: 62–63).

In this passionate speech A. P. sketches, among other things, the Pythagorean image of the music of the spheres (*musica universalis*) to which some of Tammsaare's keywords are also bound. The cosmic dimension even in a microcosm, the tiniest speck of dust, is essential in Tammsaare's world perception.

A biblical allusion can also be detected. The entire image of music as "a new gospel" that A.P. presents is the axis of the story (Tammsaare 1979: 109). And the music that sounded in the space before the Earth was born can be associated with the Spirit of God that moved upon the face of the waters before the light was created. (Genesis 1:1,2). A. P.'s point of view is that human beings can perceive the cosmic and the eternal through music. His concept of music also reveals the Schopenhauerean understanding of music, as the most direct expression of the universal will.

The short story *Viul* (Violin) has something of it, too, but indirectly. The heroine of the story, Miss Mardus, is like A. P. sure that the musical instrument has a soul of its own. She argues that her violin "is full of spirit [---], it has several souls and several spirits and these several souls and several spirits have all come upon me". (Tammsaare 1979: 47.) A. P. is really passionate in his explanation, "But wood and metal are influenced by sound, how else could one tune the violin or make the horn blare wrong. Who can say what happened to the shuddering violin when Paganini was bowing on it!" (Tammsaare 1979: 62)

The question whether objects "can hypnotise and suggest things to the living" (ib. 37) shows that Tammsaare is above all interested in the issue of freedom. How free can the human being actually be? Has he any control over his life or even over himself? What happens to him when Paganini touches his bow to his violin?

It seems that Miss Mardus is the mouthpiece of Freud here. She is an unconscious being, totally dependent on her insensible urges. Even the name of the heroine shows it – in Estonian *mardus* is a



banshee, a ghost of the dead. Or, in other words: the shadow side of the consciousness.

The unexplainable bond between Miss Mardus and her violin is an essential component in Tammsaare's concept of music – the link between the woman and a musical instrument, hinted already before. Tammsaare is seeking the same theory of love in the woman that music has come to tell the world. The short story *Viiul* links together the theory of love, the violin (*resp.* music) and the woman, creating an unconscious and even fatal attachment that, nevertheless, has something redeeming in it.

Thus the fourth agent of Tammsaare's poetic irrationalism is the redeeming virgin/woman.

#### A4: Eternal femininity

The so-called virginity issue is directly or indirectly present in almost every piece of Tammsaare's work. The bond between the woman and the theory of love is emphasised most clearly in his short story *Matus* (Funeral), in which the dead author Vanakamar cannot be buried before a virgin has kissed him.

The virgin in this short story is thus the receptacle of redemption or its mediator. Next to the corporal the eternal has been stressed and this binds writer Vanakamar's yearning for redemption to metaphysical spheres.

Being a virgin has the pivotal place in Tammsaare's play *Kuningal on külmal* (The King Feels Cold), where "not being touched by man" is the most valuable quality of the heroine Angela.<sup>7</sup> The image

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<sup>7</sup> The motifs of the play come from the Old Testament First Book of Kings. 1. Now King David was old and stricken in years; and they covered him with clothes, but he gat no heat. 2. Wherefore his servants said unto him, Let there be sought for my lord the king a young virgin: and let her stan before the king, and let her cherish him, and let her lie in thy bosom, that my lord the king may get heat. 3. So they sought for a fair damsel throughout all the coasts of Israel, and found Abishag a Shunamite, and brought her to the king. 4. And the damsel was very fair, and cherished the king, and ministered to him: but the king knew her not. ( Holy Bible (authorized King

of the virgin comes from the tradition of the great goddess and the virginal perfection reflects her metaphysical dimension (Koivunen 2008: 54). Tammsaare has been thinking of “the romantic dream about the rebirth of mankind through an innocent and simple woman who should cherish the one who is cold and scared in the mess of contemporary European culture.” (Tammsaare 1993: 353.) The role of Angela in the play is rather similar to what we could consider the eternal femininity like Solovyov and Dostoyevsky saw it<sup>8</sup>. Angela’s virginity is suitable to represent also the redeeming image that is attributed to Virgin Mary, but not an asexual one. She is bound to the earth and fecundity. Karlo sees and loves in Angela “the would-be generation and the mother of his children” (Tammsaare 1985: 152). Thus Angela is also representing the cycles of nature that propel the human being in time.

Undoubtedly the source of this “eternal femininity” and the metaphysical wisdom of the woman is J. W. Goethe and his *Das Ewigweibliche* that have an important role in his *Faust*. Tammsaare came upon the idea of Sophia as the divine wisdom not only in Goethe but also in Dostoyevsky. A good example is the story *Varjundid*. With Dostoyevsky, especially his *Crime and Punishment* Tammsaare shares first of all the name of the heroine – Sonya. This is the diminutive of the Russian Sofija that comes from Greek Σοφία (Sophia, Sofia). Dostoyevsky surely did not choose this name for his

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James Version, The World Publishing Company, New York) I Kings 1: 1,2,3,4.)

<sup>8</sup> The Russian philosopher of religion Vladimir Solovyov (1853–1900) considers Sophia the life-giving centre or the spirit of all the creation, the divine wisdom. One of the ways of her expression is the new cognition that appears when one falls in love, the human being changes and the change is reflected in his material environment and on the physical level. (Schipflinger 1997: 217–219). A Logos-centered man can recognize Sophia in the figure of a woman or some other elements, through the aesthetic experience of beauty or art. According to Solovyov, beauty is the appearance of Sophia and the recognition of the phenomenon inspires and exalts the man. In Solovyov's philosophy the world was neither unique nor dual but triadic. And Sophia is the third, linking or completing part, the transformative force, the link that creates the whole (Kornblatt 2009:27).

heroine haphazardly.<sup>9</sup> Dostoyevsky's Sonya was the embodiment of eternal femininity and its elevating influence; and indeed, gives a new breath to the Sonya of Tammsaare's *Varjundid* as well.

The woman as nature and the woman as the bearer of the metaphysical (the mysterious, the revelation) wisdom can both be treated as the eternal femininity in Tammsaare's poetics. The uncontrolled "primeval" force enters the men's realistic world outlook just through women. Here some criticism can be detected – the men's world has become technical (machines and industry) in its rationality and thus also something that is destroying itself. The final points in Tammsaare's work illustrate this statement quite well. The male characters (Indrek, Villu, Oskar) who have all tried to control their lives with ratio and still come into a blind alley either commit suicide or trust their fate into the hands of a woman. Women are the ones to carry on life. The point is the clearest in the climax of the novel *Kõrboja peremees*, where two women start to bring up the true master (man) of the farm together.

The irrationality of Tammsaare's female characters does not express itself only through their virginity. The jester may also appear in a woman and this type is the last agent of irrational poetics in the present article.

### A5: The Jester-type character

The archpriest in the play *Kuningal on külm* says that the world belongs to the woman and the jester.

The Jester as a character occurs in the play *Kuningal on külm* but several main characters also possess features typical of a jester. Some literary critics drew attention to the fact already in the late 1930s. They found that Tammsaare could reveal the unconsciousness – "functioning of the factors in real life" that prevents the logical cognition from dominating.

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<sup>9</sup> Dostoyevsky's warm relationship with Solovyov began in 1873, the philosopher has been considered as the prototype for Alyosha in the *Brothers Karamazovs* (Kornblatt 2009: 18).



Y. Lotman has created a triad – a fool – a wizard – a madman, in which the third element madness is expressed in the freedom to violate the rules and behave in a way that is not allowed for a “normal” human being. “Madman’s” incalculable actions are effective due to unpredictability that staggers the opponent. Stereotypical behaviour becomes senseless and the “normal” adversary is defenceless. (Lotman 2001: 52–54.)

The antics of the fool that are those of Lotman’s “madman” and venturing beyond borders are synchronous. Through the fool (or jester) unexpected events may penetrate into life and become starters for new processes. Tammsaare’s fools are provocative, talkative, naïve and simple, sometimes transcendental in their being – total antipodes to their adversaries (e.g. Jürka of Põrgupõhja, Pearu, and Maurus).

The relationship between the legendary characters of Andres and Pearu in the first part of the novel *Tõde ja õigus* serves as a good example of the fool’s behaviour. Pearu has a very special role: the archetype of the jester. The antagonism between Andres and Pearu becomes the axis that supports such antipodes of the following novels.

Andres arrives at Vargamäe as a creator, as somebody whose purpose is to put everything in order. He is convinced that his hard work will help him to control the world that he has created. Andres expects that he would be able to change and “improve” nature. Pearu is the embodiment of chaos that brings unpredictability and senselessness into Andres’s life.

Pearu’s antics in the novel start new events but also make Andres philosophise and think about the world. Andres and Pearu are like some Ancient Greek philosophers who argue in the agora and strive for finding the truth in their controversy.

Indrek and Karin, the married couple in the fourth part of the novel *Tõde ja õigus* are the same kind of opposites – Indrek wants to analyse and systematise the world, Karin doubts. Her aim is to get to the total truth, to reveal everything that is hidden and concealed, although she is never satisfied with any truth at all. Next to Angela in the play *Kuningal on külm*, Karin is another female jester in Tammsaare’s work.

Karin doubts Indrek’s truths and values. In her inability to understand she is actually the one who tells the truth that Indrek does not want to hear. She is not a standard character in the contemporary



society either as she makes Indrek's secrets and details of their private life public. Her uncontrolled behaviour only increases Indrek's inner crisis that finally is concluded in tragedy.

Karin is the embodiment of irrational urges (love, yearning for power and guilt) and she unleashes these urges in other people also. Her role in the novel could be described with the same words Mikhail Bahtin uses to describe the function of the fool in the development of the novel (Bahtin 1987).

Several other antipodes, "adversary pairs" can be found in other novels by Tammsaare.

These pairs give the writer an opportunity to create an existentialist confrontation: the human being on the one and the cosmic (irrational) forces on the other side. In this controversy Indrek and Andres are in the mercy of these uncontrolled forces and in their crossing point, being unable to anything as the human being is a part of the space/universe.

It goes without saying that the question: who is closer to the truth, the wise or the mad, naturally follows. The starters for the discussion and/or those to tell the truth are certainly those who are "queer", a bit mad, and who make public what the consciousness would prefer to repel or keep hidden.

## Summing up

Tammsaare's realism is tightly bound with irrationalism. Many more examples could be found in his work to show the human as an irrational being. The agents I preferred are the most conspicuous and solid when speaking about the poetics of the writer's work. Using these five elements in different variations we arrive at the pattern of Tammsaare's method to depict reality. While composing his work Tammsaare uses a basis, one part of which is irrationality as a substantial component of human reality/life. In order to outline it, he uses the keywords that I drew attention to in this article, the keywords that are the main features of the writer's poetics.

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## *Desarrollo del contrato ficcional en dos subgéneros de la ciencia ficción: dura y prospectiva*

### 1. Los contratos de ficción proyectivos

A menudo el estudioso de los géneros narrativos choca con los diversos problemas de la literatura de ciencia ficción. Uno de esos problemas es la pluralidad de subgéneros que la constituyen, pluralidad que produce la evidente confusión ante sus límites y ante las obras que podrían adscribirsele<sup>1</sup>. Además escasean los trabajos académicos en español mediante los cuales pueda ser orientado el profano. Por todo ello, para facilitar el acercamiento al género, comenzaré por una definición: «Literatura proyectiva basada en fenómenos no sobrenaturales» (Moreno 2010: 71), donde por «ficción proyectiva» entenderíamos toda aquella construcción ficcional no encuadrable en la literatura «realista»<sup>2</sup>. Por lo general, dado el desafortunado nombre del género<sup>3</sup>, siempre se ha entendido como

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<sup>1</sup> Otros problemas habituales son: el exceso de obras centradas en pura formulación, los personajes poco complejos y la huida de los discursos estéticos tradicionales (Jameson (2005: 11), las presiones de cierta crítica hispanista obsesionada con el realismo (Santiáñez-Tió 1995: 34-5; Roas y Casas 2008) y la casi absoluta ausencia de referencias en manuales de historia de la literatura o en programaciones de educación secundaria e incluso universitaria.

<sup>2</sup> Por «realista», evidentemente, no refiero al movimiento literario decimonónico, sino a la literatura donde no se desarrolla ningún acontecimiento que entre en conflicto con los supuestos del mundo empírico de la sociedad en la cual se ha escrito el texto. En la ficción proyectiva entrarían la literatura maravillosa, la fantástica y la propia ciencia ficción. Para un estado de la cuestión, cfr. D. Roas (2001). Para un repaso bibliográfico de estudios en español, tanto sobre literatura maravillosa como fantástica, cfr. J.M. Sardiñas (2006).

<sup>3</sup> Propuesto por el editor estadounidense en la primera mitad del siglo XX por Hugo Gernsback para vender más ejemplares de su revista *Amazing Stories* y criticado en numerosas ocasiones (Scholes y Rabkin 1977: 36).



«ciencia ficción» aquella narrativa que emplea futuros avances científicos como *novum* de los esquemas narrativos<sup>4</sup>. No obstante, la importancia de la ciencia empírica como principio narrativo ha decrecido con las sucesivas décadas y con los diferentes movimientos literarios<sup>5</sup>. Algunos autores incluso han descalificado las líneas más «duras», es decir, los relatos más centrados en la descripción de tecnología que en lo literario, llegando a excluirlas de la ciencia ficción y considerándolas un género aparte (J.I. Ferreras 1972: 24–33).

Por otro lado, en cuanto a la aceptación de estas novelas más «científicas» dentro de los estudios académicos, sus complejas relaciones entre literatura y ciencia exigen contemplarlas con detenimiento. Al fin y al cabo, la teoría literaria contemporánea ya no admite cotos cerrados, sino que aspira a no despreciar ninguna línea sin antes plantearse los efectos en los lectores que disfrutan de cada obra o las diferentes redes de significados que pueden construirse desde el texto o incluso desde fuera de él.

Desde esta problemática, propongo ciertos fundamentos teóricos sobre la naturaleza ficcional de estas «novelas científicas» y sobre el tipo de experiencia estética que persiguen, en contraposición con otro subgénero: la ficción prospectiva.

En este sentido, resulta sobradamente conocido el concepto de «pacto de ficción», por el cual un lector que se acerca a una obra literaria establece un acuerdo tácito más o menos inconsciente con el texto y da por cierto lo que en él se cuenta, suspendiendo la incredulidad. No obstante, todos sabemos que no resulta tan sencillo suspender la incredulidad en unos textos como en otros. Podríamos añadir que incluso existe cierto tipo de textos en los que esta suspensión obedece a reglas culturales muy específicas. Evidentemente, la

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<sup>4</sup> Como explicación de dicho mecanismo, Darko Suvin (1979: 94) acuñó el término «*novum*», que se ha mantenido hasta hoy para designar la variable argumental que es imposible sin ser sobrenatural y que impulsa toda la estética narrativa de una obra de ciencia ficción. Para un análisis en español sobre el término, cfr. N. Novell (2008: 201–6).

<sup>5</sup> El más importante fue la *New Wave* anglosajona, con autores como J. G. Ballard, B. W. Aldiss o T. S. Disch, que mostraron mayor interés por las aplicaciones literarias que por la exposición científica.

aceptación de una hagiografía, por ejemplo, por parte de un lector será diferente según el sistema religioso que acepte, así como la creencia en una teoría científica podrá predisponer a dicho lector para el éxito o el fracaso del pacto de ficción<sup>6</sup>.

En este sentido, el tipo de pacto de ficción asumido es lo que produce unos subgéneros narrativos u otros. Ninguno de ellos implica una mayor o una menor intensidad de la ficción<sup>7</sup>, pero sí es cierto que cuesta por lo general un mayor esfuerzo acceder a los géneros proyectivos que a los «realistas» (Forster 1927: 112–3).

Este planteamiento conllevará las críticas de algunos lectores posmodernos que dudan de cualquier apriorismo sobre el conocimiento de la realidad (Feyerabend 1975: 120–3). Sin embargo, la ficción proyectiva se escribe y se lee por lo general desde una determinada concepción de la realidad y, por consiguiente, no considero que sean relevantes a la hora de analizar los géneros desde los principios que propongo, aunque ya existan algunos estudios interesantes al respecto<sup>8</sup>. Podemos incluir aquí, por tanto, los tres grandes géneros proyectivos: la literatura de ciencia ficción (con sus numerosos subgéneros: prospectiva, *hard* (o «dura»), utopía, distopía, ucronía, viajes en el tiempo, ciberpunk, *steampunk*...), la literatura mara-

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<sup>6</sup> El presente artículo parte de la consideración previa de un lector modelo occidental educado en parámetros científicos de cultura general. Espero que futuros acercamientos desde otros parámetros culturales complementen el estudio de las ficciones proyectivas, como empieza a ocurrir (Ochiagha 2008; Marimón 2009).

<sup>7</sup> Para un buen resumen de las teorías de la ficción, cfr. L. Dolezel (1997: 13–54) en una obra cuyas propuestas sobre la ficción comparto.

<sup>8</sup> Para las relaciones entre la visión posmoderna de la realidad y la literatura fantástica, cfr. D. Roas (2009). La constatación de unos géneros diferentes de los «realistas» es necesaria para destacar la escasa relación entre ellos y para explicar su estética, enriqueciendo con ello su lectura. A menudo, al analizar textos proyectivos se realizan requiebros o interminables enumeraciones para referirse a los diversos tipos. Entre ellos solo hay un elemento común: fenómenos dados por imposibles desde las leyes físicas en el momento de escritura (Fernández 1991: 288–9; D.F. Ferreras 1995: 102–3; Roas 2001: 18–9).

villosa (con sus también numerosos subgéneros: absurdo, realismo mágico, fantasía heroica...) y la literatura fantástica<sup>9</sup>.

Cada uno de estos géneros plantea en sí mismo una manera diferente de enfrentar esa suspensión de la incredulidad y, por consiguiente, el pacto de ficción. La elección no es baladí, sino que conlleva en sí misma implicaciones estéticas de todo tipo, aparte de las evidentes digresiones filosóficas, sociales, políticas...

Todas estas maneras de enfrentar el pacto conllevan, respectivamente, una serie de cláusulas, cuya transgresión provoca la ruptura del pacto de ficción, con las consiguientes frases coloquiales: «Me ha sacado de la novela» o «Esto yo no me lo creo».

De este modo, aceptamos cláusulas proyectivas como: recursos mágicos o paradojas cómicas o mecanismos del futuro, según el género, por la coherencia interna del texto y conforme a una tradición genérica a la que se adhiere, asumiéndola como horizonte de expectativas. Así, en *The Lord of Rings* (Tolkien 1954-5), un lector que aceptara el pacto de ficción no tendría problemas ante el hecho de que Gandalf haga brillar su bastón mágico (cláusula del subgénero de la fantasía heroica, dentro de la literatura maravillosa), pero no entendería que en el último capítulo apareciera un ordenador con más inteligencia que nosotros (cláusula de la ciencia ficción). Del mismo modo, asumiría la existencia del ordenador inteligente en *2001: A Space Odyssey* (Clarke 1968), pero no aceptaría que en medio de la nave Voyager un elfo lanzara una flecha mágica.

En realidad, cada género implica lo que podemos llamar un «contrato de ficción», con unas cláusulas particulares que propician unos desarrollos estéticos-narrativos u otros, vinculados con las necesidades del relato y con las inquietudes del autor.

Cada contrato de ficción implica una manera de entender las relaciones entre realidad y ficción, por lo que su influencia afecta –si se desarrolla con coherencia estética– a todos los niveles retóricos

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<sup>9</sup> No encuentro convincentes los argumentos de Alazraki (1990) sobre una línea «neofantástica» que separe en géneros diferentes a Borges o Cortázar de Hoffmann o Lovecraft. Por ello me sumo a teóricos más puristas, como R. Campra (2008) o el ya citado D. Roas entre los remendadores del desaguisado que dejó T. Todorov (1970), al continuar la estela de las primerizas aproximaciones de Tomashevski (1925: 218-9).



(Moreno 2010: 217–35) con consecuencias estéticas propias que el lector identifica más allá de la anécdota temática, a un nivel más profundo (Moreno 2010: 177–81).

## 2. El contrato «duro»

### 2.1. Definición

Me interesa ahora, entre todos estos contratos, señalar como ejemplo el del subgénero *hard* de la ciencia ficción, cuyo término traduciré por «dura» a partir de aquí<sup>10</sup>. Se trata quizás del más conocido, porque guarda ciertas similitudes con la primitiva novela científica de Verne que tanto ha despistado a los profanos<sup>11</sup>.

La ciencia ficción dura se basa en un nóvum desarrollado con cierta obsesión por la veracidad científica y su desarrollo tecnológico, es decir, «Ciencia ficción derivada del riguroso desarrollo de una tecnología»<sup>12</sup>.

Dentro de las cláusulas del contrato duro se encuentra la de la argumentación técnica, realizada de la manera más divulgativa posible y a menudo como un juego a la vez literario e intelectual (Csicsery-Ronay 2008: 112–116)<sup>13</sup>. Por ello, muchas obras duras se

<sup>10</sup> No encuentro razones de peso para no españolizar el término, aparte de la mera costumbre.

<sup>11</sup> Para la separación entre la novela científica de Verne y el género de ciencia ficción que la superaría, remito de nuevo a J. I. Ferreras (1972: 24–33).

<sup>12</sup> Para una bibliografía sobre el subgénero, cfr. Samuelson 2009.

<sup>13</sup> Al fin y al cabo, dentro de la ciencia ficción pero fuera del subgénero duro, podemos encontrar otras obras que no contradicen leyes de la física, pero que tampoco dan demasiadas explicaciones sobre el nóvum. Por ejemplo, U. K. Le Guin une dos sociedades antagónicas (capitalista y anarquista) por medio de un cohete espacial, en su excelente novela *The Dispossessed*, pero no se molesta en explicar hasta el último detalle cómo funciona el cohete. A Le Guin le interesa solo el desarrollo político-social y, por ello, jamás se le adscribe al subgénero duro. Un caso parecido es el de *Dying Inside* (Silverberg 1972), que sin plantear ningún efecto desasosegador propio del género fantástico (es decir, respecto al horror de



transforman en meras excusas ficcionales para la especulación sobre desarrollo tecnológico, como en el caso de *The Fountains of Paradise* (Clarke 1979). Otras, por el contrario, consiguen fundir estas explicaciones con mundos estéticos coherentes, tramas interesantes y personajes que no son meras comparsas actanciales, como *Mundos en el abismo* (Aguilera y Redal 1988).

## 2.2. El sentido de la maravilla en la ciencia ficción dura: *Distress*, de Greg Egan

Como ejemplo de las cuestiones referentes al contrato de ciencia ficción dura, me centraré en el ejemplo paradigmático de *Distress*, por ser quizás las más conocida y accesible de su autor y una de las más representativas del subgénero. Además reúne compendiadas, a mi juicio, las características más comunes de este tipo de contrato: el tópico del personaje científico, la visión materialista de la existencia y la firme creencia en la potencialidad del ser humano, centrado en la obsesión por el progreso humano a partir de la tecnología, que habrá de aportar incluso modelos utópicos de sociedad. Leamos un ejemplo, en boca de un personaje científico:

The universe can't hide anything: forget all that anthropomorphic Victorian nonsense about «prising out nature's secrets». The universe can't lie; it just what it does, and there's nothing else to it (Egan 1995: 77).

Suppose every human being was wiped off the face of the planet tomorrow, and we waited a few million years for the next species with a set of religious and scientific cultures to arise. What do you think the new religions would have in common with the old ones –the ones from our time? I suspect the only common ground would be certain ethical principles which could be traced to shared biological influences: sexual reproduction, child rearing, the advantages of altruism, the awareness of death. And if the biology was very different, there might be no overlap at all.

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que interpretemos mal la realidad), tampoco entra en explicaciones científicas para explicar la telepatía de su protagonista.

But if we waited for the new scientific culture to come up with their idea of a TOE, then I believe that – however different it looked «on paper» – it would be something which either culture would be able to show was mathematically equivalent in every respect to our TOE... just as any physics undergraduate can prove that all the forms of Maxwell's Equations describe exactly the same thing (ib. 100).

El contrato de ficción dura asume que muchos (rehuiré, tímido, el escribir: «todos los») problemas de la humanidad se resolverán gracias al buen uso de la tecnología y al rechazo de otro tipo de «distracciones». Una característica derivada de ello sería la pasión por las descripciones tecnológicas y las extensas digresiones acerca del funcionamiento de la realidad desde una óptica científica y tecnológica, como puede observarse en numerosos pasajes de *Distress* (como ejemplo: 123).

A menudo, estas descripciones digresivas devoran la trama para convertir el texto en una novela de tesis, en detrimento del equilibrio narrativo. Por ejemplo, en un extenso pasaje de la novela (98–102), una brillante científica desarrolla una prolija crítica acerca de las diferentes sectas anti-ciencia que existen en la sociedad futura planteada. Puede detectarse sin problemas una crítica a las corrientes místicas, neoplatónicas, religiosas... que el autor considera poco ilustradas (98–108). El recurso no implica por sí mismo ningún problema estético, pero es tal la explicitación de valoraciones acerca de estas visiones del mundo que se rompe la cohesión cuando encontramos interrupciones en el discurso – de repente, sin justificación estética ni narrativa – para expresar que el protagonista de pronto se ha acordado de su ex-amante o de un contrato (99). Es decir, el discurso de tesis queda incómodamente roto por la irrupción de la psicología o de la narrativa en medio de un mero discurso argumentativo<sup>14</sup>. Cualquier enemigo del género podría afirmar: «el autor ha olvidado que la literatura de ciencia ficción es literatura». No obstante, dejemos al autor muerto posmodernamente e intente-

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<sup>14</sup> Otro ejemplo lo descubrimos solo con contar el número de páginas con digresiones científicas de al menos cinco o seis líneas: 45 en las primeras 105 páginas de la edición española.

mos comprender el éxito de este texto, incluso fuera de los círculos científicos.

Lo que funciona a lo largo de estos pasajes es el sentido de la maravilla, presente en numerosas obras y experiencias a lo largo de la historia: desde las descripciones de la guerra de Troya hasta el síndrome Stendhal, pasando por toda la épica medieval, la forma de mirar el mundo de don Quijote, la descripción de las barricadas en *Les misérables*, la proyectiva manera en que recorre las calles la sangre de Santiago Nasar en *Crónica de una muerte anunciada* o, en *Distress*:

I inhaled deeply, studying the events which followed the inrush of air. And I could trace the sweetness of the odour and the cooling of the nasal membranes, the satisfying fullness of the lungs, the surge of blood, the clarity delivered to the brain... all back to the TOE.

My claustrophobia evaporated. *To inhabit this universe – to coexist with anything – I had to be matter.* Physics was not a cage; its delineation between the possible and the impossible was the bare minimum that existence required. And the broken symmetry of the TOE – hacked out of the infinite paralysing choices of pre-space – was the bedrock on which I stood (ib. 335–6).

Estos pasajes científicos cumplen una función similar a las descripciones de Galdós de la batalla de Trafalgar:

La metralla inglesa rasgaba el velamen como si grandes e invisibles uñas le hicieran trizas. Los pedazos de obra muerta, los trozos de madera, los gruesos obenques, segados cual haces de espigas; los motones que caían, los trozos de velamen, los hierros, cabos y demás despojos arrancados de su sitio por el cañón enemigo, llenaban la cubierta, donde apenas había espacio para moverse. De minuto en minuto caían al suelo o al mar multitud de hombres llenos de vida; las blasfemias de los combatientes se mezclaban a los lamentos de los heridos, de tal modo que no era posible distinguir si insultaban a Dios los que

morían o le llamaban con angustia los que luchaban (Pérez Galdós 1873: 165).

O a las que despliega el individuo a partir del gozo de una suntuosa fiesta en la naturaleza en *Diana enamorada*:

Salieron luego de través seis ninfas vestidas de raso carmesí, guarnecido con follajes de oro y plata, puestos sus cabellos en torno de la cabeza, cogido con unas redes anchas de hilo de oro de Arabia, llevando ricos prendedores de rubines y esmeraldas, de los cuales sobre sus fuentes caían unos diamantes de extremadísimo valor (Gil Polo 1564: 277).

En ambos ejemplos, el texto contiene elementos vinculables con el asombro y la desmesura: «como si grandes e invisibles uñas le hicieran trizas» o «sobre sus fuentes caían unos diamantes de extremadísimo valor». Se trata de la vieja sensación de lo sublime: «La categoría de lo sublime es provocada por un *exceso* o *desmesura* de naturaleza humana, no natural» (Trías, 1988: 128). En los contratos de ficción dura, el individuo siente esta misma desmesura emocional ante la comprensión intelectual de la naturaleza o la percepción del progreso tecnológico (Egan 1995: 20).

A partir de aquí, el lector modelo del subgénero duro asimila perfectamente esta manera de mirar y entiende la obra en su conjunto como una obra lírica en la que el detallismo embriagador cumple una función similar al desarrollado por muchas obras realistas.

Un posible problema para el crítico tradicional surgiría cuando se sintiera capaz de apreciar este lirismo en las calles del *Cuarteto de Alejandría*:

Never had the early dawn-light seemed so good to Nessim. The city looked to him as brilliant as a precious stone. The shrill telephones whose voices filled the great stone buildings in which the financiers really lived, sounded to him like the voices of great fruitful mechanical birds. They glittered with a pharaonic youthfulness. The trees in the park had been rinsed down by an unaccustomed dawn rain. They were covered in brilliants and looked like great contented cats at their toilet (Durrell 1957: 167).



Pero quizás no en un pasaje como este:

I have symbionts providing a second, independent immune system anyway. But who knows what's coming along next? I'll be prepared, whatever it is. Not by anticipating the specifics – which no one could ever do – but by making sure that no vulnerable cell in my body still speaks the same biochemical language as any virus on Earth (Egan 1995: 20–1).

Para el análisis no importa tanto afirmar el valor poético del propio discurso como señalar el ámbito de interés estético para el lector modelo de este tipo de contrato de ficción. A dicho lector modelo este lirismo «científico» le importa a menudo más que otros elementos literarios. Por ello, en estas obras, frente a este interés pueden encontrarse recursos de escaso valor estético y narrativo como forzadas descripciones físicas de los personajes, insulsas referencias al vestuario, excesivos diálogos y, si la trama lo requiere, sobreabundancia de científicas descripciones espaciales, herencia del estilo de Isaac Asimov y de otros autores duros de los años cuarenta y cincuenta, en detrimento de otros tipos de descripciones más vinculadas con la complejidad psicológica o con lo emocional o con la belleza del propio discurso.

Como ya he afirmado, esta línea tiene un claro antecedente en el cientificismo de algunas obras de Verne, donde se encuentra un placer discutiblemente estético en la exposición de cálculos, sin otro tipo de lirismo que los sublime:

Ainsi un litre de poudre pèse environ deux livres (–900 grammes [La libre américaine est de 453 gr.]; il produit en s'enflammant quatre cents litres de gaz, ces gaz rendus libres, et sous l'action d'une température portée à deux mille quatre cents degrés, occupent l'espace de quatre mille litres. Donc le volume de la poudre est aux volumes des gaz produits par sa déflagration comme un est à quatre mille. Que l'on juge alors de l'effrayante poussée de ces gaz lorsqu'ils sont comprimés dans un espace quatre mille fois trop resserré (Verne 1865: 46).

No obstante, autores como Egan no se limitan a disfrutar de los cálculos, sino que buscan con ahínco ese lirismo en las ideas subyacentes y, con cierta intención de crear efectos sublimes, plantean una semiosfera de maravilloso progreso que nos produce sentidos nuevos al chocar con la sociedad en la que vivimos. Por eso, el contrato de ficción dura es transgresor desde la utopía científica, es decir, crea compasión y temor respecto a nuestra propia realidad, en comparación con las maravillas prometidas, como en el siguiente pasaje:

I was the Keystone. I'd explained the universe into being, wrapped it around the seed of this moment, layer after layer of beautiful convoluted necessity. The blazing wasteland of galaxies, twenty billion years of cosmic evolution, ten billion human cousins, forty billion species of life – the whole elaborate ancestry of consciousness flowed out of this singularity. I had no need to reach out and imagine every molecule, every planet, every face. This moment encode them all (Egan 1995: 337).

Por último, a menudo la destrucción de la trama consiste en el desarrollo – ligeramente hilvanado por un personaje o un tenue conflicto – de numerosas ideas científicas sin tensión dramática ni función narrativa.

De nuevo, *Distress* resulta paradigmática, aunque podemos encontrar esta tendencia también en muchas otras obras. En *The Forge of God* (Bear 1987), por ejemplo, los personajes aparecen y desaparecen como meros espectadores que permiten describir científicamente las diferentes maneras en que es destruido el planeta Tierra.

Pese a las evidentes diferencias estéticas, la obsesión de un autor por plasmar una realidad política, por ejemplo, no se diferencia en esencia de la obsesión de otro por literaturizar hipótesis científicas. La ciencia ficción dura se basa, por tanto, en la belleza de la verdad científica y en la de las próximas verdades que aún hemos de descubrir mediante la ciencia. Para un amplio espectro de lectores, el análisis de la realidad física desde la ciencia – con un lirismo propio – no desmerece respecto a los intereses de una crítica feminista que vanaglorie obras literariamente débiles o de un crítico historicista

que edite una obra de vigencia estética ya agotada pero de valores históricos indudables.

El lector que acepta estas cláusulas ficcionales puede encontrar satisfechos sus intereses estéticos. Por consiguiente, la valoración crítica de una obra de ciencia ficción dura debería partir siempre de este presupuesto, pues de lo contrario los intereses estéticos del crítico anularían, con su horizonte de perspectivas viciado, enriquecedores acercamientos a dicha obra.

### 3. El contrato prospectivo

#### 3.1. Definición

El caso de la narrativa prospectiva me ha resultado interesante para contrastar contratos de ficción proyectivos. La propuesta de la etiqueta corresponde a J. Díez (2008 y 2009), quien con ella pretende desvincular el género prospectivo de la ciencia ficción, creando una correspondencia a cuatro bandas:

<b>Subgénero de literatura proyectiva</b>	<b>Cláusula del contrato de ficción o «rasgo proyectivo dominante»</b>	<b>Efecto (relación con la realidad)</b>
Maravillosa	Fenómeno sobrenatural	Maravilloso
Fantástica	Fenómeno sobrenatural	Traumático
Ciencia ficción	Fenómeno plausible	Maravilloso
Prospectiva	Fenómeno plausible	Traumático

En efecto, la narrativa prospectiva es aquella que plantea un mundo futuro plausible, pero que busca transmitir una sensación de desasosiego ante la humanidad o ante su destino. Así, la literatura prospectiva plantea una realidad alternativa plausible que conlleva una fuerte crítica cultural a algún nivel: social, político, económico, ideológico... Obras prospectivas célebres son *A Clockwork Orange* (Burgess 1962), *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (Orwell 1949), *Brave New*

*World* (Huxley 1932) o películas como *Blade runner*, *Soylent Green* o *Gattaca*<sup>15</sup>.

### 3.2. La superación del humanismo idealista o La estética del caos:

*The Road*, de Cormac McCarthy

Como vemos, los contratos ficcionales de la ciencia ficción dura y de la ficción prospectiva se plantean desde «cláusulas de relación con la realidad» muy diferentes. Mientras que la ciencia ficción dura observa su mundo maravilloso como algo deseable e incluso validado por las leyes de la naturaleza, la literatura prospectiva sitúa al lector en un punto similar al del espectador de la tragedia que define Aristóteles, impotentes ante una realidad durísima que bien podría ser la nuestra. Este juego entre lo verosímil necesario y lo imposible (Aristóteles 1451b, 1460a y 1461b) despierta nuestra compasión hacia los personajes y el temor de que nosotros pudiéramos vernos en una situación semejante (1453b). Puede observarse en casi cualquier novela prospectiva de J.G. Ballard; por ejemplo, *High Rise* (1975) – donde vecinos de un rascacielos que colma todas las necesidades terminan por matarse mediante una primitiva lucha por el poder – o *Crash* (1973), novela en la cual profundas pulsiones sexuales se subliman a través de la fascinación producida por los accidentes automovilísticos (99).

Un excelente ejemplo prospectivo, tan representativo como *Distress* respecto a la ciencia ficción dura, es *The Road* (McCarthy 2006). En esta demoledora novela, el mundo ha quedado devastado por un feroz incendio que ha terminado con prácticamente todos los animales del planeta y, desde luego, con toda la vegetación. ¿Una guerra nuclear? ¿Alguna catástrofe natural como la caída de un meteoro? No se explica la causa. Lo cierto es que los escasos humanos supervivientes viven de la comida enlatada que queda, aunque pasados los años esta escasea:

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<sup>15</sup> Algunos ejemplos de prospectiva española son *La invención de Morel* (Bioy Casares 1940) y *Quizás el viento nos lleve al infinito* (Torrente Ballester 1984).



Late in the year. He hardly knew the month. He thought they had enough food to get through the mountains but there was no way to tell. The pass at the watershed was five thousand feet and it was going to be very cold. He said that everything depended on reaching the coast, yet waking in the night he knew that all of this was empty and no substance to it. There was a good chance they would die in the mountains and that would be that (McCarthy 2006: 24).

En medio de este horror, un padre acompaña a su hijo de ocho años a lo largo de una carretera hasta el mar, por si hay suerte de que el chico lo vea antes de morir.

Como *Distress*, esta obra plantea una realidad que no contradice ninguna ley de la naturaleza. El lector solo deduce que no existen razones científicas que nieguen esta la posibilidad de esta situación. Pero si ocurriera se vería la pequeñez del ser humano, sin que la anécdota de tal o cual momento histórico pueda despistar de las inquietudes que la obra implica.

En este sentido, la novela prospectiva no se basa necesariamente en ninguna ideología positivista, como el materialismo histórico, ni en planteamientos ideológicos totalizadores como el feminismo o el conductismo. No pretende ser una novela de tesis, sino un desarrollo posmoderno que aparte al ser humano de su camino para que pueda mirarlo desde la cuneta. En resumen, su lirismo y su traslación de obsesiones psicológicas humanas son más fuertes que la necesidad de exponer postulados ideológicos o religiosos, provocando una ambigua e incluso contradictoria indefinición:

God knows what those eyes saw. He got up to pile more wood on the fire and he raked the coals back from the dead leaves. The red sparks rose in a shudder and died in the blackness overhead. The old man drank the last of his coffee and set the bowl before him and leaned toward the heat with his hands out. The man watched him. How would you know if you were the last man on earth? he said. I dont guess you would know it. You'd just be it. Nobody would know it. It wouldnt make any difference. When you die it's the same as if everybody else did too.

I guess God would know it. Is that it?  
 There is no God.  
 No?  
 There is no God and we are his prophets.  
 I dont understand how you're still alive. How do you eat?  
 I dont know.  
 You dont know?  
 People give you things.  
 People give you things.  
 Yes.  
 To eat.  
 To eat. Yes.  
 No they dont.  
 You did.  
 No I didnt. The boy did (McCarthy 2006: 143–4).

En el caso de la literatura prospectiva, la mera relación con la realidad del contrato de ficción aporta una pátina diferente a la que aportaría, por ejemplo, un realismo mágico. Si tuviéramos claro, por ejemplo, que este gran incendio ocurrido en *The Road* se debiera a que el gran Xiuhtecuhtli ha devastado el mundo, el horror resultante entroncaría con las energías incontrolables de la existencia, con los designios divinos, quizás con la culpa o con el destino.

Desde ninguna de estas premisas se obtendría una lectura coherente de *The Road* sin caer en la sobreinterpretación, sin salir de su semiosfera. Su contrato de ficción implica una visión de un mundo sin razones, sin orden y sin justicia, donde la muerte espera porque sí, sin nada que la explique o le dé un sentido. No existe un proselitismo claro a favor o en contra de ninguna religión ni ideología, sino la mera sensación existencialista de desesperanza hacia el superviviente:

In his dream she was sick and he cared for her. The dream bore the look of sacrifice but he thought differently. He did not take care of her and she died alone somewhere in the dark and there is no other dream nor other waking world and there is no other tale to tell (McCarthy 2006: 27).

En la narrativa prospectiva, los seres humanos viven sus mezquinidades sin necesidad de justificarse con magia, seres ultraterrenos o supersticiones arcaicas. Por ello, su vacío existencialista, la vulgaridad de su devenir, el horror de estar vivo entroncan con las críticas más duras de la posmodernidad contra las ilusiones positivistas, pero sin ninguna ideología específica, institucionalizada, por medio.

Hemos visto que en la ciencia ficción dura, la experimentación literaria no debe nublar el postulado científico-ideológico que anima la novela. En cambio, al no defender una tesis clara y argumentada, sino transmitir una serie de sensaciones, la literatura prospectiva constituye un fértil terreno para la experimentación:

They stood on the far shore of a river and called to him. Tattered gods slouching in their rags across the waste. Trekking the dried floor of a mineral sea where it lay cracked and broken like a fallen plate. Paths of feral fire in the coagulate sands. The figures faded in the distance. He woke and lay in the dark (McCarthy 2006: 44).

Por ello encontramos técnicas como la fragmentación narrativa de *The Road*. La cita anterior, una de las muchas breves unidades discursivas de la novela, representa perfectamente los retazos de imágenes con los que está construido el texto. Mediante esta fragmentación, la realidad de *The Road* adquiere cierta atmósfera de continuidad. Cada unidad narrativa –todas ellas breves y a menudo de escasa significación por sí mismas– es una fugaz plasmación de la realidad, sin duda repetida en el mundo posible de la obra, presentada como pequeño ejemplo de la cotidianeidad e instantaneidad de los personajes. Veamos otra breve unidad, situada solo tres unidades inconexas después de la cita anterior:

No lists of things to be done. The day providential to itself. The hour. There is no later. This is later. All things of grace and beauty such that one holds them to one's heart have a common provenance in pain. Their birth in grief and ashes. So, he whispered to the sleeping boy, I have you (McCarthy 2006: 46).

La brevedad además resta importancia a los pasajeros momentos representados, que se olvidan tan rápidamente como aparecen los nuevos fugaces momentos. De este modo, el nihilismo y la desesperanza angustiosa de este mundo apocalíptico se refuerza con la falta de trascendencia de las unidades narrativas mostradas y permite resaltar el verdadero centro emocional de la obra: el amor de un padre por su hijo incluso en el peor de los mundos posibles.

Defiende Iser (1976: 280–97) que el objeto estético se completa cuando el lector llena los vacíos de significado, invitado por el propio texto. En *The Road* se nos sustrae la mayor parte del camino que recorren en silencio padre e hijo; apenas se intuye entre los monólogos, los perecederos encuentros y los fríos diálogos. El lector debe intuirlo desde las pequeñas unidades y, para ello, la fragmentación es un medio alternativo a las descripciones repletas de palabras y consideraciones de un narrador omnisciente. Así, el silencio es mostrado ante todo por el silencio previo de los vacíos existentes entre los numerosos fragmentos y solo es roto por los pensamientos y emociones con que el lector completa dichos fragmentos.

La forma interior de *The Road* invita a la reflexión del lector, quien puede anticipar un futuro oscuro y adivinar el horror de unas vivencias no narradas. Este encuentro entre silencio, horror, amor y elucubración lectora se vincula directamente con la propia forma del contrato de ficción prospectivo: una realidad inexistente, pero intelectualmente plausible.

Por otra parte, dicho contrato, al precisar solo de una relación de intuitiva relación con la realidad conocida – y no de la exposición de complicadas cuestiones científicas y su consiguiente literaturización –, ha permitido desarrollar las inquietudes culturales más allá del obligado ejercicio intelectual.

*The Road* representa en este sentido un ejemplo especialmente ilustrativo, sin ninguna explicación que escape a nuestro entendimiento. Por ello introduce referencias de cotidianidad que permiten una poderosa semantización, imprescindible para este subgénero:

The clocks stopped at 1:17. A long shear of light and then a series of low concussions. He got up and went to the window.



What is it? she said. He didnt answer. He went into the bathroom and threw the lightswitch but the power was already gone. A dull rose glow in the windowglass. He dropped to one knee and raised the lever to stop the tub and then turned on both taps as far as they would go. She was standing in the doorway in her nightwear, clutching the jamb, cradling her belly in one hand. What is it? she said. What is happening?

I dont know.

Why are you taking a bath?

I'm not (McCarthy 2006: 45).

En una novela de ciencia ficción dura como *The Forge of God*, por el contrario, el autor dedica muchas páginas a la explicación científica del motivo de la destrucción del planeta y de las diferentes etapas de dicha destrucción (Bear 1987: 299), de una manera impensable en *The Road* y, quizás, en cualquier novela prospectiva.

Como puede apreciarse mediante la comparación textual, las diferentes inquietudes que sustentan ambos contratos de ficción se proyectan en el discurso, al igual que los intereses estéticos comúnmente asociados a dichos contratos.

Los efectos tienen que ver por tanto con las cláusulas escogidas para cada contrato.

#### 4. Conclusiones

Puede dar la impresión de que definiendo una mayor potencialidad estética y técnica en la estética prospectiva que en la ciencia ficción dura. No considero que se trate de un postulado ni de una imposibilidad estética por parte de la ciencia ficción dura, sino que esta ha desarrollado su contrato de ficción desde cierta tendencia intelectual que ha influido en la estética. La defensa de una tesis, en realidad, no debería estar reñida con el uso de complejas técnicas narrativas. La misma evolución de personajes, por ejemplo, se inició como una revolucionaria técnica narrativa en textos como *La Celestina* —mediante el conocido caso de Pármeno—, *El Lazarillo* o el mismo *Quijote* y hoy es empleada sin problemas en novelas de ciencia ficción dura como *Marooned in Real Time* (Vinge 1986: 56–

61, 87–99, 179–87), aunque es cierto que sin profundizaciones como las de *Eugenie Grandet* o *Les misérables*.

No obstante, la poeticidad del contrato de ficción de ambos géneros – prospectiva y ciencia ficción dura – no puede buscarse por el momento en los mismos lugares, por mucho que la complejidad de muchas obras del primero sea indudablemente mayor que la de la mayor parte de las obras del segundo. Como espero haber expuesto, el contrato de ficción prospectivo – pese a su evidente crítica cultural – no se enfoca por obligación a la defensa de una tesis, mientras que el contrato de ciencia ficción dura vincula la tesis defendida con el sentido de la maravilla inherente a la relación entre descripción científica y lirismo. Aquí debe denunciarse la frecuente incultura de mucho lector ajeno a las ciencias – yo mismo me encuentro incluido – que no participa de la misma fascinación científica o carece de los conocimientos necesarios para disfrutar de ciertas obras. Defender que existe una mayor poeticidad en la descripción urbanística de una ciudad – como en las obras de Galdós – o en una denuncia social que en la descripción de unas bóvedas construidas para vencer el aplastamiento del paso del tiempo – como en *Marooned in Real Time* (Vinge 1986: 23–4, 180–1) – revela solo la falta de entrenamiento en el análisis de ciertos contratos de ficción. En fin, no defiendiendo el valor estético de las obras citadas, sino la perspectiva crítica desde la que considero que deben ser analizados los diferentes contratos y, de este modo, haber aclarado el funcionamiento de dos contratos de ficción narrativa poco conocidos, pero de al menos un siglo de tradición literaria y demostrada influencia en la cultura actual.

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## *Eastern-European Science-fictional Space through the General Representability of the Other<sup>1</sup>*

### Introduction

The equally rich traditions of Anglo-American and Eastern-European science fiction have significant historical, ideological and individual differences, but rarely have they been comparatively, comprehensively set side by side: for example, Roger Luckhurst, in his thorough historical characterization and overview of science fiction (see Luckhurst 2005) focuses solely on its Anglo-American field, whereas Darko Suvin's equally well-known chapter on Russian science fiction (see Suvin 1979: 243–269) draws only a few comparisons with its Western counterpart. This can, of course, be explained by the monumental size of the task at hand: the (Anglo-)American and Eastern-European traditions have had fairly separate histories, they have developed in radically different ideological contexts and inhabited separate lingual spaces and, especially in the earlier phases of their historical development, the interaction between the two was not particularly intense. Nevertheless, it is my conviction that both traditions – and especially the less explored and less thoroughly characterized Eastern-European one – would benefit from an *initial comparative approach*. An attempt at this is, precisely, the theoretical aim of the current article. With any luck, such a comparison could also reveal something characteristic about the generic tendencies of Science Fiction in general, and, finally, say something meaningful about the way fiction itself “works” with respect to reality.

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First and foremost, the article below focuses on establishing and outlining the common comparative ground on which further research could take place – the aim is to flesh out the specific common notion which could be used for further characterization of the respective dominants of the two separate traditions. In the present survey, I establish this common ground on the notion of the general representability of the Other, the unrepresentable. An insight into the different dominant ways the Other/the Different/the Unknown is represented and treated in Eastern-European and (Anglo)-American science-fictional traditions is also telling with respect to the differences between the dominant creative (ideological) impulses behind them.

I begin with an overall discussion of the general possibilities and limitations of representing the unrepresentable, and of the possible general philosophical function of attempting to do so in fiction. I then narrow the focus to the specific nature of the manifestations of this attempt in science fiction. Finally, I will arrive at the distinct ways these manifestations differ in Eastern-European (pre-1989) and (Anglo)-American science-fictional traditions. Due to lack of space and the nature of the research I exemplify this trajectory through the basic characteristics of Stanislaw Lem's *Solaris* and comparatively extrapolate its innermost tendencies to characterize the empirical dominants of both fields.

### 1. Space journeys, literary space and science fiction

People undertake journeys. A journey is a metaphor for life – at least this is what scholars tend to say. Among other things, people undertake journeys into space – all else aside, this is also a metaphor for life. Space exploration does not merely carry a scientific, political or economic importance. If one deduces everything directly pragmatic, space journeys also carry an exceptionally strong human meaning. From such an unconventional point of view, the global space effort reveals the hopeless but absolutely necessary idealism of human ambition: the immense everyday efforts, sacrifices, expenditure and the inevitable finitude of the outcome of the endeavour form a stark contrast with the apparent infinity and the final incomprehensibility

of the outer space. Life without these endeavours and sacrifices seems almost unimaginable, but, nevertheless, such is the general balance of forces when one has determined to start a journey towards the Other, the Unknown, the Different, or, metaphorically speaking, "towards the distant stars". From the midst of the seemingly uninterrupted everyday bustle of the here-and-now, these efforts appear the least functional or pragmatic but also to the greatest extent humanly necessary.

It might be the same with the poetic and narrative efforts so often undertaken by writers or poets. Fiction also seems to be a certain kind of journey to another space which we would probably only designate as "real" in another modality – to a space that Maurice Blanchot would perhaps call *The Space of Literature*. These journeys are also often undertaken at the expense of enormous inner sacrifices. And they might also be considered pragmatically non-functional but nevertheless humanly absolutely necessary – without them, without the space of fiction, the human reality is also almost unimaginable.

One might risk the metaphorical claim that fiction is a peculiar kind of effort to bring the distant stars closer to the here-and-now: to reduce the distance that separates us from the Other, the Different, the Unknown as much as possible. And the fictional journey also entails that same stark contrast which I already described above: a literary work in its singularity forms this contrast with the seemingly infinite expanse of the fictional outer space. No writing can fill this expanse any more than the constant adding-up of numbers can fill the infinitude. No work of literature is a closure in itself; reality in its mere necessity always demands further explorations of the fictional space, more writing, another work. The gap that divides humanity chained to the planet from the promise of freedom evoked by the perspective of travelling to outer space forms a self-evident analogy with the gap that divides time and eternity, Letter and Spirit, singularity and multiplicity, and so on, and so forth. People probably crave outer space as much as they crave some kind of eternity, the pure Spirit or infinity. The distant stars are seldom unattractive.

In the framework of my current research focus, this arbitrary analogy between outer and literary space is, of course, best mani-



fested in the literary genre of science fiction where the space voyage is probably historically the most common thematic motif. One might say that in science fiction, the literary journey to another, indefinite modality is directly literalized and materialized – the Other, the Different or the Unknown is here immediately solidified to the inner “material” level of fictional reality. This way, science fiction might lend an explanatory force to the description of the nature of the journeys undertaken by literature in general.

## 2. The general limits of representation

And although it is in science fiction that the reader is most accustomed to expect to encounter unfamiliar or never-before-seen phenomena – alien creatures, technologies, ecological systems or space-times, and so on – the occurrence of the *properly* Other, the Different or the Unknown in science fiction is in fact quite rare (and the same, following the previous allegory, is also true in the case of space explorations, or of literature in general). Such a rarity is, first and foremost, due to the inevitable limits set to human expression by the nature of representation itself. (And on the final borderline, the word “representation” therefore designates the “apparatus” that allows fundamental access to reality – reality, in this respect, is all that which *presents itself*.) This is perhaps a trivial statement: it is impossible to represent anything which is not in and of itself always already anthropocentric or *a priori* perceivable according to human experience and values. A classic example is the chimera from Greek mythology. It is a monstrous, fire-breathing creature that has the body of a lioness, a tail that ends in a snake’s head, and an additional head of a goat that arises on her back at the centre of her spine – superficially, therefore, a fantastic and alien creature, but by nature still composed of entirely familiar “spare parts”. And on a fundamental level, the same “familiarity in unknown’s clothing” is generally intrinsic to even the most incomprehensible representation: in order to be recognized as representation at all, that which is represented must in any case be already encoded in the language of human experience. (But the opposite is equally true: in order to be recognized as representation, all that which is represented must

contain at least a minimal degree of “otherness”, or we would mistake it for reality as such and not its “second-level” representation – see also Freedman 2000: 21.)

On a narrower literary level, the real limits of representability become apparent in much more radical cases – when, for example, a literary text tries to convey something that truly cannot be perceived. Such is the case with the Scottish writer David Lindsay who already in his novel *Voyage to Arcturus* (1920) describes colours that have never been seen before:

What was particular about the large feathery ball floating in the air was its colour. It was an entirely new colour – not a new shade or combination, but a new primary colour, as vivid as blue, red or yellow, but quite different. When he inquired, she told him that it was known as “ulfire”. Presently he met with a second new colour. This she designated “jale”. The sense impression caused in Maskull by these two additional primary colours can only be vaguely hinted at by analogy. Just as the blue is delicate and mysterious, yellow clear and unsubtle, and red sanguine and passionate, so he felt ulfire to be wild and painful, and jale dreamlike, devilish and voluptuous. (Lindsay 1963: 53)

Lindsay’s undertaking is not *fully* successful: in the final analysis, he only manages to refer to the never-before-seen colour by a fictional word, and the reader is ultimately unable to envisage the described colour. That which is perceivable to the fictional character is, due to the insertion of fictional words, not perceivable to the reader of the fictional text. (As Fredric Jameson remarks, the fact that in this passage Lindsay attributes the perception of the colour to a human being is thereby also a science-fictional error because a human lacks the necessary sensory organ for the perception of this colour; Jameson 2005: 120) The problem of the overall literary representability of the radically Other, the Different, the Unknown presents itself precisely at this point: unless we represent the unperceivable by composing our literary works entirely out of fictional and therefore utterly incomprehensible words, *the very act of the lingual or figural description of the Unknown itself already transforms it into something familiar, graspable and homely*. According to this logic,

the Other can only be something unrepresentable, something that cannot even be designated. But how to represent that which cannot be designated if language itself is *merely* an apparatus for designation?

### 3. Jean-François Lyotard on the representability of the unrepresentable

I do not hereby intend to provide definitive solutions to questions of such general nature, but an initial lead to a possible answer (or to possible further questions) is already present in Lindsay's text: the presence of the Other, the Different, the Unknown can merely be *alluded to* by a *formal reference* which does not betray anything of the Unknown's *essence or content*. (Lindsay, in the example at hand, achieves this by the inclusion of fictional words – designators which have no imaginable referent.) In order for the Unknown to remain Unknown, in order for it not to lose the quality of the radically Different, in order for it not to be reduced to the “familiarity in unknown's clothing” of a Chimera-like construct, the potentially alien referent has to be tactfully held in the field of tension between the known and the unknown: on the level of “content”, it has to be *described* as little as possible; on the level of “form”, it has to be *alluded to* as strongly as possible.

On his own terms and in a different context, Jean-François Lyotard has described the opposite poles of this field of tension through the opposition between realism and the avant-garde (or what he calls “the modern art”). In a very broad distinction, Lyotard, speaking of the Kantian sublime, separates that which can be conceived from that which can be “presented” and defines the feeling of the sublime as “a conflict [- -] between the faculty to conceive of something and the faculty to “present something” (Lyotard 1992: 19). The feeling of the sublime is a feeling of the existence of that which cannot be (re)presented. On the basis of this distinction, Lyotard defines realism as the art which treats reality presuming “an accord between the capacity to conceive and the capacity to present an object” (ib.). In other words, realism presents only that part of the

conceivable which can be presented. It treats the conceivable and the presentable as equals; everything that can be perceived can also be presented. (And therefore: "Realism [- -] can be defined only by its intention of avoiding the question of reality implied in the question of art..."; see ib. 16) What Lyotard calls "modern art", on the other hand, is that which focuses on solving the conflict inherent in the feeling of the sublime: it "devotes [itself] to presenting the existence of something unrepresentable" (ib. 20). It is focused on the effort of representing that which can be conceived but not presented; therefore, it treats the presentable as a subset of the conceivable. Lyotard questions this approach through the example of modern painting:

Showing that there is something we can conceive of which we can neither see or show: this is the stake of modern painting. But how do we show something that cannot be seen? Kant himself suggests the direction to follow when he calls *formlessness*, the *absence of form*, a possible index to the unrepresentable. And, speaking of the empty *abstraction* felt by the imagination as it searches for a presentation of the infinite (another unrepresentable), he says that it is itself like a presentation of the infinite, its *negative presentation*. [---] For an outline of an aesthetic of sublime painting, there is little we need to add to these remarks: as painting, it will evidently "present" something, but negatively: it will therefore avoid figuration or representation; it will be "blank" like one of Malevich's squares; it will make one see only by prohibiting one from seeing; it will give pleasure only by giving pain. (Ib. 20)

That which Lyotard calls "the modern art" expresses the "absence of form" and the "empty abstraction" felt by the imagination in the shape of an *absence of content* alluded to by *form as index*: "[T]he modern aesthetic is an aesthetic of the sublime, but it is nostalgic; it allows the unrepresentable to be invoked only as absent content, while form, thanks to its recognizable consistency, continues to offer the reader or spectator material for consolation and pleasure." The aesthetic of the sublime is that which "invokes the unrepresentable in presentation itself, which refuses the consolation of correct forms..." (Ib. 23–24) The task of an artist working in such a spirit is "not to [---]



*provide reality* but to invent allusions to what is conceivable but not presentable" (ib. 24).

Returning now to the terms and context of literature in general and science fiction in particular, it can be said that such, then, is the doctrine of representing the unrepresentable: the unknown should not be conceded to the homely and familiar; that which under the opaque and impenetrable surface of the Other is in and of itself nothing, should not be betrayed in the text through an attempt of direct figuration or representation of content. The loyalty to the tactful maintenance of the Other can only be realized through a mere allusion – as with a black hole in space, the presence and the "borders" of the literary Other, Different or Unknown should be concluded only by way of outlining its "event-horizon", beyond which lies the specific mode of its non-existence. We can assert the existence and location of a black hole, but we cannot tell "what goes on inside it". The literary Unknown, like a black hole, is an Unknown only if it does not give anything away of its "absent inside". This, thus, is the poetic task of the writer of the sublime: he should show that the unknown *is there* but he should not betray its *essence*, he should not "provide reality" but rather "allude to the unrepresentable".

#### 4. On the necessity of representing the unrepresentable

Having arrived at this point, it has become necessary to pose an as yet unanswered question: why choose such an approach in the first place – why ascribe such a great importance to the necessity of trying to represent the Other in literature? Why emphasise the need to maintain the Other as the Other, the Unknown as the Unknown? In Lyotard's terms, why prefer a formal allusion (to the absent content) to the figurative description (of the present content)? In the current context, this necessity comes from a general ideological presupposition about literature: namely, the presupposition that literature has the faint power *either* to strengthen *or* to undermine the prevailing, dominant (ideological, cultural, lingual) reality. In other words, literature can either directly mirror this reality – mirror that what is "already evidently so" – and thereby uncritically strengthen its

prevalence. Or it can take up a potentially critical position by assuming an estranging distance, and present us our reality and its inherent, implicit, subdued possibilities and its underlying conditions in an equal light, as if for the very first time. (Lyotard would call the former preference “realist” and the latter “modern” or “avant-garde”: the former has an “intention of avoiding the question of reality implied in the question of art”; the latter “refuses the consolation of correct forms”). Ideally, in the light of the latter preference, reality and its hidden possibilities could emerge through fiction as something qualitatively New, and fiction could give hope to that which the uninterrupted flow of the dominant reality, ideology or “text” normally brushes aside. If one considers this to be the purpose of literary or poetic writing then one must also concede that the undermining of the prevalent reality, the representation of this reality’s possibilities from an equalizing distance can only take place through the *undomesticated* presence of the Other, the Different, the Unknown: the text has to include, as its central component, something which the dominant ideological reality is unable to familiarize, unable to make use of in the process of its immanent self-enhancement. In lyotardian terms, the text has to contain something that it can only *indirectly allude to* but cannot *figuratively describe*.

Thereby, Lyotard’s distinction between realism and the modern art has definite merits when describing the nature and generic tendencies of science fiction. The Other has two faces or, rather, there are two separate kinds of Others: the realist other and the modernist other. The realist other differs from the modernist other in the same way as a chimera-like construct differs from a formal allusion to an unrepresentable content – the former is equally conceivable and presentable, the latter is conceivable but not presentable. It is now evident that only the latter kind of Unknown – that which “the known” cannot domesticate – can be called the Other Proper. And it is now also evident, contrary to what might at first sight be expected, that the occurrence of this properly Other, this lyotardian “unrepresentable in representation itself”, is particularly rare in science fiction.

## 5. Representing the unrepresentable in science fiction

There is a good structural reason for the lack of the properly Other in science fiction – for the lack of that mere allusion to an absent content through which the Unknown can solely be maintained, and for science fiction's inclination towards actually familiar, Chimera-like constructs. It is because of its almost generic commitment to mimetic representation, its “unspoken requirement” to solidify the abstract Other, Different or the Unknown to the level of the “material reality” of its depicted fictional world. Brian McHale has noted this tendency while comparing the poetics of cyberpunk science fiction (authors like William Gibson, Bruce Sterling, and so on) and the poetics of what he calls “mainstream postmodernist fiction” (authors like James Joyce, Thomas Pynchon, and so on):

[W]hat typically occurs as a configuration of narrative structure or a pattern of language in postmodernist fiction tends to occur as an element of the fictional world in cyberpunk. Cyberpunk, one might say, translates or transcodes postmodernist motifs from the level of form (the verbal continuum, narrative strategies) to the level of content or “world”. To put it differently, cyberpunk tends to “literalize” or “actualize” what in postmodernist fiction occurs as a metaphor – metaphor not so much in the narrow sense of a verbal trope (though that is also a possibility) but in the extended sense in which a narrative strategy or a particular pattern of language use may be understood as a figurative reflection of an “idea” or theme. (McHale 1992: 246)

McHale's assertion – made in another context and on somewhat different terms – can here be elevated to the overall generic level of science fiction and worded in previously used lyotardian terms: *due to its mimetic commitment, science fiction has the generic tendency to figuratively represent, on the level of fictional world or “content”, modern art's formal allusions to that which is conceivable but not presentable, thereby almost inevitably turning these allusions into both conceivable and presentable Chimera-like constructs.* Such a materialization to the level of the fictional world or content always inclines towards direct wording, and direct descriptions tend to familiarize or domesticate the feeling of the sublime: that is why, in



science fiction, we have so many flying cars but so few carefully crafted impenetrable Monoliths in the vein of Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey* (the Monolith, here, being science fiction's finest equivalent to Malevich's squares). And that might also be one of the reasons why science fiction has all too often been considered "bad art": it is, in lyotardian terms, *essentially a realist practice* because it lacks sufficient allusion to the sublime excess of the Other.<sup>2</sup>

And so, in spite of the cognitive estrangement that the science-fictional texts generate when they project alien space-times, ecological systems, societies, creatures, technological devices and so on, most of them are still deeply embedded in and easily reduced to the ideological reality in which they were written. I have room here only for initial generalizations which can be easily contested with individual historical examples, but in the classic (Anglo-)American tradition it is quite rare for the science-fictional journey to encounter insoluble challenges, entities that cannot be familiarized, Unknown forces which the industrial capacities of the humankind cannot tame, or spaces which are not immediately reducible to cognitive surroundings of the cultural reality from which the text originates. Most of science fiction subjects the Other, the Unknown, or the unattainable to the gravity of prevailing (technocratic) ideology, and transforms it into an instrumental background on which the familiar belief in absolute knowledge and scientific progress can be constantly

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<sup>2</sup> This is why we can find more efficient traces of this Otherness in "high" modernist literature – in, for example, Proust, Joyce, or Musil. According to Lyotard, "[i]n Proust the thing that is eluded as the price of this allusion [to the Other] is the identity of consciousness, falling prey to an excess of time. But in Joyce it is the identity of writing which falls prey to an excess of the book or literature. Proust invokes the unrepresentable by means of a language which keeps its syntax and lexicon intact, and a writing which, in terms of most of its operators, is still part of the genre of the narrative novel. [...] Joyce makes us discern the unrepresentable in the writing itself, in the signifier." (Lyotard 1992: 23) And Kafka is here perhaps in many ways the characteristic intermediate example: it is he who seems, without assuming any spatiotemporal distance, to grotesquely defamiliarize everything already present in culture, all the socio-bureaucratic machinery that is utterly familiar to us and so on.



reaffirmed. In this respect, immediately extrapolative science fiction is particularly symptomatic: believable, plausible futuristic visions are attractive and pleasing specifically because reading them does not confront us with the undermining, unsettling aura of the sublime Other/the Unknown. This was predominantly the case with the Golden Age of science fiction in the 1950s and 60s (if to consider, for example the scientific space-enthusiasm of Arthur C. Clarke or Robert Heinlein); and with the cyberpunk movement of the 1980s where, underneath the dystopian tone of apparent resistance one could still perceive the alluring effect of travelling into the technological progress of digital non-space. More properly representative of the Other – but at the same much less characteristically science-fictional – was the speculative direction of the genre in the 1960s and 70s. The works of Ursula LeGuin, J. G. Ballard or Philip K. Dick were relatively more freed from the extrapolative compulsion and instead of metonymically developing the present reality further into the future they preferred to make a metaphorical leap from this reality to another one. And even here – and these *are* very broad brushstrokes – one usually stood quite far from the kind of Other directly represented by Kubrick's Monolith in *2001: A Space Odyssey*. (The origin of the presence of the properly Other which can be peripherally glimpsed in the work of these authors can, once again, more easily be traced back to the level of *formal allusions*: Ballard in, for example, *The Atrocity Exhibition* experimented with form a lot and Dick's worlds sometimes feel utterly incomprehensible or ungraspable not because of what they particularly thematize – there are androids, aliens, half-dead, and so on in his worlds – but because of what they, on the level of the “structure” of the world, allusively leave out.<sup>3</sup> In the present article, in an attempt to “stay true” to science fiction's generic commitment to mimetic representation, I am focusing on the representability of the unrepresentable, on the possibility of alluding to the feeling of the sublime on the concrete level of “content” or “fictional world”.)

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<sup>3</sup> I owe this attentive reference to Brian McHale.

## 6. Representation of the unrepresentable in *Solaris*

But this does not mean that there are no science-fictional works where the Other inhabits a central, structural place *on the level of the fictional world or "thematized content"*. Probably the most prominent science fictional work in this respect is Stanislaw Lem's *Solaris* (Lem 2003).

In this novel, we approach two fictional stars, a blue and a red sun, in the light of which shines Solaris, an oceanic planet that by all suppositions is a single conscious organism. The novel begins when the psychologist Kelvin arrives at the research station floating just above Solaris. The scientists stationed there have explored the opaque and impenetrable surface of the planet already for decades and in many shifts. Having invented and used a thorough conceptual system for their research, they have achieved some success in creating a formal classification of the complex phenomena appearing on the planet's surface, but they still have not, because of a lack of any verified answers reached a conclusion as to the meaning of their actions *as science* (see also Freedman 2000: 97–99). When Kelvin and his fellow researchers try to obtain a more aggressive contact with the planet, the research becomes traumatic. The Ocean responds to their invasive behaviour by explicating their inner psychological nature, at the same time revealing nothing about its own elusive core. In the best understanding of the researchers stationed on the space ship, the planet is experimenting with their minds, confronting them with their innermost repressed memories and the materialized forms of their thoughts. As a central example, Kelvin is mysteriously visited by his former lover who has committed suicide and he tries to handle the situation by first trying to get rid of her. But when this fails – the woman always comes back – he finally gives up his endeavours, falls in love once again and the bulk of their remaining days in the station is spent weirdly and controversially vegetating together. The novel only hints at the tortures that the other researchers are subjected to, but there remains an impression that these are even worse and more traumatic. The scientists finally find a way how to disintegrate the organic shape of Kelvin's memories, but the ocean's intellect nevertheless solidifies psychic phenomena in a way

that is utterly incomprehensible to man. The mind of the planet is so radically different from the so-called objective consciousness of the researchers that communication between them fails due to the utter lack of any common ground. And so the readers put down *Solaris* with endless speculations and without any even remotely settling knowledge.

Formally, Lem's novel is therefore an almost metaphysical *tractatus* about the possibility of contact with the Other. The failure of the researchers' efforts is described through tens of pages of pseudo-scientific but in themselves believable and coherent descriptions of the surface of the planet and tens of pages which give an account of the scientific history of its almost fruitless research. The absolute rationality and the extreme stylistic rigour of these descriptions form a stark contrast with the events in the research station and Solaris' own impenetrable nature. This field of tension is the novel's most important structural component, namely *due to this contrast*, Lem's work manages to maintain the Other as the Other: in the lyotardian terms used above, the planet Solaris is, in the thematic context of the novel and on the level of its fictional world, only being *alluded to*. The scientists trying to explore it merely conceive of its existence, but they are unable to (re)present it in their scientific language in a way that would have any effective *meaningful content*.

In this respect, *Solaris* is a very rare science-fictional limit-case. Instead of giving definite answers about the nature of the planet – instead of “providing reality” – Solaris projects an “absent content” and thereby provokes its protagonists (and the readers of the novel) to countless further questions about its nature. Not betraying anything of the planet's essence, *Solaris* manages to represent the un-presentable through a Kantian “negative presentation”, by “making one see only by prohibiting one from seeing”, by *refusing the consolation of correct forms* – and all this *on the thematized level of its science fictional world*.



## 7. Eastern European and American science-fictional traditions: ethical questioning vs. practical problem-solving

This way, *Solaris* efficiently explicates the difference between technocratic science fiction which is familiarizing and homely, and the properly estranging, unsettling and undermining science fiction. The former, by way of postulating chimera-like constructs which are easily reducible to the tendencies of the prevalent socio-economic reality, provides the reader with the singular clear answer of the dominating ideology. The latter, by way of introducing the Other that is maintained as the Other, urges the reader to ask an infinite number of questions, which, besides formally being about the exact nature of this Other, also address the conditional nature of the prevalent ideological reality. The impenetrable nature of this Unknown provokes the reader to search for alternative approaches towards reality and test them against the prevailing ideology. In accordance with this, Istvan Csicsery-Ronay, Jr has remarked in his *Seven Beauties of Science Fiction* that “*Solaris* is a pure Novum<sup>4</sup>. It has no significant qualities other than its newness and difference. [ - - - ] It separates the history of human meanings, ideologies, projects, and successful experiments with existence, from the blank Novum that signifies only that these things do not apply.” (Csicsery-Ronay, Jr 2008: 68) In a very broad perspective, and on the general theoretical background of the representability of the unrepresentable, the example of *Solaris* thereby allows a comparative approach to the respective dominants of Eastern European and American science-fictional traditions. I agree with Csicsery-Ronay, Jr when he words the difference between the two traditions in terms of their readers’ respective attitudes towards the relationship between human beings and technology:

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<sup>4</sup> “Novum” is Darko Suvin’s term for science fiction’s central structural component, an element of the qualitatively new which introduces to the science fictional work a decisive estranging break that transforms all the other elements of the depicted fictional world. (See Suvin 1979: 64–67.)



"The explicit ethical problematizing typical of Eastern European SF often strikes North American readers as overly abstract and dull. At the other extreme the fear of being seen as tedious moralists often leads U.S. science fiction writers to contortions; they try merely to hint at the ethical questions lying behind the power and thrill in the foreground. U.S. writers frequently assume that a relationship between human beings and technology that would entail tremendous ethical dilemmas already exists as an unproblematic *fait accompli*. The dominant feeling in the United States, as opposed to the more traditional attachments of Eastern Europe, is that enormous technological changes are inevitable, and will inevitably bring ethical changes largely without the conscious participation of the subjects involved. And it is obvious to anyone comparing the two SF cultures (I cannot speak about Japanese SF) that Eastern European education openly, indeed perhaps obsessively, harps on philosophical ethics versus pragmatic problem solving."<sup>5</sup>

Put in the terms of the current argument, the American tradition's tendency towards pragmatic problem solving ("the language of one prevailing answer") predominantly expresses itself through easily domesticated Chimera-like others, and is a symptom of a prevailing belief in the dominant technocratic ideology. The ethical questioning ("the language of infinite questions") of the Eastern European tradition, on the other hand, is more focused on the critical analysis of the technocratic ideology, and thereby inevitably requires the representation of the unrepresentable as its central structural component. This can be efficiently exemplified if one compares the domesticating and ultimately all-conquering space voyages undertaken by the protagonists of the writers of the American Golden Age (e.g. Heinlein and Clarke) to the ultimately inexplicable phenomena and spatial zones frequently present in the works of the most well-known authors of the Eastern European traditions (Lem, the brothers Strugatsky).

The difference between the two traditions can be briefly explained with the radically different ideological contexts they

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<sup>5</sup> See <http://acad.depauw.edu/~icronay/flu.htm>

operated in: in the pre-1989 Soviet-block tradition, science fiction took the shape of either *direct and explicit*, essentially utopian praise of the ruling regime which is not discussed in the present article (artistically, the best example here being Ivan Yefremov's "Andromeda", a backward-looking utopia where the intergalactic communist order has long been victoriously established<sup>6</sup>) or the (unquestionably censure-induced) allusions to the (among everything else, also ideologically) Other which has been in the focus of the present article. The unproblematic problem-solving of the American tradition can be considered a mid-way between these two extremes: American science fiction of the Golden Age with its Chimera-like, reducible Others seems to be *moderately and implicitly* convinced in the positive capabilities of the continuing liberal-democratic technological progress of its time.

## Conclusions

As a final note, the representation of the Other as the Other – realized by way of a tactful formal allusion to the absent content – raises the science-fictional work as much as possible above the time where it is historically embedded. The majority of science fiction has its event horizon – one should only consider the futuristic visions, the "good old-fashioned futures" which are past their "best before", easily reducible to the cultural context they were written in, and increasingly obsolete and improbable compared to the horizons of the here-and-now of the contemporary world. The tactful maintenance of the Unknown as the Unknown is an obstacle to such obsolescence because it avoids historicity to the greatest possible measure and conserves the literary work as a pocket of eternity in time. *Solaris* does not have a "best before", a horizon of obsolescence, because the nature of its Other prevents it from being conveniently reduced to the particular historical conditions of the time of its writing or the everyday here-and-now of its reader's

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<sup>6</sup> In the theoretical context of the present article, it can be argued that on the level of its content or "fictional world", a classic, fully fleshed-out Utopian vision *lacks any kind of Other*.

present. Few other science-fictional works leave the impression of having been so unreachably far and so in isolation from planet Earth and its historicity.

Returning to the metaphor I began with, the ambivalence and the infinite amount of questions potentially provoked by the presence of the Other as the Other holds an advantage over a singular and explanatory answer also with respect to the journeys that writers and poets undertake into the space of literature as such. Because the potentially infinite amount of these questions carries in itself a potential to reduce, as much as possible, the contrast between the singularity of a singular literary journey and the infinite expanse of the fictional outer space.

The present article has followed the trajectory of presuppositions and conclusions outlined below:

- 1) Thematically, science fiction seems to be the literature that represents the Other/the Different/the Unknown.
- 2) Any kind of representation is always already anthropocentric, in order to be recognized as representation at all, that which is represented must in any case already be encoded to the language of human experience.
- 3) The literary representation of the Other can take the shape of either
  - (i) a "realistic" Chimera-like construct which is always easily reducible to the equally conceivable and presentable content of the perceived "outer" reality or
  - (ii) a formal attempt to allude to the absent content of the feeling of the sublime which is conceivable but not presentable.
- 4) The Other of the (i) Chimera-like construct is always a direct reflection of the dominant, ideological reality. The Other of (ii) the formal allusion to the feeling of the sublime refuses and has the potential to undermine this reality.
- 5) Due to its prevalently mimetic commitment, science fiction has the generic tendency to figuratively represent, on the level of fictional world or "content", modern art's formal allusions to that which is conceivable but not presentable, thereby almost inevitably turning these allusions into both conceivable and presentable Chimera-like constructs. Its Other is therefore almost

always a direct reflection of the dominant, ideological reality, and not the Other proper.

- 6) Stanislaw Lem's *Solaris* is a rare example of the kind of science fiction which, by refusing to betray anything of the essence of its Other, manages to allude to the feeling of the sublime on the level of its fictional world or "content".
- 7) Such kind of science fiction, involving itself in elaborating the ethical implications of domesticating the Other, is more frequent in the (pre-1989) Eastern-European tradition than in the American Golden Age tradition, which, with the support of an implicit belief in the domesticating powers of the prevalent technocratic ideology, thematically largely concerns itself with pragmatic problem-solving.

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*Human Being as Defined by its Temporality:  
The Problem of Time in Salman Rushdie's Grimus  
and Umberto Eco's Mysterious Flame  
of Queen Loana*

Salman Rushdie and Umberto Eco, two of the most established authors of the contemporary novel, both design their novels as complex reflections of the contemporary environment, usually by combining elements from other fields of human cognition (e.g. science and philosophy) and from the social and political reality. In Rushdie's first novel – *Grimus* – and in Eco's latest novel – *The Mysterious Flame of Queen Loana* – the main theme that connects these elements is the problem of time. Through the literary plot, both authors develop detailed and unique concepts of time by utilizing elements from contemporary philosophy and science (especially physics and cognitive science). In both novels, time, although in quite different contexts, is essentially connected with the human defined by his being-in-time. Only as a finite being can a human being design himself as a complete and authentic Da-sein, if we use a phrase from Heidegger's philosophy.

## 1. Salman Rushdie: *Grimus*<sup>1</sup>

*Grimus*, Rushdie's first novel, is a conglomerate of various literary styles; it develops multiple ideas connected by a uniform narrative plot. The publisher Vintage advertises the novel as "An enticing combination of science fantasy, storytelling and folklore ..." (the cover), which points to the two main literary styles used in the novel – magical realism and science fiction that are strongly intertwined throughout the novel without either of them becoming dominant. Magical realism and science fiction are both defined through their specific treatment of time. On the one hand, a restoration of old non-European cultures in magical realism includes literary excursions into myths, mythical time and alternative history. The European conception of linear time is thus dispersed and replaced by cyclical time. On the other hand, different manipulations of time (e.g. time machines) are one of the most common motifs in science fiction, and entanglement of different aspects of time (the present and the past entangled with some elements of the future) is one of the basic determinants of this artistic genre. The choice of both literary styles thus already suggests that the main theme of the novel deals with the problem of time.

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<sup>1</sup> A short summary of Rushdie's *Grimus*: Eagle and his sister receive a yellow drink of life and a blue drink of death as a gift from Grimus, a mysterious travelling salesman. After some time, the immortal Eagle finds out about a secret passage to a parallel world, where immortal people live. Grimus, the creator and supervisor of the island lives at the top of an inaccessible mountain with his sister, because he is scared that unsatisfied settlers of the island may destroy the Stone Rose, a mythical object that helps maintain the order and even the existence of the island. As they meet, Grimus reveals his plan: the creation of the island and the manipulation of its settlers serve only as means towards his ideal death at the end of his long life. Grimus wants to die as a victim of an assassination, while Eagle as his closest copy must carry on in the role of the creator/supervisor of the island. But after Grimus's death Eagle decides to put an end to the game with different dimensions and human destinies, he destroys the Stone Rose and the whole island slowly decomposes.

### 1.1. A fantasy world based on contemporary physics

It is Rushdie's science-fiction world that offers the basis for the development of his concepts of time. He creates a persuasive combination of fantastic and realistic elements by introducing some of the essential parts of contemporary unification theories<sup>2</sup>. These physical elements are built into a fantasy, and even though they are sometimes in contradiction with (mostly theoretical) scientific assumptions, they remain recognizable and the reader is able to connect them to their scientific source. The most frequently used and essential elements for the plot are the many-worlds interpretation, one of the leading interpretations of quantum mechanics, and the reality of additional dimensions, a common element in contemporary physical models of our world.

When Eagle, the immortal main character, comes to the Island Caf<sup>3</sup>, where immortal people live in isolation, Jones, one of the settlers, tries to explain the nature of such an island's existence:

Perhaps I might make a highly inexact analogy to demonstrate my thesis. Here we all are, [...]. Is it not a conceptual possibility that here, in our midst, [...], is a completely other world, composed of different kinds of solids, different kinds of empty spaces, with different perceptual tools which make us non-existent to its inhabitants as they are to ours? In a word, another dimension. [...] If you concede that conceptual possibility [...] you must also concede that there may well be more than one. In fact, that an infinity of dimensions might exist [...] And further: there is no reason why those dimensions should operate solely on our scale. The infinity could range from the tiniest micro-particle, the smallest sub-atom, to the universe. Is it not fascinating to speculate that we might all exist within the spaces of a few sub-atomic particles in some other, unknowably vast universe? (Rushdie 1996: 52–53)

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<sup>2</sup> Theories that try to unite quantum mechanics and relativity, the latest, although not completely compatible descriptions of physical reality.

<sup>3</sup> Different characters use different versions of the Island's name (Caf, Kaf, Calf). To avoid confusion we will use the name "Caf", except in citations.

In this rather poetic analogy, there are some very interesting parallels with contemporary ideas in physics. The extent to which Jones's interpretation is similar to elements of unification theories (which have been formed after the novel has been written) suggests that Rushdie and unification theorists shared their sources to some extent. Since *Grimus* was written shortly after Rushdie's Cambridge years, it is not improbable that he acquainted himself with the physical ideas forming at the time.

Jones's fascinating speculations are similar to physical explanations as to why additional dimensions, necessary in models of unification theories, have not been proven experimentally. In different physical models extra dimensions are, similar to Jones's reasoning, either very small (for example Calabi-Yau manifold in superstring theory<sup>4</sup>) or gigantic (for example RS2 model, one of the Randall-Sundrum's models<sup>5</sup>).

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<sup>4</sup> In superstring theory, one of the most well-known unification theories based on elementary one dimensional phenomena called strings, the extra dimensions of spacetime are usually conjectured to take the form of a 6-dimensional Calabi-Yau manifold. With their help, the fact that no physical experiments have confirmed the reality of additional dimensions is explained by their smallness and curvature. (Green 2004)

<sup>5</sup> Randall-Sundrum models, also called five-dimensional warped geometry theory, describe the real world as a higher-dimensional Universe described by warped geometry. There are two popular models. The first, called RS1, has a finite size for the extra dimension within two branes (more dimensional analogues of strings), one at each end. The second, RS2, is similar to the first, but one brane has been placed infinitely far away, so that there is only one brane left in the model. So the fifth infinite dimension is introduced. The standard model (A theory of the fundamental interactions and the elementary particles that take part in these interactions), except for the graviton, is described as being localized on a four-dimensional brane. Our four-dimensional world might in fact be just an "island" among other universes with different dimensions. The concept of branes, more dimensional analogues of strings, as represented in the RS2 model also offers an analogy with Jones's idea of our existence within a particle that determines the physical reality of our world. (Randall 2005)



While Jones carries on with his explanation, another analogy with contemporary physical ideas is introduced, namely the analogy with the many-worlds interpretation, one of the most well-known interpretations of the wave function collapse (one of the most striking quantum events). It originated in Hugh Everett's Ph.D. thesis (Everett 1956) and was quite popular and well-known at the time *Grimus* was written:

Perhaps you have come across the theory of potential existences [...]. So suppose there were, say, merely four potential pasts and futures for the Mediterranean Sea. In one of them, there never was nor will be an island such as this. In another the island existed but no longer does. In a third the island does not exist but will at some time in the future. And in the fourth ... he gestured around him ... it has existed; and continues to do so. [...] The dimensions come in several varieties, you see, he said. There are a million possible Earths with a million possible histories, all of which actually exist simultaneously. In the course of one's daily life, one weaves a course between them, if you like, but that does not destroy the existence of pasts or futures we choose not to enter. (Ib. 53)

Jones's explanation of the theory of potential existences is quite similar to the many-worlds interpretation, which denies the objective reality of the wave function collapse.<sup>6</sup> Instead, the many-worlds interpretation rejects proposes the realization of all possibilities. Every possible outcome to every event defines, or exists in, its own world. In the many-worlds interpretation as well as in Jones's explanation, all the different worlds are incomprehensible, therefore it is not possible to confirm them through a physical experiment. Furthermore, in both the actualization of a particular event in "our" reality doesn't affect other realities and other realizations. Both

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<sup>6</sup> In quantum mechanics, the wave function collapse is the process by which a wave function, a description of a physical system before the measurement that maps all possible states of the system (a particle is in superposition of different states), appears to reduce to a single state after interacting with an observer.

explanations offer an interesting and novel description of time, especially of "now" as part of it. "Nows" do not (only) follow each other linearly any more, but are also parallel. The otherwise absolute objective timeline (not only the subjective timeline constructed by our consciousness) is now questionable. This new description of time reminds us of a labyrinth with many possible directions, which is a very commonly used symbol in postmodern philosophy.

Rushdie creates an isolated world of immortal people on Caf Island on the basis of two contemporary physical concepts: additional dimensions and the many-worlds interpretation.

These ideas are, however, essentially connected with another, mainly philosophical one, also important for Rushdie's concept of spacetime on Caf Island, namely with the idea of subjective time. This has been, in one form or another, a crucial part of all theories of time, however, Rushdie's proceeding is significantly postmodern: "What I have been describing are the Outer Dimensions, said Mr. Jones. There are Inner Dimensions as well. One never knows what universes may lie locked within one's mind." (Ib. 55)

The idea of Inner Dimensions also has a scientific background, this time it's neurological, instead of physical. The existence of shadowy parts of our mind and of additional Inner Dimensions is not based just on psychoanalysis but even more so on contemporary explanations of consciousness as a multiple drafts system. "There is no single, definitive 'stream of consciousness,' because there is no central Headquarters, no Cartesian theatre where 'it all comes together' for the perusal of a Central Meaner. Instead of such a single stream (however wide), there are multiple channels, in which specialist circuits try, in parallel pandemoniums, to do their various things, creating multiple drafts as they go." (Dennett 1993: 253–254)

Here as well, the abolition of the traditional image of time as an absolute objective flux plays a crucial role. A personal conception of time is based on a consciousness of internal time, while the problem of consciousness and its disassemblance brings us to the problem of free will. Its existence has already been problematized in traditional philosophy and science, however, quantum-mechanical principles

(the role of chance, quantum entanglement<sup>7</sup>, etc.) and the concept of “block time” (as an unchanging four-dimensional block) or time-scape make the problematization even more radical. Free will is similarly problematized in *Grimus* in view of the flux-lines concept, which can be interpreted in the context of the many-worlds interpretation and predestination.

It is the Crystal of Potentialities. In it I can examine many potential presents and futures and discover the key moments, the crossroads in time, which guide us down one or the other line of flux. (Rushdie 1996: 235)

So she will be very bitter, and will agree. The flux-lines say she will. I have examined them. Free will really is an illusion, you know. People behave according to the flux-lines of their potential futures. (Ib. 239)

From one point of view, an immortal life enables complete free will in all actions, as life without a full stop does not make us choose any more, and an individual is not determined by a finite number of actions. On the other hand, the structure of a world that makes such an eternity possible emphasizes the impossibility of free will. Total negative freedom is highly problematic either way: if time is treated traditionally as a line, even an immortal individual cannot choose everything – each event is characterized by its position in spacetime and is thus different from its repetition; if time is treated as a labyrinth of parallel events (as in *Grimus*), this requires a complete determination of events, which cannot be connected through causation any more, and also demands free will to be merely an illusion. In *Grimus* this reflects itself in a very interesting way in the character of “The Two-Time Kid” who tries to limit his negative

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<sup>7</sup> Entangled particles are particles that cannot be described with individual wave functions any more but only by a common wave function, describing them as one system. So when a measurement is performed on one particle, the properties of the other are immediately altered, even when separated at arbitrary distances.

freedom and substitute the lack of causality by creating and strictly following some artificial rules, namely trying everything twice:

The dainty man was called Hunter. [...], but his companion called him The Two-Time Kid. The name had stuck, not particularly because of the insult latent in it, but thanks to Hunter's frequent avowal that he would 'try anything twice' [...]: Once to see if one likes it; twice to see if one was right. (Ib. 110)

As seen in the case of The Two-Time-Kid, existence within the endless time dimension loses its meaning and needs to be compensated by meaningless goals. This existential problem, illustrated in the following motif, is thus deeply connected with the new role of time in *Grimus*:

The donkey was bellowing because The Two-Time Kid, Hunter [...], was in the process of sodomizing it, and even for a docile donkey, there are limits. [...] For pity's sake stop that, shouted Flapping Eagle, hauling Hunter off the tethered donkey. – All right, said Hunter mildly, it's disgustingly unpleasant anyway. – Then why ... – I'll try anything twice, said Hunter as if by rote, dusting himself down fastidiously. Last time the beast kicked me. Broke my leg, damn nearly. At least I shan't have to do it again. (Ib. 151)

In a world objectively determined by the specific conditions of Caf Island and subjectively by the obstinate Hunter's nature, even an act commonly regarded as inappropriate, irregular, illegal ... and even for him "disgustingly unpleasant," needs to be tried twice. This emphasizes a problem of non-linear, non-ending time. Without a unified arrow of time and the principle of causality, the order of events can be either completely determined or chaotic; the mere existence and the description of Rushdie's science-fictional world suggest the first possibility. If there is no principle of causality, no absolute line connecting different events (and thus making the confirmation and any logical reasoning possible), then there cannot be any absolutely valid beliefs, experiments, etc. Therefore, even truth is only an illusion based on subjectively arranged beliefs – in



the represented case, on double repetition. On the other hand, the concept of endless time lacks any basis upon which a personal meaning could be formed and thus needs a posterior determination, even though based on complete insanity. In completely relative spacetime even truth and (personal) meaning of life are completely relative: "One-Track, said Hunter. Why did you come to the Island? Peckenpaw considered the question, gravely. He said: I got used to being alive." (Ib. 152)

The Two-Time Kid is not the only inhabitant of the island trying to save his existence from becoming completely meaningless by manic obsession. Rushdie offers two connected explanations. The first is "the fever of Inner Dimensions." Because of the special environment on the island, all inhabitants are in danger of losing their individual consciousness and thereby their lives. Habits and fixed ideas are their main defence – the cornerstones of their personas.

But this was Calf Mountain; and in the field of the Grimus Effect, suicide had been unnecessary. Flapping Eagle could almost see the gutted brain within the coined head. Because Elfrida's words had done more than upset Ignatius. They had broken through the unconscious, ingrained defense mechanism, the mental barrier he had built for almost every member of the community of K. Elfrida's withdrawal had removed the cornerstone of the persona he had built; and in that instant, when everything which had seemed sure was suddenly flung into a state of flux, the fever of the Inner Dimensions had swarmed over him. (Ib. 177)

The second explanation, although not emphasized by the author, is obvious and actually already present in the first one. If personal time is limited neither by a full stop nor by the idea of linear (and thereby somehow determined) "outer" time, existence loses all meaning. Consciousness of internal time cannot be possible in an environment without cornerstones. Therefore meaning is artificially added by supplemental determination, but that kind of determination cannot be anything but meaningless. *Grimus* describes many different determinations that are added artificially: the island's philosopher is obsessed with studying old phrases and myths, his wife is obsessed with him, etc.; however, one of them reflects our every-day experien-

ces more than the others. Dolores's obsession with fixation of time loses its tragicomical character present in the obsessions of others, and is well-known in our world, where people are often faced with the absence of meaning: "It is yesterday, she whispered. Every day is yesterday, so every day is fixed." (Ib. 51)

Her obsession is an attempt to achieve complete fixation or complete repetition, which should be repeated *ad infinitum* but nonetheless strictly limits one's personal negative freedom. The infinite field of possibilities is packed into a routine. Dolores's character could be interpreted as the outmost case of an unauthentic Da-sein.

## 1.2. Life without a full stop

In *Grimus*, personal time is not primarily problematized in connection with immortality, but in connection with death. Only as a deficiency, when it is not self-evident any more, is death finally perceived. Only now can death be perceived as a part of life – not just as its end, but as a crucial part of its formation, of its essence.

Then if life is on one side, death must be on the other, said Khalit. [...] But here's a paradox, said Khalit. Suppose a man deprived of death. Suppose him wandering through all eternity, a beginning without an end. Does the absence of death in him mean that life is also absent. – Debatable, said Mallit. He flipped the coin. Yes, he said. (Ib. 78)

The way life and death are dealt with in *Grimus* is very similar to Heidegger's philosophy. "Rather, just as Da-sein constantly already is its not-yet as long as it is, it also always is its end. [...] Death is a way to be that Da-sein takes over as soon as it is." (Heidegger 1996: 229) Only as final can Da-sein also be authentic, because this is the only way one can project oneself by authentic choices. "Something is always still outstanding in Da-sein which has not yet become 'real' as a potentiality-of-its-being. A constant unfinished quality thus lies in the essence of the constitution of Da-sein." (Ib. 219–220) Exactly this principle is the leading one in the life of Grimus – the creator of the island and the one who directs all actions within the island's

spacetime: "Engraved in the stone over the door of Grimushome: THAT WHICH IS COMPLETE IS ALSO DEAD." (Rushdie 1996: 233)

The primary owner of the bottles containing eternity of life, who later distributes them to the chosen ones, is not, as the others are, captured in the paradox of simultaneous existence of the wish for eternal life and the loss of any personal meaning of life caused by un-ending time. His existence is constructed on the basis of anticipated death: "It was thus, I conceptualized the island, for in building a life one must be conscious of its end. Who would write a story without knowing how it finished? All beginnings contain an end. [...] I planned Kaf Mountain around my death." (Ib. 233)

Grimus's way of existence is presented as the superior one. He is the one who does not require a meaningless subsequent determination to bear the weight of immortality. He is not threatened by "The fever of Inner Dimensions." A meaning is given to his immortality (which is not immortality at all) by the anticipated full stop: "— Grimus, what is this all about? Grimus looked mildly astonished. — All about, Mr. Eagle? But of course it is all about death. Death, Mr. Eagle — that is what life is about." (Ib. 231)

Prior planning of death is also related to Heidegger's philosophy. Through manipulation of the island's inhabitants and manipulation of time (flux-lines), Grimus plans his death. But the crucial part of his plan is Eagle — his opposite (if Grimus is symbolically the carrier of eternal life, Eagle is symbolically connected with death). Eagle thus enters the indispensable inability of any comprehension of death and the eternal absence of final control and conclusion.

That is what I hope to do with you, Flapping Eagle. [...] You are to be the next stage of the cycle, the next bearer of the flag, Hercules succeeding Atlas. In the midst of death we are in life. — What if I refuse? The question came unprompted from Flapping Eagle's scared lips. Megalomania is a frightening thing to be circled by. — You are the next life of the Phoenix, repeated Grimus. The Phoenician Death. (Ib. 233)

Even in the carefully planned world of *Grimus*, death cannot be experienced and Grimus's project remains unfinished. His plan contains everything but the final instance, which it is unable to overcome. Flapping Eagle as the one carrying death and thus being explicitly individual breaks the planned repetition. By deciding to destroy the Stone Rose and the (present) order and thereby the existence of the island, he goes beyond the plan by bringing in death: "Deprived of its connection with all relative Dimensions, the world of Calf Mountain was slowly unmaking itself, its molecules and atoms breaking, dissolving quietly, vanishing into primal, unmade energy. The raw material of being was claiming its own." (Ib. 253)

However, Eagle's attitude towards life and death is very similar to Grimus's one. According to him, immortality is an intermezzo, an intermediate state of not-being-human: "– It's a sad ambition you have, Mr. Eagle, said Virgil Jones. To grow old, to die; how is it that someone like you, so young in mind and body, can have such an ambition? Flapping Eagle replied, with a bitter tone in his voice which surprised him: – I want to return to the human race. [...] – Interesting, said Virgil, that you should think of death as such a humanizing force." (Ib. 55)

Main characters of the novel, Grimus and Eagle, are thus defined by their similarities as well as by their opposition, both relationships being defined by the crucial role of death - the creator and carrier of life can be whole only as long as the carrier of final destruction and death is present. He completes him, but also brings in a lack, chaos, incompleteness. There is to put chaos in order and bring it all to the end.

#### 1.4. On the way to postmodern time

With the motifs of the elixir of immortal life and the island of immortal people Rushdie emphasizes the concept of personal time as essentially determined by death. To paraphrase Heidegger: a sock with a hole represents the essence of the sock better than a whole sock, since the function of a torn sock is not self-evident anymore. Similarly, in *Grimus* the lack of the full stop at the end of life emphasizes that the essence of personal time is its completeness –



being limited by its beginning and end. Only as finite beings can humans constitute themselves as authentic and as being whole.

The literary plot in *Grimus* is on the one hand based on this very complex and structured philosophical concept of time and on the other hand on singular motifs taken from modern physics, which are thus often slightly transformed, but remain in touch with their scientific background. Literature as the point of contact between different approaches thus enables the entanglement of elements from different fields of time-comprehension, which in our everyday life usually remain disconnected because of the specialization of different approaches.

## 2. Umberto Eco: *The Mysterious Flame of Queen Loana*<sup>8</sup>

A similar connection between philosophical and physical elements and a similar concept of personal time can be found in Eco's *The Mysterious Flame of Queen Loana*. Eco's novels are often labelled as conspiracy novels, a label typical and representative of post-modern literature. A quick overview of the plot of his last novel, describing an old rare books dealer's return home to recover his lost memories after a stroke, suggests a deviation from this pattern. Careful reading, however, reveals the opposite. While the main character tries to reconstitute his memories, a game of searching for personal meanings disguised by the entanglement of different personal interpretations unveils. Literary fiction from the novels of his childhood and personal memories of people around him are mixed with his current reality into an inseparable mixture. The main

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<sup>8</sup> A short summary of Eco's *The Mysterious Flame of Queen Loana*: Yambo is a sixty-ish rare book dealer, a husband, father and grandfather, who has suffered a loss of episodic memory after a stroke and cannot recall any personal experiences. He withdraws to the family home in an effort to recover his past. After days of searching through old newspapers, vinyl records, books, magazines, and childhood comic books, he is unsuccessful in regaining memories, though he relives the story of his generation. But as he suffers another stroke, all memories mob him at once in a colorful flash and reveal so desired elements of his personal identity.

character is more than ever the victim of a conspiracy, only this time the conspiracy is set within him. Therefore memory and subjective time become part of a postmodern conspiracy game.

## 2.1. The foundation of memories

The conspiracy game and labyrinths of meanings in *Mysterious Flame of Queen Loana* are not based solely on historical and bibliographical facts, although these are not missing, but also on contemporary pop-scientific representations of neurology. The contemporary neurological view of the structure of memory is essentially related to contemporary theories of consciousness. Memory is thus not regarded as a unified, absolute construct, but as a cooperation of multiple processes that do not form a hierarchy. That kind of approach is only possible, to use Derrida's vocabulary, after the destruction of traditional "logocentrism and the metaphysics of presence" (Derrida 1977: 49), which ordered all phenomena hierarchically and based on two classes.<sup>9</sup> This approach to memory stems from results of scientific experiments. (Bourtchouladze 2003)

By observing brain-damaged patients, scientists have determined three different memory centres. The basal forebrain plays a role in identifying the chronology of past occurrences. Injury to this area preserves the ability to remember some events but impairs recalling the time and place they occurred. The hippocampus is in charge of the formation of new memories, while the temporal lobe is in charge of retrieving existing memories, particularly those related to unique events that occurred at a particular time and place. (Damasio 2002) This kind of differentiation is parallel to related differentiations of consciousness of internal time within philosophical theories of Husserl and Deleuze. On the other hand, that kind of neurological differentiation also represents the basis of Eco's plot:

We have different types of memory. One is called implicit, and it allows us to do with ease various things we've learned [...] And

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<sup>9</sup> Positive, present, masculine, urban, etc. belonged into the superior one, while negative, non-present, feminine, natural, etc. belonged into the inferior one.

then there's something called explicit memory, by which we remember things and know we're remembering them. But this explicit memory is twofold. One part tends nowadays to be called semantic memory [...], this is the first type to form even in children. The child quickly learns to recognize a car or a dog, and to form general categories [...]. It takes the child longer, however, to develop the second type of explicit memory, which we call episodic, or autobiographical. [...] It's episodic memory that establishes a link between who we are today and who we have been, and without it, when we say I, we're referring only to what we're feeling now, not to what we felt before, which gets lost, as you say, in the fog. You haven't lost your semantic memory, you've lost your episodic memory. (Eco 2005: 12–13)

This summary of memory-activity introduces the problem of lost past of subjective time. However, the consciousness of internal time, the retention and the protention, are not impaired, and memories not included in the personal arrow of time are unimpaired as well. In the novel this aspect is explained by the main character's wife, a psychologist:

"You are saying you no longer live in time. We are the time we live in. You used to love Augustine's passage about time. He was the most intelligent man who ever lived, you always said. We psychologists can learn a lot from him still. We live in the three moments of expectation, attention, and memory, and none of them can exist without the others. You can't stretch towards the future because you've lost your past. And knowing what Julius Caesar did doesn't help you figure out what you yourself should do." (Ib. 29)

As is typical of Eco's way of writing, he uses the authority of Saint Augustine to explain the concept of completeness of time, while at the same time he connects it with contemporary philosophy using his own modern interpretation, which is very close to modern phenomenological theories of time. On the one hand, there is no protention or consciousness of internal time without retention in Husserl's phenomenological analysis of time – they both (retention



and protention), “spread out themselves over the time-field to build the unity of the continuity.” (Husserl 1985: 34) On the other hand, there is no personal future without personal past in *The Mysterious Flame of Queen Loana*.

Eco’s interpretations are also close to the philosophy of Deleuze, especially his first two syntheses of time. The first synthesis consists mainly of habits and is based on primary, spontaneous consciousness of time, while the second, active, synthesis can be grounded only in the basis of the first one. “Whereas the passive synthesis of habit constitutes the living present in time and makes the past and the future two asymmetrical elements of that present, the passive synthesis of memory constitutes the pure past in time, and makes the former and the present present (thus the present in reproduction and the future in reflection) two asymmetrical elements of this past as such.” (Deleuze 1994: 81) The past as past has thus never been present by itself. It is always contemporaneous with the present in relation to which it is the past.

This passage from Husserl’s model of consciousness of internal time to Deleuze’s interpretation of active synthesis can be more clearly seen in the reflection of a first-person narrator, where we can observe a kind of interpretation of Husserl’s well-known illustration of consciousness of internal time, namely the description of listening to music:

I was dozing, and the clock woke me. I didn’t hear the first few chimes distinctly, that is to say, I didn’t count them. But as soon as I decided to count I realized that there had already been three, so I was able to count four, five and so on. I understood that I could say four and then wait for the fifth, because one, two, and three had passed, and I somehow knew that. If the fourth chime had been the first I was conscious of, I would have thought it was six o’clock. I think our lives are like that – you can only anticipate the future if you can call the past to mind. I can’t count the chimes of my life because I don’t know how many came before. (Eco 2005: 26)

The lack of retention allows the construction of consciousness of internal time to be formed, while the lack of stored past memories



enables the complete construction of a self-conscious individuum in (his own) time. Any sensation of time is an entanglement of passing and synthesis. To be conscious of time, one needs to be conscious of all different moments. Therefore they have to be contemporaneously present in the consciousness and different at the same time. Thus there is no consciousness of time without the synthesis of time, and the loss of a part of the synthesis enables the forth-coming synthesis and accordingly the complete consciousness of time. The concept of the individuum as a totality, existing only within (his own) time, is not possible if a part of the totality does not exist. This mutilates the complete consciousness of the (personal) present and past – a part of the labyrinth is broken down and the essential threads of meaning are torn off. This time Eco's main character is more than ever the victim of a conspiracy.

Negative freedom is also put into question if life is viewed as essentially limited, as determined by birth and death. In the analysis of Rushdie's *Grimus*, we have emphasized the problem of freedom in the case of lack of death. Similarly we can emphasize the problem of freedom in the case of (a kind of) lack of birth, as is shown in *Mysterious Flame of Queen Loana*: "Is it worth to be born if you cannot remember it later? And, technically speaking, had I ever been born? Other people, of course, said that I was. As far as I know, I was born in late April, as sixty years of age, in a hospital room." (Ib. 98) The book dealer is not equipped with his former decisions of the past sixty years, despite being re-born in an already defined environment – defined as such by his past decisions. But that causes not only a kind of negative freedom, possibility of beginning from the start, but also a lack of foundation, essential for the formation of authentic Da-sein. As Heidegger's Da-sein is essentially temporal, this reveals the problems of synthesis of time. "At this point, why bother trying to remember? Memory is a stopgap for humans, for whom time flies and what has passed is past. I was enjoying the marvel of beginning *ab ovo*." (Ib. 225) The marvel of beginning *ab ovo* is thus not the choice of any optional beginning, but the attempt to go back, to someone's authentic beginning, which would not be burdened with repetitions and would be original. As memory is lost, it is not an absolute substance and unchangeable framework that is

lost, but something essentially changeable and flowing. Here Eco, following contemporary neurological theories, is again very post-modern:

“You can’t think of memory as a warehouse where you deposit past events and retrieve them later just as they were when you put them there, [...] when you remember something, you’re constructing a new profile of neuronal pleasant experience. When afterwards you remember that place, you reactivate that initial pattern of neuronal excitation with a profile of excitation that’s similar to, but not the same as that, which was originally stimulated. [...] The image of your parents in this photo is the one we’ve shown you and the one we see ourselves. You have to start from this image to rebuild something else, and only that will be yours.” (Ib. 25)

The presented views are to some extent connected with postmodern decay of absoluteness and of the logic of metaphysics of presence and especially with Deleuze’s philosophy of difference and repetition. As difference is beyond everything, everything is a simulacrum in the empirical world, “so that one can no longer point to the existence of an original and a copy.” (69) There are no copies but repetitions. Series of repetitions are reproductions of each other, not of a central original any more. Memory is actually the most representative player of this postmodern dynamic game. Although continually changed, permuted, etc., it represents the momentary structure as determined.

Some of the typical elements of *Mysterious Flame of Queen Loana* (as being lost in the labyrinth of meanings, dynamics in the world of data, fluid ontology of information, etc.) are connected with the basic parts of contemporary neurology. It is not just written fiction that intervenes in the real world, but dreams and memories as well. The conspiracy is part of the world, where even the main authority of “I”, the centre of consciousness in command, is missing.

The problem of time is again revealed on the basis of some elements from contemporary science and their entanglement with basic and thus also essentially current philosophical themes. The essence of time and of human being-in-time is emphasized by the

lack of the crucial element – this time of the storage of past memories. The project of the authentic Da-sein is (again) represented as essentially conditioned by being defined by its temporality. The synthesis of a human person as a whole is thus connected with the synthesis of all three aspects of time – past, present and future.

## Conclusion

Time and its essential connection with us as being defined by our being-in-time is the main theme in both presented novels. In the literary-fictional worlds, based on elements from contemporary science, the true role of personal time is emphasized by the lack of one of its basic elements. In *Grimus* the lack of the end, and in *The Mysterious Flame of Queen Loana* the lack of the beginning of personal time emphasize their role in the synthesis of the authentic Da-sein and in the constitution of a human being as complete and unique. The use of two similar conceptions of time in two otherwise quite different contexts additionally emphasizes their true integration with contemporary environment and their role of complex reflection of the contemporary comprehension of time. Literature as a highly sensitive indicator of human environment, not limited by any explicit methodology or field of expertise, is able to combine different horizons of the comprehension of time and thus to reveal the truth about (our) time and ourselves as defined by being-in-time.

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## *The Chthonic Realm of Our Psyche: Mythic and Moral Aspects of Dracula's Nature*

Myths reflect the collective experience of mankind. Certain things recur in world myths. Carl Gustav Jung, Swiss psychologist, psychiatrist and analyst noticed that his patients' dreams contained a lot of similar motives without being acquainted with one another. He observed that these motives in dreams are akin to motives appearing in myths, tales and legends. These archaic pictures or symbols which are universally recognized, he entitled archetypes. The distant locations of vampiric entities prove that vampirism is also a universal phenomenon. In the following article I intend to explore the essential inherent mythic characteristics of Stoker's *Dracula*, focusing on possible conceptions of morality.

### Dracula as a mythic deity

Vampires reveal a number of mythic features which can be found in several deities of world mythology. They are Creators, they have the power to give and take away lives, they are preserver and destroyer. *Dracula* shows similarities with many creation myths. Vampires do not need a woman to give birth that is why they are divine creatures. In this sense, they are father and mother at the same time. Since they are also lovers of the victim, a very strange incestuous relationship can be disclosed. The first gods were all incestuous: having no other partner to mate with, they often had sexual relationship with their own brother, sister, mother or father.

Vampires clearly possess godlike features. From Stoker's working notes it is known that the writer had three possible titles in mind when writing *Dracula*, namely *Count Dracula*, *The Un-Dead* and *The Dead UnDead*. These titles allude to one of the key features of the vampires, to immortality. Athanasia is an ontological boundary that separates humans from deities. *Dracula's* figure as a deity

is the most striking in his relation with Renfield. Renfield's devoted exclamation that "I am here to Your bidding, Master. I am Your slave, and You will reward me, for I shall be faithful. I have worshipped You long and after off" (Stoker 1994: 126) clearly manifests that he worships Dracula. Once an attendant even remarks that Renfield behaves at times as if a "sudden form of religious mania" (124) has seized him. Not only Renfield sees Dracula as a God, Dracula makes himself be seen as a God, he is conscious of his power: "All these lives will I give you, ay, and many more and greater, through countless ages, if you will fall down and worship me!" (333) Renfield wants to benefit from the relationship with the count; he is eager to have immortality. He is obsessed with bloodlust and eternal life.

"But those who eat my flesh and drink my blood have eternal life, and I will raise them at the last day" (*Holy Bible*, John 6: 53–57) promises Christ the end of death and the beginning of eternal life to believers. The idea that the soul is eternal makes us humans immortal spiritual beings. The immortality myth is important for people, it gives hope that there is life after death and that we have a lot of time still. This delusion boils down to the effort to overcome our fear of death, and as Freud notes, to "maintain moral order among the living" (Freud 2001: 945). The creation of immortal supernatural entities can be seen as a power-wish, a metaphysical impossibility to conquer death, but also entails another explanation with a moral lesson. Beyond our own relation to death, we have to cope with the loss of our beloved ones. We do not know what happens after physical death, but we certainly know what it is like to lose someone close to us. The return of the dead in evil forms unconsciously inspires people to let the dead go and let their former attachment be broken off. Some old beliefs of the primitive races can be traced back in the relation between the living and the dead in civilized societies as Freud refers to R. Kleinpaul (*The Living and the Dead in Folklore, Religion and Myth*, 1898) in *Totem and Taboo* that

[a]ccording to him too, this relation culminates in the conviction that the dead, thirsting for blood, draw the living after them. The living did not feel themselves safe from the persecutions of the

dead until a body of water had been put between them. That is why it was preferred to bury the dead on islands or to bring them to the other side of a river, the expressions "here" and "beyond" originated in this way. Later moderation has restricted the malevolence of the dead to those categories where a peculiar right to feel rancor had to be admitted, such as the murdered who pursue their murderer as evil spirits, and those who, like brides, had died with their longings unsatisfied. Kleinpaul believes that originally, however, the dead were all vampires, who bore ill-will to the living, and strove to harm them and deprive them of life. It was the corpse that first furnished the conception of an evil spirit. (Freud 1918: 99)

The dead crave for blood, that is, they bear the primary qualities of a vampire. The vampires become parasites who can live only with the help of human's blood, or rather, they are parasitoid, because they finally destroy their host, leastways they deprive the soul of their victim(s) from salvation.

It is important to note that despite the glorious imagination of Christian afterlife, vampires' immortality means damnation. The vampire turns the ideal representative image of the good Christian upside down, whose body is temporary but his soul is eternal. In contrast, the undead bloodsuckers' body, physicality is what is eternal, but their soul is already lost. This immortality is paradoxical though, because they can be destroyed. Religious objects are proper weapons against them since a vampire is an anti-God, who does not provide morality principles and lacks ethical attitudes. Their form reveals to people the danger of not yielding to the Christian religious belief system, and the consequences of leading an immoral or amoral life. Religion and cultural values are intertwined in the character of the vampire.

In Stoker's *Dracula* Renfield realizes this illusionary aspect of immortality. First, he succumbs to the temptation of everlasting life, but then he changes his mind when he feels being burdened with souls. In order to keep up their undead existence, vampires need to drink blood, they are with blood fixation. "The blood is the life! the blood is the life!" cries Renfield in Stoker's *Dracula* after he cuts Dr Seward's left wrist, and licks up the vital liquid from the floor (171).



Blood as being equal to life is a very ancient myth of mankind. It was early recognized by tribal societies that losing too much blood resulted in losing one's life, therefore they attributed the red liquid with magical properties. Drinking from the enemy's blood was a superstitious belief of conveying the power of the deceased. In vampire myth it is blood through which the materialization of the evil spirit can come through. The sanguine fluid serves as a mediator between the living and the dead, which makes it possible for the dead to animate and come back to haunt human beings. Blood is the main element in the vampire creation myth, but it is clear that sanguine drops were primary elements for creating humans in several other myths worldwide.

In the creation myth of Babylonia, the primordial mother Tiamat's son Kingu played a significant role. After Marduk cut Tiamat's body into two pieces, thus creating sky from her upper-, and earth from her lower body, he used Kingu's blood in order to create the first humans. Pre-Columbian Mesoamerica is pervaded by blood symbolism, too. The priests held down the victim, stretched him out and cut out his heart while alive with an obsidian knife. With this method they sacrificed thousands of people. Behind these barbarous acts lay the belief of their creation myth. According to legends, the god Quetzalcoatl sacrificed himself, gave his own blood in order to animate the ancestors' bones, and with him several other gods made themselves bleed for humans. In securing the cycle of nature, the Aztecs gave human blood in return. The victims of the Aztecs not only died for the gods, but were seen as deities themselves, thus recurring the auto-sacrificial bloodletting of their deities. This sacrifice for humans is apparent also in Christian myth when Jesus Christ gave his own blood and life for humans' sins<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless, the loss of blood does not always have fatal consequences. In the Middle Ages in order to remove the contaminated bodily fluids from the patient's circulatory system, as a medical practise, bloodletting was used. Another medical method, blood transfusion had been used to replace blood of anaemic people, and through this auto-sacrificial act another person's life could be saved.



## Ethical problems of sex with the vampire

The vampire legends' blood myth is undercurrent with eroticism. The act of blood-taking is more intimate than it seems at first sight. The first physical contact brings about a close relationship immediately, a strong mental and physical dependence between the vampire and his victim. The target of the vampiric kiss is the victim's neck. Critics often claim that bloodsucking in this way becomes a metaphor of sexual intercourse. This observation can be justified easily, examining the touching of the vampire and the victimized person. The vampire plunges his fangs (phallic symbol) into his victim's neck. A penetrating and a receiving organ play part in this act, during which bodily fluids intermingle. The fangs and the bloody scar on the neck become supplementary sexual organs. So, those human beings transformed into a vampire will become new creatures possessing active and passive organs as well. They own sexual duality. They become hermaphrodites: male on the mouth and female on their neck.<sup>2</sup>

Human sexuality carries finality in itself; death is a reality principle. Eternal life is something that human beings cannot experience. Belief in afterlife is common to a lot of religions, it helps to endure our limited earthly existence. The only way to "live on" is through offsprings, which holds out a promise of some kind of eternity, thus immortality and sexuality motifs are correlated. The pleasure principle forces the issue of generation. In *Dracula* it is also through sexuality how one experiences infinite state. Dracula is a liminal numen, the multi-level junction of sex and death. According to Bunson, the physical sensation of sex with a vampire is just one part

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<sup>2</sup> This gender crossing in the domain of deities is not uncommon. The Egyptian primal sun god, Amenhotep is depicted as clearly androgynous. The Indian Shiva in iconographies called Ardhanarishvara is seen as god-goddess, having united with Shakti, the feminine creative power. African myths spawn with half-male and half-female representations as in the case of Mawu-Lisa, or the thunder god Hevioso. These figures represent both the feminine and masculine energies, as well as the wholeness and totality of the universe.

of the whole experience, because it is rooted “in the passing of a soul into the realm of the undead, as a mortal undergoes seduction, acceptance and the partial death of the physical form – a metaphysical intimacy unobtainable between mortals” (1993: 237–238).

A psychological explanation lies behind Dracula’s sexuality. David Punter identifies Dracula with “the endless desire of the unconscious for gratification” (1999: 26). He is un-dead, because desire never dies. His existence can never reach the level of satisfaction, for “his very nature is desire” (Punter 1999: 26). That is why he keeps moving on to different objects. Vampiric sexuality becomes a perpetual recurrence. Dracula takes advantage of his victims while they are in a stupor. The blurring of dream and reality brings about nightmare-formationlike hallucinations. The unconscious works. To identify Dracula with the unconscious postulates “undesirable sexuality,” that is something which is against the ethics of the Victorian era. In the famous scene when Dracula forces Mina to drink from his chest, Mina is in a stupor, but the intrusion of Van Helsing and Dr Seward awakens her. From this point on, Mina latches on to what is happening to her. As I have implied, Dracula represents the unconscious, the repressed sexual fantasies of Mina, but these fantasies do not necessarily mean all perversions of the vampiric nature. It is as if Mina awakens to her sexuality. Lucy surrenders to her desires, but it goes against Mina’s conscience to do so. Mina remains the representation of the “conventional” passive Victorian woman.

According to the Jungian psychology, ethical problems cannot only be brought up by the *shadow*, but also by the *anima* and the *animus*. The *animus* is the female personification of the unconscious in men, and the *anima* is the male personification in case of women. Like the *shadow*, they can have good and bad aspects. They appear in the figure of the opposite sex in dreams. Dracula, the anatomically male represents the *animus* of Lucy and Mina. If a woman fails to be aware of her negative *animus*, she can easily be possessed by it;

but if she realizes who and what her animus is and what he does to her, and if she faces these realities instead of allowing herself to be possessed, her animus can turn into an invaluable inner

companion who endows her with the masculine qualities of initiative, courage, objectivity, and spiritual wisdom.

(Franz 1978: 206)

Lucy becomes possessed by her *animus*, while Mina is able to turn consciously to hers. After the violent blood drinking scene, when Van Helsing and Dr Seward “awaken” Mina, the girl becomes aware of the negative side of her *animus*. The masculine qualities of her character are highly praised by Van Helsing later on. Mina avoids *animus* projection and she can withdraw it by integrating it into her personality. Mina’s adventure with Dracula is a process to her individuation.

The three vampiresses and the vampire Lucy are in contrast the *anima* of the male characters. As Marie-Louise von Franz puts it, “the most frequent manifestations of the anima take the form of erotic fantasy” (1978: 191). This can be observed in the most erotically described scene of the novel, which is the first encounter of Jonathan with the fair vampiress:

The fair girl went on her knees and bent over me, fairly gloating. There was a deliberate voluptuousness which was both thrilling and repulsive, and as she arched her neck she actually licked her lips like an animal, till I could see in the moonlight the moisture shining on the scarlet lips and on the red tongue as it lapped the white sharp teeth. Lower and lower went her head as the lips went below the range of my mouth and chin and seemed about to fasten on my throat. Then she paused, and I could hear the churning sound of her tongue as it licked her teeth and lips, and could feel the hot breath on my neck. Then the skin of my throat began to tingle as one’s flesh does when the hand that is to tickle it approaches nearer – nearer. I could feel the soft, shivering touch of the lips on the supersensitive skin of my throat, and the hard dents of two sharp teeth, just touching and pausing there. I closed my eyes in a languorous ecstasy and waited – waited with beating heart.

(Stoker 1994: 52)



Jonathan projects his repressed sexual urges onto the vampire ladies, and the dreamlike quality is accentuated. The figurative language of dreams expresses inner anxieties, and dealing with the darker aspects of the personality, nightmares and dreams have become common devices of Gothic fiction. Dreams mean distance and closeness at the same time. Events occurring in dreams are distant in a sense that they are beyond the borders of reality, but on the other hand they are indicative of the person's inner world and relation to the world. While seemingly new things are shown, the events and figures always represent something familiar. This uncanny effect is accentuated when Jonathan meets the three vampiresses in Dracula's castle, as the following excerpt demonstrates:

I suppose I must have fallen asleep; I hope so, but I fear, for all that followed was startlingly real – so real that now, sitting here in the broad, full sunlight of the morning, I cannot in the least believe that it was all sleep.

I was not alone. The room was the same, unchanged in any way since I came into it; I could see along the floor, in the brilliant moonlight, my own footsteps marked where I had disturbed the long accumulation of dust. In the moonlight opposite me were three young women, ladies by their dress and manner. I thought at the time that I must be dreaming when I saw them, for, though the moonlight was behind them, they threw no shadow on the floor. They came close to me and looked at me for some time and then whispered together. Two were dark, and had high aquiline noses, like the Count's, and great dark, piercing eyes, that seemed to be almost red when contrasted with the pale yellow moon. The other was fair, as fair as can be, with great, wavy masses of golden hair and eyes like pale sapphires. I seemed somehow to know her face, and to know it in connection with some dreamy fear, but I could not recollect at the moment how or where.

(Ib. 50–51)

Jung accentuated the importance of symbols and inner events, a certain kind of introspection. In contrast with Freud, whose theories based on sexual interpretations, Jung's libido concept was seen as



pure life force in which sexuality is just one way of expressions. "The libido is God and Devil" (1916: 120) reveals Jung the morally divided dual nature of libido. The vampire sucks blood, that is, the energy from conscious life. The consequence of this power and energy loss is that unconscious contents take control over the individual's life. Gothic novels explore the subconscious mind therefore they are almost never devoid of dream and/or nightmare scenes. Vampires are active when it is dark. Deprived of quietus, a ray of light postulates the vampire's instantaneous annihilation, the end of his lugubrious state of existence.

In all cultures the light and dark contrast is of peculiar interest. Light is associated with life, whereas dark is linked to death and the underworld. The vampire goes out hunting from sunset to sunrise and sleeps during the day. People often had anxiety that the sun might fail to rise and the life-giving light never reaches them. Vampires are anti-solar creatures, and their association with darkness links them with the underworld but also with nocturnal activities, such as dreams and nightmares. Dracula rises from his coffin to visit his victim who is comatose. His uprising symbolizes those anxieties, fears, frustration and aggression that are buried within us. If repressed feelings are not overcome, they will surface in due course and begin to disturb us. Vampires are photophobic and in the blaze of day they vanish; that is when they are converted into the conscious, they cease to exist, they stop their perturbing activities. The *Dracula* story is instructive in this sense, indicating that difficulties should not be avoided, but confronted. Northrop Frye further associates the cycle of waking and dreaming with the cycle of light and darkness, which can apply to *Dracula*. The hero being a sufferer of frustrations is really in the power of darkness in daylight, explains Frye his antithesis; and the libido, the conquering heroic self awakes in the darkness (Frye 1972: 431).

### The subhuman side

The heroes of the novel face a creature that has "the strength in his hand of twenty men" (244). In its manifestation, Dracula is superhuman, immortal and has power over the minds of humans. He

can hypnotize his victim and this way he can control her. However, pointing out the godlike nature of Dracula is vague in itself. For unfolding a more precise explanation of his nature, I turn to the Jungian archetypes. According to the Jungian view, Dracula can be classified into the so-called trickster archetype, that is:

[h]e is a forerunner of the saviour, and, like him, God, man and animal at once. He is both subhuman and superhuman, a bestial and divine being, whose chief and most alarming characteristic is his unconsciousness. Because of it he is deserted by his (evidently human) companions, which seems to indicate that he has fallen below their level of consciousness. He is so unconscious of himself that his body is not a unity, and his two hands fight each other. He takes his anus off and entrusts it with a special task. Even his sex is optional despite its phallic qualities: he can turn himself into a woman and bear children.

(Jung 1988: 143)

Dracula is in the netherworld and the upper world at the same time, but still anthropomorphic. In folklore, supernatural creatures were thought to come back to haunt people first in the form of demonic spirits, but later they were able to take up physical forms and trespass the world of the living. In medieval mentality there was less distinction between physical and mental as well as religious and non-religious spheres, no wonder that so many superstitions occurred at the time. Enough to think of witchcraft trials where hundreds of innocent people fell victims to unreasoning frame-ups. The different counts, including denial of the Christian faith and sexual relations with the devil demonstrate well the crossing of the metaphysical realm, that is, the blurring of the two categories mentioned above.

Another characteristic of the trickster is his shape-shifting ability into an animal form (ib. 136). From German mythology, the trickster Loki often changes into an insect or a fly in order to amuse himself by watching the consequences of the mischief he caused. Zeus, the Greek demiurge is known about his frequent shape-shifting when he wanted to carry out his sexual adventures as in the form of a swan when mating with Leda, or in the form of a bull when enticing Europa.

Vampires also have animal alter-egos, they can appear in the form of bats or wolves. The earliest association between bats and vampires was drawn by Spanish conquistadors who faced bats which sucked the blood of their cattle and horses in tropical Southern and Central Mexico. This bloodsucking species, the *Desmodus rotundus* reminded them of the European folkloric vampires, being night fliers and drinking blood, so they called them vampire bats after the European vampire tradition. Although these bats prefer the sanguine flood of warm-blooded animals and birds, they rarely also attack human beings. Dracula can take the shape of a bat, which, psychologically speaking, clearly indicates his subhuman nature. Animals symbolize man's primitive and instinctual side. The animalistic nature of the count indicates that instincts have extracted from the conscious sphere, thus in need of integration.

In addition, Dracula is said to be able to materialize into fog. Fog corresponds to obscurity, when clear view is not available. The inability to see suggests the idea of losing control over one's senses. Gloomy atmosphere surrounds the potential victim of the vampire who is active at night under the cover of darkness. In Stoker's novel Dracula's "blackness" is stressed; he is said to get dressed in black and wear a black hat, and his horses are also depicted as black. This dimness of the count – just like of all the chthonian "children of the night" – is a sign of evil nature. Paradoxical again, his outward appearance suggests the opposite.

### The illness of desire

When vampires are noticed by people, they are described as extremely pale. The vampire spends his daytime in coffin, which explains his unnatural whiteness. Pallor can be associated with several illnesses, which exhibit similar symptoms to vampirism. Pellagra and porphyria,<sup>3</sup> where photosensitivity is a key sign, are usually

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<sup>3</sup> Pellagra has three main symptoms: diarrhoea, dermatitis and finally dementia. Those suffering from pellagra are quite aggressive and are without any appetite, so they grow thin quickly. They produce symptoms which are similar to some characteristics of the vampires, because like the



associated with vampirism. In addition, tuberculosis patients have vampiric symptoms such as fatigue, decrepitude, poor appetite, and consequently, loss of weight. A person can acquire bacteria from people living close to them, or can be infected after having got in contact with corpses. This picture fits the vampire myth where the dead (usually family members as it is mentioned in most folklore tales) return, and due to their visits the living person also wastes away. It is similar to a chain reaction, the living become dead, and the dead come alive. Metaphorically speaking it reflects the cycle of life, its natural stages of passing away and birth.

Later tuberculosis was romanticized throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth century and was seen as "a disease apt to strike the hypersensitive, the talented, [and] the passionate" (Sontag 1989: 12). It is definitely not an accidental analogue how the Byronic, aristocratic vampire came to the fore, and the pallor of this (dark) romantic hero correlated with the achromasia of the folkloric bloodsucker. Diseases affect everyday life, and thus have some social aspects. René Dubos explored the social history of tuberculosis in his remarkable book *The White Plague: Tuberculosis, Man, and Society*, commenting that

[w]hereas the influence of bubonic plague is obvious in Boccaccio's tales, and in the dissolution of morals at certain periods of the Reinassance, the part played by tuberculosis in more recent history is less distinct even though it was profound and lasting. The disease distorted the norms of life and behaviour for several generations by killing young adults or ruining their physical and mental health.

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vampires, the pellagric patients are sensitive to sunlight and cannot sleep at night. The other illness, porphyria appears more rarely. It features photosensitivity and in case of not avoiding sunlight, the skin blisters. Patients suffering from porphyria can be cured by blood transfusion.



In the case of women, whiteness had become a desirable attribute, indicative of these ladies' spiritual, moral and physical purity. This vestal innocence of women was very important at the time when economic and industrial developments were taking place at a great pace, and men were involved in business. Wives were expected to defend the males' soul from damage in the world of commerce, and become keepers of their husbands' soul.

Art reflects social changes, and the anaemic depiction of women became a kind of cult among early Victorian painters. Bram Dijkstra argues that apart from the reflection of the desired feminine moral consciousness, there is also a subtle hint at "social status and economic privilege" (Dijkstra 1986: 28) connecting success with consumptive looks. However, this near-death condition suggested sacrifice on the part of women, and the dutiful submission and the entrapment of domestic life became suffocating for some. "The cult of the woman as corpse" (ib. 46) was beginning to take a different turn in the late nineteenth century: instead of death, women rebelled against this condition and began to "rise from their symbolic coffin". Art had become affluent in beastly females, and the vampire, aptly fitting as visual equivalent of this symbolic uprising, became a popular topic on canvas.

The pale seducer – an obvious paradox since colourful outward features should reflect passion, and the vampire's apparent apathy under the white mask conceals passionate sentiments of all sorts – represents the dangerous aspects of the underlying threat to the purity of the soul. Dominated by Christian ideology, these perilous women became stigmatized by the original sin of the fallen woman, temptation. In vampire *topos*, women who lack moral stability are prone to yielding to the alluring machinations of the vampire, the personification of Evil. When it comes to male characters, they are also tempted by these female figures and it depends on their moral consciousness whether they succumb or not. The result of the vampiric "loving" is death (of the soul) and – while people can die of love – death can not only be the end but also the efficient cause.

## Death and rebirth

The *mors in actu* motif appears in medical science, in art, and as myth or superstition in folklore. In ancient Greece, moderation was the keyword when it came to men's sexuality (Foucault 1992: 83); guilt was not attached to the practices otherwise. Excess was seen as something that should be controlled by the individual, thus virtue lay in man's ability of self-mastery. The emergence of Christianity<sup>4</sup> altered the attitude towards sexual issues; it is different from the Ancient Times, especially from the classical Greek period, where more freedom was attached to carnal pleasures. It is striking that negative judgements and attitudes towards nakedness and the body became emphasized when religious sentiment was prevalent in the given periods, basically in the Middle Ages and in the High Victorian era. The moral problematization of sexuality came into foreground at these times. Sexual life was seen as something hideous that should no way be the source of pleasure. Strange it may seem, immoderate sexual intercourse served as an explanation for *mors in actu* both according to the Antique and Christian views. The reason lies in the fact that in medieval times the inheritance of the antique medical view was very dominant, and the other reason is the strong influence of the Arabian medical science (Horányi-Magyar 1998: 66). Despite the fact that love-making was considered to be neutral from health's point of view, Christian worldview has brought a social anathema on it.

When plague, the pandemic disease called The Black Death swept over the world in the fourteenth century and killed almost half of the population in Europe, people were strongly reminded of the brevity of their earthly existence. Death had become a daily experience, people grew more conscious about the fact that death can come at any minute for anybody regardless of gender, rank, age, or religion. This intensified sense of human frailty manifested itself in iconography known as *Dance of Death*, or *Danse Macabre* in French

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<sup>4</sup> Foucault points out that there is no use of talking about continuity between pagan and Christian sexual morality, because principles are endowed with different values (1992: 21).

and *Totentanz* in German. In *Totentanz* pictures death is personified in the form of skeletons who accompany various people to their grave, indicating that death is inevitable for all humans. During this medieval allegory of death, lovers could be victims while walking or caught even during coitus when skeletons brought both or one of them to their way into the other world (Horányi-Magyar 1998: 71). To talk about *mors in actu* in case of *Dracula* and his victims is a bit complicated. Vampires cause slow death, their victims die of atrophy. Dracula comes back several times to the sufferers, thus the *mors in actu* motif is preceded by a long "courtship" before his victims die of anaemia. Furthermore, victims in a way die but soon they transform into an equally evil creature such as their masters, they become undead.

Blood is what guarantees the survival of the species, the keeping up of the living dead mode of being. Representing vitality, blood also makes Dracula young – but this youth operates only on the outside. The vampire is an ancient creature who is supposed to live for hundreds of years without changing in appearance. Dracula's youth originates from an afterlife condition. The vampiric non-existence in the ethical sphere can be two-fold. First of all, if staked, vampires can be liberated from the shackles of Hell, as will be observed in case of Lucy, who transforms back to her virtuous image. Secondly, moral uncertainty may follow. The arch vampire Dracula simply just ceases to exist, crumbles into dust, and nothing is known about his ultimate faith.

The instructive moral lessons of the traditional Christian religion, according to which, if one is good, he or she will go to Heaven, and if one is bad, then he or she will be punished in Hell. The belief in salvation and damnation in Stoker's time had been challenged by Darwin and science. In *Dracula*, Professor Van Helsing represents the man of science, although he believes in vampires, therefore his character is a proper manifestation of the Victorian doubts and uncertainty occurring between the rational and the irrational. The dichotomy between morality and immorality still corresponds to Heaven and Hell in the vampire narrative. The vampire is the personification of immoral qualities. Those infected by the blood-sucker can expect the suffering of the netherworld, and those



virtuous people who put up resistance have a good chance to go to Heaven. In this sense the vampire is a morality marker.

## Conclusion

The vampire myth is pervaded by death and sex taboos. The character of the vampire is a storehouse for binary oppositions such as living/dead, creator/destroyer, male/female, superhuman/subhuman, ancient/young, which are common features of mythic deities. This ambiguity correlates with underlying psychological explanations regarding Dracula. The resurrection of the vampire entails positive and negative aspects. Creating such a deity reflects people's wishes and fantasies, but in a dislocated realm of morality. Dracula represents the darker side of the psyche, and despite its seemingly evil, confrontation with "him" is of positive nature, thus with a moral lesson.

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*L'androgynie décadent à la fin du 19e siècle.*

*Léonora d'Este – androgynie, femme fatale,  
vampire...*

## Introduction

Léonora d'Este– protagoniste du roman le plus connu de Joséphin Péladan *Le vice suprême* incarne toutes les aspirations de l'âme vers les dimensions supérieures. Les aspirations vers l'idéal sont très caractéristiques de l'époque symboliste mais cela n'est pas tout. La figure en question ne reste pas univoque: étant l'incarnation du Bien, Léonora est aussi la génératrice du Mal parce qu'elle symbolise également le mal du siècle, la désillusion, le pessimisme. Comme l'idéal était trop éloigné et presque inaccessible, le symbole androgynie qui jusqu'à la fin du 19e siècle symbolisait la totalité, l'intégralité et la perfection se dégrade et prend une forme monstrueuse et contradictoire– celle du vampire et de la femme fatale. Léonora d'Este n'est ni androgynie ni vampire dans le sens littéraire du mot, cependant elle a toutes les caractéristiques pour incarner l'un ou l'autre. A première vue, la figure du vampire et celle de l'androgynie semblent être complètement différentes, même contradictoires, mais l'analyse suivante a pour but de révéler que, sous plusieurs aspects, elles se ressemblent.

## Le statut de la femme à la fin du 19e siècle dans la vie et dans l'art

Pour comprendre mieux le comportement de Léonora d'Este il faut faire quelques observations sur le statut de la femme à la fin du 19e siècle. Déjà d'après Baudelaire et Schopenhauer, la femme émancipée est quelque chose d'horrible. Ils comparent la femme à une bête, les deux sont purement instinctives. La femme est

considérée comme être humain seulement dans le cas où elle accepte son rôle, celui d'être mère. Sinon, elle devient une créature satanique qui s'oppose à la nature et condamne Dieu. Péladan écrit que, dévouée et en acceptant son rôle de satellite de l'homme, elle peut être sublime, mais si elle veut être son égale ou lui être supérieure, elle devient odieuse et condamne Dieu ainsi que les lois de la création. (Péladan 1926: 230) C'est aussi le cas de Léonora d'Este qui, selon Belkora, est celle par qui le malheur arrive, le succube qui anéantit l'homme. (Belkora 1986: 19)

À la fin du 19<sup>e</sup> siècle, la femme a une influence particulière sur l'artiste qui, voulant mener une vie purement spirituelle, n'est pas vraiment capable de rester insensible à sa beauté. L'artiste sait que la femme pervertit l'homme, et c'est pourquoi, ayant peur de tomber dans une dimension trop matérielle, il fait tout ce qui est en son pouvoir pour résister à la tentation. Le meilleur moyen est de se tourner vers l'art. Pour éviter les conséquences tristes dues aux plaisirs matériels, Péladan fait prononcer à tous les postulants qui veulent devenir membre de l'Ordre des Rose+Croix le serment d'idéalité. Ils doivent jurer sur l'éternel devenir de chercher, admirer et aimer la Beauté par les voies de l'art et du mystère; de la louer, servir et défendre même à leur péril; de garder leurs cœurs de l'amour sexuel pour le donner à l'idéal; et de ne jamais chercher la poésie dans la femme qui, selon Péladan, n'en présente que la grossière image. (Péladan 1893: 28–29)

L'Artiste a beau idéaliser l'art et donner son cœur à l'idéal, il n'arrive pas à résister à la tentation. C'est à l'aide de l'art et de l'idéal qu'il s'exprime et qu'il donne à la femme un caractère diabolique et impitoyable mais aussi irrésistible et envoûtant. La femme devient un objet d'adoration, un objet de sa propre hantise. Elle incarne la volupté pour ceux qui ne savent pas jouir de l'esprit. Bien qu'elle soit belle et presque surnaturelle, elle reste cependant "une figure horripilante qui cherche les émotions malsaines et qui ne comprend même pas l'horreur des situations les plus affreuses". (Moreau, Cahier III, p. 25, cité par Holten 1960: 18) Dans son essence première la femme est toujours, comme dit Gustave Moreau, "l'être inconscient, folle de l'inconnu, du mystère, éprise du mal sous la forme de séduction perverse et diabolique". (Moreau 2002: 123)

Selon Belkora, l'homme perd toute sa masculinité devant cette créature démoniaque, il n'est plus celui qui possède, mais celui qui se donne. (Belkora 1986: 14) À cause de cette castration symbolique effectuée par la femme dominatrice, il s'effémine et devient ce que Monneyron appelle "l'homme féminise". (Monneyron 1996: 15) La femme dévastatrice, le symbole de la luxure conduit l'homme à une perte inexorable. Belkora écrit dans sa thèse de Doctorat que dans cette castration indirecte réside la liberté de la femme, celle de dire non, mais en se condamnant à des plaisirs fétichistes ou solitaires d'où elle a exclu l'homme, elle ne peut longtemps se suffire à elle-même. En castrant l'autre, elle précipite aussi sa propre mort. (Belkora 1986: 40)

### La dégradation de l'androgynie

Dans la mythologie et dans la tradition hermétique-alchimique l'androgynie est la figure asexuée. Selon Péladan, l'androgynie est avant tout une vierge (Péladan 1910: 40) mais il le caractérise aussi comme "le sexe initial, sexe définitif, absolu de l'amour, absolu de la forme, sexe qui nie le sexe, sexe d'éternité". (Péladan 1910\*: 40, 70,76) Cependant, en dépit de son asexualité et sa virginité, l'androgynie devient à l'époque symboliste une figure érotique et homosexuelle. Eliade écrit que les héros de Péladan sont "parfaits" en sensualité et qu'il s'agit d'un hermaphroditisme morbide, voire satanique. Il ne s'agit plus d'un androgynie mais d'un hermaphrodite dans lequel les deux sexes coexistent anatomiquement, cette surabondance donnant des possibilités érotiques. (Eliade 1962: 123) L'androgynie qui était jusqu'à la fin du 19e siècle d'origine divine se revêt des caractéristiques vampiriques, presque animales.

L'androgynie, comme la figure du vampire, n'est pas seulement lié au plaisir mais aussi à la maladie et à la mort<sup>1</sup>. Le vampire tue ses

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<sup>1</sup> La femme qui sème la mort trouve son expression au sens propre dans "Mors Syphilitica" de Félicien Rops. Rops est selon Péladan "le peintre de la perversité". Il est le seul artiste de son siècle à comprendre et à dénoncer la tristesse de la chair. Il montre la femme dans toute son horreur comme "femina super bestiam". (Joséphin Péladan, "Les maîtres contemporains",



victimes en buvant leur sang, l'androgynie, en revanche, les dévore mentalement. Celui-ci est une chimère qui épuise les hommes. Belkora écrit que tel est le cas de la Princesse d'Este qui prend un malin désir à aguicher les hommes de son entourage et à ne jamais accorder ses faveurs à aucun d'eux. (Belkora 1986: 176) Léonora ressemble à la figure du vampire parce qu'elle est parfaitement consciente de ses capacités d'ensorceleuse, elle domine l'homme en le tuant petit à petit. Bien qu'elle agisse comme une goule avec ses victimes masculines, elle reste, à l'instar de Cléopâtre de Gautier, toujours inaccessible<sup>2</sup>.

Dans ce contexte l'androgynie et le vampire se ressemblent, il est devenu difficile de les distinguer. Ils ne sont pas similaires seulement physiquement<sup>3</sup> mais ils le sont aussi mentalement. Comme tous les deux sont contre nature, ils précipitent la mort. Ils sont destinés à périr parce qu'ils sont des monstres qui n'ont pas droit à la vie. Tous les deux constituent un écart extraordinaire par rapport à la nature et comme ils mettent en danger la différenciation des rôles - non seulement dans les relations sexuelles, mais aussi dans les différentes tâches sociales - il faut les tuer comme il fallait tuer les hermaphrodites dans l'antiquité grecque. (Brisson 1997: 13-39) Ces deux figures portent en elles un message négatif qui annonce la décadence de la race latine. Péladan écrit dans son manifeste de 1891 que les décadents ne croient ni au progrès, ni au salut. A la race latine, qui va mourir, ils préparent une dernière surprise afin d'éblouir et adoucir les Barbares qui vont venir. (Péladan 1891)

Cependant, il y a une grande différence: la corporéité. Tandis que l'androgynie nie son corps et veut être quelqu'un autre, le vampire

dans *Félicien Rops et son œuvre*, Bruxelles, Edmond Deman Librairie, 1897, p. 56. cité par Belkora Kaptan, "Le thème de l'androgynie en littérature et en peinture de 1875-1900", Université de Paris, 1986, p. 55)

<sup>2</sup> Selon Théophile Gautier, la Cléopâtre est "une reine, c'est quelque chose de si loin des hommes, de si élevé, de si séparé, de si impossible! [...] Ce n'est plus une femme, c'est une figure auguste et sacrée qui n'a point de sexe, et que l'on adore à genoux sans l'aimer, comme la statue d'une déesse". (Gautier 2006: 57)

<sup>3</sup> A l'époque du symbolisme et de la décadence tous les deux représentent l'idéal de beauté.

n'a (n'est) que son corps. Comme le vampire est une créature complètement physique qui a constamment besoin de sang, il ne réussit pas à tuer la chair et ne parvient pas à éviter le contact physique avec autrui. Mais l'androgynie, lui aussi peut subir une métamorphose et prendre une forme beaucoup plus matérielle, celle du sphinx. Le sphinx est la figure emblématique de la femme charnelle qui, comme le vampire, éveille en l'homme des instincts purement primitifs et bestiaux.

### L'androgynie vs la gynandre: la beauté démoniaque

Péladan n'aime pas que l'androgynie, un être tellement sublime et divin, subisse la dégradation. Pour rétablir son statut original, il crée la gynandre. L'androgynie qui, selon Péladan, est la jeunesse à égale distance du mâle et de la femelle, et qui constitue le dogme plastique, maintient son origine divine, idéale. (Péladan 1894: 44) La gynandre, par contre, prend une forme monstrueuse. Si l'androgynie est l'adolescent vierge et encore féminin, la gynandre sera la femme prétendant à la virilité, l'usurpatrice sexuelle: le féminin singeant le viril. (Péladan 1891: 43)

Léonora d'Este a toutes les caractéristiques typiques d'une gynandre. Elle est la «femme hominalisée» par excellence. Outre les caractéristiques psychologiques elle ressemble à une gynandre aussi physiquement: elle est très maigre sans que nulle part l'ossature paraisse. Elle a la poitrine plate, les seins petits mais précis et la ligne de la taille enfle un peu aux hanches. Elle est comme «un ange de missel dévêtu en vierge folle par un imagier pervers». (Péladan 1926: 46) Elle est «née sous un ciel italien, et élégantisée par un mélange de cette maigreur florentine où il n'y a pas d'os et de cette chair lombarde où il n'y a pas de graisse». (Ib. 22) Léonora a une étrange beauté rousse, ce qui fait d'elle une aberration de la nature, un signe maléfique, parce que les cheveux roux ont toujours été considérés comme quelque chose d'anormal.

Mais Léonora n'est pas la seule gynandre dans le roman de Péladan, il y a aussi la Nine. Péladan la décrit comme un monstre curieux: «La Nine n'avait pas de hanches, la Nine n'avait pas de gorge: la ligne de sa taille se continuait verticale à ses cuisses

étroites, ses reins n'étaient que des pectoraux abaissés. De son sexe ni les flancs larges de la fécondité, ni les saillantes mamelles de la maternité, mais la charme de la chatte et la grâce du mouvement félin. Aggravant à dessein l'hybridation de son aspect, elle portait la tête rasée. [...] Son costume, toujours d'homme, augmentait le trouble détestable que sa vue causait aux pervers. Elle était, consciemment l'androgyné pâle, vampire suprême des civilisations vieilles, dernier monstre avant le feu du ciel." (Ib. 50)

À la fin du 19<sup>e</sup> siècle la beauté, la curiosité et la démonialité sont inséparablement liées, mais plus la figure est belle, plus vicieuse elle est. C'est particulièrement clair dans la peinture et c'est surtout dans la peinture que se trouvent les gynandres les plus inquiétantes<sup>4</sup>. Dans l'œuvre de Gustave Moreau cette figure démoniaque apparaît comme Chimère. Déjà le terme «chimère» renferme en soi ce caractère ambigu: symbolisant dans la mythologie grecque le monstre qui a la tête et le poitrail d'un lion, le ventre d'une chèvre et la queue d'un dragon, la chimère se transforme à la fin du 19<sup>e</sup> siècle en équivalent négatif de la pure fantaisie (Littré). Le monstre subit une métamorphose et prend la forme d'une belle femme chimérique aux cheveux d'or et longs mais qui cependant ne perd pas complètement le sens premier du mot.

Léonora d'Este est aussi un être démoniaque parce qu'elle est lettrée et érudite. La démonialité est selon Péladan le péché lettré, patricien et décadent par excellence. Il faut plus que de l'imagination, beaucoup de lecture et un peu d'archéologie pour le commettre. (Ib. 95) Léonora est une femme cultivée, elle a reçu une éducation florentine, royale. Ayant une superbe connaissance du grec, du latin et du français, elle était une enfant extrêmement précoce et intelligente. Son tuteur, Sarkis, lui a fait apprendre simultanément par cœur en ces trois langues les trois premiers chants de la "Divine Comédie". Enfant, elle traduisait Sophocle et Tacite parce que Sarkis estimait que les langues d'Homère, de Tacite, de Dante et de Balzac suffisaient à une latine. Outre les langues, la

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<sup>4</sup> Plusieurs artistes et écrivains sont convaincus que l'image d'une féminité dévastatrice trouve son expression la plus parfaite dans la Salomé de Gustave Moreau.



Princesse connaît bien l'histoire et les beaux-arts, sait jouer du piano et dessiner. À cause de l'éducation qui a détruit son faible sens moral, elle trouve le vice plus séduisant que la vertu et les œuvres d'art où la femme triomphe de l'homme l'attirent invinciblement. (Ib. 32-41)

La Salomé de Moreau et la Princesse d'Este sont sous plusieurs aspects très similaires. Toutes les deux correspondent à l'idéal plastique et incarnent la démonialité tellement caractéristique de la gynandre et de l'époque symboliste. Léonora d'Este, comme Salomé, en citant l'œuvre d'Huysmans "A Rebours", est avant tout "la déité symbolique de l'indestructible Luxure, la déesse de l'immortelle Hystérie, la Beauté maudite, [...] la Bête monstrueuse indifférente, irresponsable, insensible, empoisonnant, de même que l'Hélène antique, tout ce qui l'approche, tout ce qui la voit, tout ce qu'elle touché"<sup>5</sup>. (Huysmans *A Rebours*, chapitre V)

### Le vice suprême

*Le vice suprême* (publié en 1889) de Joséphin Péladan aborde tous les péchés caractéristiques de l'époque symboliste qu'on peut imaginer. L'un des protagonistes Mérodack donne au vice suprême la définition suivante qui caractérise très bien l'androgynie (la gynandre): "Oh! L'onanisme immonde de la pensée... l'ivresse astrale, l'instinct de luxure éperonné par l'esprit de luxure, l'âme titillant le corps! L'ivrognerie des sens est hideuse; l'emportement organique, honteux, mais cela! Cela! C'est le vice suprême." (Péladan 1926: 261)

Péladan écrit que les esprits supérieurs n'ont pas besoin de grimoire, parce que leur pensée est une page écrite par l'enfer, pour l'enfer. Raisonner, justifier, héroïser le mal, en établir le rituel, est encore pire que de le commettre. Selon lui, il y a toujours de l'aveuglement dans la satisfaction de l'instinct et de la démente dans la perpétration du méfait, mais concevoir et théoriser exigent une opération calme de l'esprit, ce qui est le Vice suprême. (Ib. 213)

<sup>5</sup> Outre la Salomé de Moreau, la Léonora d'Este illustre à la fois la Salammbô de Flaubert, l'Hérodiade de Mallarmé et la Cléopâtre de Gautier.



L'androgynisme, vampire, gynandre, a beau être représenté comme une vierge, la chasteté n'exclut pas le vice ou bien "l'onanisme spirituel", pour utiliser la terminologie de l'époque. Quand Huysmans observe les figures représentées sur les aquarelles de Moreau, une impression inquiétante surgit: c'est une impression d'onanisme spirituel, répété dans une chair chaste; l'impression d'une âme épuisée par des idées solitaires et des pensées secrètes. (Huysmans 2006: 348)

S'il faut choisir entre le péché charnel et celui de la pensée, Léonora préfère rester chaste. C'est ici que réside sa plus grande infortune. Le vice suprême n'est rien d'autre que le crime commis contre sa propre nature. Le véritable vice, dit Lorrain, c'est l'imagination et non l'habitude plus ou moins honteuse: être vicieux c'est vouloir être un autre et ailleurs. (Lorrain "Mlle Salamandre", cité par Belkora 1986: 115) Mais Léonora a des raisons convaincantes de vouloir rester chaste. La seule expérience sexuelle qu'elle ait eue est celle d'être violente par son mari lors de la nuit de noces. Le traumatisme causé par un mari brutal explique bien son comportement<sup>6</sup>. (Péladan 1926: 82)

L'androgynisme incarne simultanément le principe du bien et celui du mal, ce qui fait de lui une aberration. Même Péladan qui a créé la gynandre, est effaré: "Quel abîme que la quiétude de la prévarication! Quelle corruption que celle qui ne se sait pas corrompue! Quel vice que le vice qui s'ignore! Avoir perdu la notion du bien et du mal, c'est le péché inconscient qui est irrémissible." (Ib. 268) Bien que l'androgynisme et la gynandre semblent innocents tout comme Dorian Gray de Wilde, la réalité qu'ils cachent à l'intérieur d'eux-mêmes est quelque chose de plus contradictoire, de plus monstrueux.

Comme les figures androgyniques ne savent pas distinguer le bien du mal, elles peuvent être simultanément vertueuses et vicieuses, saintes et pécheresses. Cela vaut aussi pour leur sexualité.

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<sup>6</sup> Péladan écrit: "Sa vertu morte sous la luxure de Malatesta, elle n'avait plus que son orgueil qui la guidait et une haine furieuse contre tous ceux qui lui manifestaient ce même désir sexuel qui l'avait profanée. Une détestable métamorphose s'opéra." (Péladan 1926: 82)

A cause de leur caractère ambigu ils peuvent être désirés par les hommes ainsi que par les femmes.

Comme la femme fatale méprise les hommes et préfère rester chaste, elle est souvent considérée comme lesbienne. L'homosexualité et le saphisme sont «à la mode» à la fin du 19e siècle et c'est pourquoi il n'est pas surprenant que l'androgynie asexué devienne une figure érotique. Le symbole se dégrade. À partir de la fin de siècle, c'est la femme qui domine, qui séduit mais qui ne se donne jamais. Elle ne respecte pas les codes sexuels en vigueur et adopte un comportement peu orthodoxe, c'est-à-dire qu'elle investit les rôles traditionnellement dévolus aux hommes. La Princesse d'Este, elle aussi a un penchant pour le saphisme et les allusions lesbiennes ne sont pas seulement indirectes. Péladan écrit que seulement ses amies avaient le corps assez beau, la caresse assez douce pour lui donner le plaisir qu'elle souhaitait. (Ib. 87)

## Conclusion

Comme le vampire, l'androgynie et la gynandre sont créés par l'homme, ils incarnent tout ce dont l'homme a constamment peur. Toutes les craintes, les phobies et les désirs subconscients y trouvent leur place. Etre contradictoire, l'androgynie incarne aussi les élans de l'âme vers l'idéal. Léonora veut retrouver cet état initial et parfait où l'homme ne connaissait pas encore la dualité.

Pour que l'idéal soit réalisable et accessible, l'androgynie qui jusqu'à la fin du 19e siècle était d'origine hermétique et divine, est violemment immergé dans une dimension matérielle qui le déforme et qui lui donne un aspect hideux. Il s'agit d'une déformation malade de l'esprit. Comme fantasmes dépassent toute possibilité de réalisation, le désir qui n'a plus d'issue devient l'angoisse. L'androgynie n'est plus l'archétype mais le résultat de la dégradation. C'est le cas de Léonora d'Este qui ressemble à l'artiste qui l'a créée, tous les deux étant damnés dans l'enfer du désir vain.

L'androgynie est semblable à Lucifer. Comme tous les deux veulent égaler Dieu et le menacent, ils subissent le châtiment définitif: ils perdent pour toujours leur position. Incapable de retrouver son origine divine, l'androgynie maudit Dieu et c'est probablement

pourquoi il se transforme en monstre— en vampire, gynandre, femme fatale. Cependant, à la suite de la transformation, l'androgynie ne perd pas complètement ses aspects surnaturels, ils demeurent pour lui rappeler son origine perdue. C'est ici que réside le tragique de l'androgynie et le paradoxe insurmontable qui caractérise toute l'époque symboliste.

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*Intertextualidad, traducción y reescritura:  
Edmond Jabès y Paul Celan en la poesía  
de José Ángel Valente*

La obra poética y ensayística de José Ángel Valente (1929–2000) ocupa un destacado lugar en la literatura europea del siglo XX. Su producción acoge casi una veintena de libros de poemas, agrupados en dos grandes bloques: por una parte, un primer segmento (1953–1976), que tituló *Punto cero* en su antología, donde plantea la indagación en la experiencia del ser, donde la angustia existencial y la naturaleza social del ser humano pasan a ser así materia de los poemas; por otra, un segundo segmento (1977–2000), que denominó *Material memoria*, donde hallamos una búsqueda del ser más allá de la experiencia en el mundo, inquiriendo en el lenguaje mismo las respuestas que el ser humano necesita, pues en el lenguaje se encuentra su verdadera esencia<sup>1</sup>. Quedaría un libro exento, en gallego (*Cantigas de Alén*, 1989), que sirve de nexo entre ambos segmentos, pues aparecen composiciones que poseen su correlato en la temática y planteamiento creativo de uno y otro bloque.

Junto a esa producción poética y su larga trayectoria como ensayista, la obra de Valente se completa con dos libros de prosas (*El fin de la edad de plata*, de 1973, y *Nueve enunciaciones*, de 1982), diversos ensayos, principalmente sobre mística o pintura, y la

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<sup>1</sup> A *Punto cero* (1980) pertenecen: *A modo de esperanza* (1955), *Poemas a Lázaro* (1960), *La memoria y los signos* (1966), *Siete representaciones* (1967), *Breve son* (1968), *Presentación y memoria para un monumento* (1970), *El inocente* (1970), *Treinta y siete fragmentos* (1972) e *Interior con figuras* (1976); por su parte, *Material memoria* (1999) está formada por: *Material memoria* (1979), *Tres lecciones de tinieblas* (1980), *Mandorla* (1982), *El fulgor* (1984), *Al dios del lugar* (1989) y *No amanece el cantor* (1992). Temática y formalmente, también estaría adscrito a este segundo bloque el libro póstumo *Fragmentos de un libro futuro* (2000).



traducción de un amplio repertorio de poetas de distintas lenguas: inglés (John Donne, John Keats, Gerard Manley Hopkins, Dylan Thomas, Robert Duncan), italiano (Eugenio Montale), griego (Constantino Cavafis), alemán (Paul Celan) y francés (Benjamín Péret, Edmond Jabès), además de la traducción de Hölderlin al gallego. Estas traducciones nos sirven como guía de lectura de aquellos poetas admirados por Valente, y cuya admiración ha llevado a la translación de la poesía de estos autores a la lengua instrumental del poeta, en una suerte de reescritura que no conlleva el marchamo estricto de *palimpsesto*, sino el hacer suyas una poesía y una poética desde la admiración, si bien asumiendo parcialmente el imaginario poético de dos de estos poetas: Edmond Jabès y Paul Celan, muy presentes en la obra poética y ensayística de Valente. Así, dedica a ellos los artículos “La memoria del fuego”, “Jabès o la inminencia” y “Edmond Jabès: judaísmo e incertidumbre”, dedicados al poeta egipcio; y “Bajo un cielo sombrío” y “Palabra, linde de lo oscuro: Paul Celan”, dedicados al poeta rumano<sup>2</sup>, sin contar las innumerables referencias a estos poetas en otros trabajos.

Ello confiere a estos dos poetas (ambos exiliados en París) una presencia continuada en la obra de Valente, tal vez porque el poeta orensano vivió el exilio exterior buena parte de su trayectoria biográfica, además del exilio interior que caracteriza al (gran) poeta contemporáneo. Asimismo, el peso de la mística judía ha sido grande en la poética valentiana, influencia que abarca varios aspectos de su obra, desde la noción de alteridad a la Cábala. El interés de Valente por la poesía mística (cristiana, judía y —en menor medida— árabe) le llevó, sin duda, a acercarse a estos poetas, si bien, dentro del contexto religioso judío, Celan y Jabès nos ofrecen dos posturas claramente diferenciadas: el poeta rumano estaba formado en el jasidismo (corriente que arraigó sobre todo en el Este de Europa), mientras que Jabès plantea muchos de sus textos a través de diálogos o aforismos

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<sup>2</sup> Para Jabès: *Variaciones sobre el pájaro y la red* precedido de *La piedra y el centro*. Barcelona: Tusquets, 2000. pp. 251–257; y *La experiencia abisal*, Barcelona, Galaxia Gutenberg, 2004. pp. 55–58 y 89–101, respectivamente. Para Celan: *La experiencia abisal*. pp. 152–155 y 209–211, respectivamente.

de rabinos ficticios, recogiendo la tradición del *midrash* o exégesis de la *Toráh*. En ambos, el tema de la Soah es recurrente, aunque en Celan ocupe el lugar central de su producción poética y en Jabès sea un tema algo más secundario, pues se centra en la búsqueda de un dios ausente, sin nombre por innombrable, y en el concepto mismo de “judío”. Estas temáticas, desarrolladas con un lenguaje enigmático, las asume el poeta español en el contexto de esa *búsqueda del ser más allá de la experiencia* y en la indagación de las raíces del lenguaje que preside la segunda parte de su producción poética y ocupa la mayor parte de sus ensayos. El punto de partida de la creación es la *escucha*, concepto asumido desde la mística, y formulado por Jabès y por Valente en términos muy próximos:

Comment s'effectue le passage du silence à l'écrit? Un tremblement de l'écriture, parfois, le révèle; ce tremblement est provoqué par l'écoute, l'ultime et immémoriale écoute qui fait, quelque part, basculer la langue et la pensée. Mais le miracle est que la langue, loin d'être entamée, s'en trouve enrichie (Jabès 2003: 11)

Se escribe por pasividad, por escucha, por atención extrema de todos los sentidos a lo que las palabras acaso van a decir (Valente 2001: 12)<sup>3</sup>.

A partir de estos principios creativos, a través de los que se busca una transcendencia de la palabra humana, manifestada a través de la palabra poética, la traducción de estos dos poetas va a ir paralela a la creación de la obra poética de José Ángel Valente. Así, tradujo a Jabès entre los años 1988 y 1991, y a Celan entre 1978 y 1995. La presencia de la obra de estos dos autores, sin embargo, supone varios procedimientos creativos o de concurrencia textual, que pasamos a analizar brevemente.

De las traducciones de textos de Edmond Jabès se deduce un tipo de *intertextualidad estructural*<sup>4</sup> que alcanza también el imaginario de

<sup>3</sup> El texto pertenece a la reflexión sobre la creación artística titulado “Cómo se pinta un dragón”.

la mística judía que reescribe el poeta egipcio. Ciertamente, Valente evita ese procedimiento creativo que consiste en el diálogo como artificio para el desarrollo del texto. Aún así, la presencia de conceptos básicos de la poética jabèsiana, como la idea del ante-libro (o planificación de un libro inserto en una serie bajo una unidad temática) como un desierto donde se abre la posibilidad de la creación o la idea del silencio como germen de la palabra esencial, aparecen claramente delimitados en los poemas de Jabès seleccionados por Valente para su traducción. Por ejemplo, en el poema "Langue source Langue cible" (*Livre du partage*, 1987), se nos dice:

«Écrire est un acte de silence, se donnant à lire dans son intégralité» (Jabès 1997: 46)<sup>5</sup>

Este poema es precisamente un punto fundamental de la poética de Jabès (en ese imaginario judío que refleja y desarrolla), no sólo por plantear la cuestión del silencio esencial, sino también por esa idea del *Libro* como expresión de lo inefable, de poner nombres a lo innombrable, por lo que la coincidencia con la poética valentiana parece evidente.

Otra cuestión temática que resulta de interés es la selección de textos del libro *Un étranger avec, sous le bras, un livre de petit format* (1989), traducidos por Valente. En este caso, el exilio cobra forma, hasta el punto de vertebrar el libro. Pero no sólo el exilio como elemento consustancial al judío, sino el exilio interior como rasgo de identidad del ser humano consciente de su condición en el mundo, ajeno a (o alienado de) un exterior hostil, también en una confluencia con la *razón poética* de María Zambrano:

<sup>4</sup> H. Plett distingue entre *intertextualidad material*, que reproduce signos pertenecientes a un texto ajeno, *intertextualidad estructural*, que repite reglas de un texto anterior, e *intertextualidad material-estructural*, que repite signos y reglas entre dos o más textos (Plett 1991: 7)

<sup>5</sup> "«Escribir es un acto de silencio, que se da a leer en su integridad»" (Valente 2002: 331)

L'étranger te permet d'être toi-même, en faisant de toi, un étranger.  
[...]

«Je n'ai pour certitude, ô pierre poreuse, que la brumeuse incertitude d'être», écrivait un sage. (Jabès 1989: 9 y 15)<sup>6</sup>

E incluso habría una tercera posibilidad de presencia textual de Jabès en la obra de Valente, desde el punto de vista estructural, pues podríamos trazar un nuevo paralelo entre unos versos del poeta egipcio y la obra valentiana: la interrelación entre vida y obra, que sustenta *Fragmentos de un libro futuro*, donde el final de la vida supone el final del libro, o viceversa. En *Le désert* (1978), Jabès concluye con este aforismo:

*(Le temps du livre est le temps de la ressemblance.*

*Nous vécumes, dans chaque parole, ce temps.*

*La fin du livre est, peut-être, la fin du temps.*) (Jabès 1978:137)

El punto de conexión entre la poética de Jabès y la de Celan se halla en el Holocausto o *Soah*, presente tanto en el ciclo *Le livre des questions* (1963–1973), como en *Un étranger avec, sous le bras, un livre de petit format*, y que articula –a su vez– la producción de Celan, superviviente a la tragedia de sus padres, desaparecidos en el campo de exterminio de *Michailowka*. Las referencias directas en la poesía de Valente tanto al Holocausto como a Celan son tardías y no por ese acercamiento al nuevo misticismo de la palabra poética que le hace asimilar las bases del imaginario judío, sino por la empatía hacia el poeta rumano, como en el poema “*Sonderaktion*, 1943”:

El humo aciago de las víctimas.

Todo se deshacía en el aire.

La historia como el viento dorado del otoño  
arrastraba a su paso los gemidos, las hojas, las cenizas,  
para que el llanto no tuviera fundamento.

<sup>6</sup> “El extranjero te permite ser tú mismo, al hacer de ti un extranjero” y “«Mi sola certidumbre, oh piedra porosa, es la brumosa incertidumbre del ser», escribía un sabio” (Valente 2002: 349)



Disolución falaz de la memoria.

Parecía

como si todo hubiera sido para siempre borrado.

Para jamás, me digo.

Para nunca. (Valente 2000:19)

Como podemos apreciar, aquí aparece una nueva vertiente del imaginario poético judío, pero ya alejado de Jabès y muy cercano al de Celan. Si Valente no emplea el procedimiento creativo del diálogo ficticio, estilema esencial de Jabès, sí se va a sentir muy cercano a la idea de poesía como interpelación al Otro que hallamos en Celan, en la vertiente ética del concepto de alteridad. En esta línea, Celan resume esta idea en “El meridiano”:

¡Pero el poema habla! Recuerda sus fechas, habla. Por supuesto, habla siempre sólo en nombre de su propia causa, en su más propia causa.

Pero pienso – y esta idea apenas les sorprenderá- que desde antaño siempre pertenece a las esperanzas del poema, precisamente el hablar de esta manera, hacerlo siempre en nombre de una causa *ajena* – no, esta palabra no la puedo seguir utilizando –, precisamente al hablar de esta manera habla en nombre de la causa *de eso Otro*, quién sabe si de un otro *totalmente Otro* [...]

El poema se convierte –¡bajo qué condiciones!– en poema de quien – todavía – percibe, que está atento a lo que aparece, que pregunta y habla a eso que aparece. Se hace diálogo; a menudo es un diálogo desesperado.

Sólo en el espacio de ese diálogo se constituye lo interpelado, que gracias a la denominación ha devenido un Tú, trae su alteridad. Aún en el aquí y ahora del poema –el poema mismo tiene siempre sólo ese presente único, singular, puntual–, aún en esa inmediatez y cercanía lo interpelado deja expresarse también lo que a él, al otro, le es más propio: su tiempo. (Celan 2004: 505 y 507)

Las traducciones de los poemas de Celan van acompañadas por comentarios de Valente en una continua reflexión sobre la poesía: la de Celan, la suya, la de los *otros*; una palabra que abra la herida más profunda en el ser humano para cerrar el conocimiento de su propia naturaleza, como en “Fuga de la muerte” (“Todesfuge”, de *Mohn und Gedächtnis*, 1952), como en “Angostura” (“Engführung”, de *Sprachgitter*, 1959), como en ese dolor que aflora desde lo biográfico de Celan hasta lo universal de nuestra esencia, y que se cierra con el salto al vacío desde el Pont Mirabeau en abril de 1970. Y es ésa la motivación del Valente traductor y comentarista: descubrir el enigma de la poesía hermética de Celan para desentrañar nuestro enigma, darle forma al enigma para descubrirnos tras él, en lo que fuimos también antes de él.

La conexión con el imaginario de Celan no es, sin embargo, recurrente. Quizá podríamos establecerlo en torno al hermetismo de la poesía contemporánea, pero ésta es una cuestión demasiado general, pues, en sus diferentes poéticas, también son herméticas las obras de Georg Trakl, Nelly Sachs, Saint-John Perse, Yves Bonnefoy, Antonio Gamoneda o Chantal Maillard, por ejemplo. De lo que se trata en este caso es de la contraposición de elementos, ya que la intertextualidad no se nos muestra ni en el plano estructural (como sucedía con Jabès) ni en el material; mucho menos en la confluencia material-estructural. Siguiendo a Gérard Genette, la relación de la poesía de Valente con la de Celan se plantea o como *paratexto* (reutilización de un título) o como *intertexto*, que de modo restrictivo el teórico francés reduce a la *cita* (Genette 1989: 10–11). Al primer tipo pertenece *Mandorla*, título de un poema de Celan, que Valente traduce, y que se convierte –a su vez– en título de un libro y de un poema del poeta orensano, que se abre con una cita de ese poema de Celan. Veamos la cita inicial:

*In der Mandel –was steht in der Mandel?  
Das Nichts.* (Valente 2001: 77)

Esta cita nos plantea ya el contrapunto que va a estructurar el libro de Valente (*Mandorla*, 1982), entre la nada –por una parte– y la materialidad corporal y la palabra poética –por otra–, que acabarán

confluyendo en el último segmento de la obra. No existe relación, más allá de la nada y esa *almendra*, núcleo de lo interior (del cuerpo y de la palabra), entre el texto (o virtual *architexto*) de Celan y el texto de Valente:

### MANDORLA

In der Mandel – was steht in der Mandel?  
 Das Nichts.  
 Es steht das Nichts in der Mandel.  
 Da steht es und steht.

Im Nichts – wer steht da? Der König.  
 Da steht der König, der König.  
 Da steht er und steht.

Judenlocke, wirst nicht grau.

Und dein Aug - wohin steht dein Auge?  
 Dein Aug steht der Mandel entgegen.  
 Dein Aug, dem Nichts steht entgegen.  
 Es steht zum König.  
 So steht es und steht.

Menschenlocke, wirst nicht grau.  
 Leere Mandel, königsblau. (P. Celan 2004: 173)<sup>7</sup>

### Mandorla

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<sup>7</sup> “En la almendra – ¿qué hay en la almendra? / La Nada. / La Nada está en la almendra. / Allí está, está. // En la Nada – ¿quién está? El Rey. / Allí está el Rey, el Rey. / Allí está, está. // Bucle de judío, no llegarás al gris. // Y tu ojo – ¿dónde está tu ojo? / Tu ojo está frente a la almendra. / Tu ojo frente a la Nada está. / Apoya al rey. / Así está allí, está. // Bucle de hombre, no llegarás al gris. / Vacía almendra, azul real ///” (Valente 2002: 257)

Estás oscura en tu concavidad  
y en tu secreta sombra contenida.

Acaricié tu sangre.

Me entraste al fondo de tu noche ebrio  
de claridad.

Mandorla. (Valente 2001: 81)

Otra posibilidad creativa que afronta Celan es la de la reescritura de elementos simbólicos procedentes del imaginario judío y cristiano. Así, en el poema "Corona" (*Mohn und Gedächtnis*, 1952) el poeta alemán reescribe la primera de las *sefirot* o esferas de manifestación divina: la Corona o suprema corona de Dios (Scholem 2000: 234), para trasladar esa suprema manifestación divina al terreno de lo erótico y, por tanto, de lo esencialmente humano:

### CORONA

Aus der Hand frißt der Herbst mir sein Blatt: wir sind Freunde.  
Wir schälen die Zeit aus den Nüssen und lehren sie gehen:  
die Zeit kehrt zurück in die Schale.

Im Spiegel ist Sonntag,  
im Traum wird g4eschlafen,  
der Mund redet wahr.

Mein Aug steigt hinab zum Geschlecht der Geliebten:  
wir sehen uns an,  
wir sagen uns Dunkles,  
wir lieben einander wie Mohn und Gedächtnis,  
wir schlafen wie Wein in den Muscheln,  
wie das Meer im Blutstrahl des Mondes.

Wir stehen umschlungen im Fenster, sie sehen uns zu von der  
straße:  
es ist Zeit, daß man weiß!



Es ist Zeit, daß der Stein sich zu blühen bequemt,  
daß der Unrast ein Herz schlägt.  
Es ist Zeit, daß es Zeit wird.

Es ist Zeit. (Celan 2004: 62)<sup>8</sup>

La corona, símbolo de la sabiduría divina en la Cábala, aparece, sin embargo, trasladada al terreno del lenguaje poético en *Tres lecciones de tinieblas* (1980), reescribiendo tanto su simbolismo en la mística judía, como la reescritura efectuada por Celan. Así, esa corona, representada por la letra Zayin,

י Zayin

Ahora tenía ante sí lo posible abierto a lo posible y lo posible: y para no morir de muerte tenía ante sí mismo el despertar: un dios entró en reposo el día séptimo: vestiste su armadura: señor de nada, ni el dios ni tú: tu propia creación es tu palabra: la que aún no dijiste: la que acaso no sabrías decir, pues ella ha de decirte: la que aguarda nupcial como la sierpe en la humedad secreta de la piedra: no hay memoria ni tiempo: y la fidelidad es como un pájaro que vuela hacia otro cielo: nunca vuelvas: un dios entró en reposo: se desplegaba el aire en muchas aves: en espejos de espejos la mañana: en una sola lágrima el adiós: te fuiste como el humo que deshace incansable sus múltiples figuras: no adorarás imágenes: señor de nada: en el umbral del aire: tu planta pisa el despertar. (Valente 2001: 62)

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<sup>8</sup> “En mi mano el otoño come su hoja: somos amigos. / Extraemos el tiempo de las nueces y le enseñamos a caminar: / regresa el tiempo a la nuez. // En el espejo es domingo, / en el sueño se duerme, / la boca dice la verdad. // Mi ojo asciende al sexo de la amada: / nos miramos, / nos decimos palabras oscuras, / nos amamos como se aman amapola y memoria, / nos dormimos como vino en los cuencos, / como la mar en el rayo sangriento de la luna. // Nos mantenemos abrazados en la ventana, nos ven desde la calle: / tiempo es de que se sepa, / tiempo es de la piedra pueda florecer, / de que en la inquietud palpite un corazón. / Tiempo es de que sea tiempo. // Es tiempo//” (Valente 2002: 247)

La segunda cuestión, la cita (*intertextualidad*, en Genette), la hallamos en el poema de Valente “Fénix” (*Al dios del lugar*, 1989): “Singbarer Rest” (de *Atemwende*, 1967); cita que, paradójicamente, pertenece a un poema de Celan no traducido por el poeta orensano. La cita pasa a ser el punto de arranque del poema:

Singbarer Rest – der Umriß  
 dessen, der durch  
 die Sichelschrift lautlos hindurch bracht,  
 abseits am Schneeort.

Quirlend  
 unter Kometen–  
 brauen  
 die Blickmasse, auf  
 die der verfinsterte winzige  
 Herztrabant zutreibt  
 mit dem  
 draußen erjagten Funken.  
 – Entmündigte Lippe, melde,  
 daß etwas geschieht, noch immer,  
 unweit von dir. (P. Celan 2004: 215)<sup>9</sup>

*Singbarer Rest*  
 PAUL CELAN

QUEDAR  
 en lo que queda  
 después del fuego,  
 residuo, sola  
 raíz de lo cantable. (Valente 2001: 195)

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<sup>9</sup> En la traducción de J. L. Reina Palazón: “RESTO CANTABLE – el perfil / de aquel que a través / de la escritura de hoz abrió brecha, silente, / a solas, en el sitio de la nieve. // Remolineando / bajo cejas– / cometas / la masa de la mirada / hacia la que, eclipsado, minúsculo, / el satélite del corazón converge / con la / chispa capturada fuera. // – Labio inhabilitado, anuncia / que sucede algo, todavía, / no lejos de tí. ///” (Celan 2004: 215)

La muerte del maestro cantor (de la sinagoga) en el campo de concentración y su posterior pulverización en el horno crematorio aguardan, en Valente, un resurgir en forma de canto: el poema. Así, la poesía de Celan es el fénix que hace resurgir el canto desde la cenizas, desmintiendo a Adorno y su reflexión sobre la imposibilidad de poesía después de Auschwitz ("kein Gedicht nach Auschwitz"). Frente al dolor y al tiempo, la palabra poética se eleva como memoria viva del ser humano, para que no muera la certeza de nuestra propia oscuridad, en virtud de la luz de ese mundo construido de palabras, la morada del hombre, el lugar de encuentro con el otro, para reconocernos distintos por la palabra –renovados por ella y en ella–, idénticos en la necesidad de esa palabra como forma de supervivencia en un mundo hostil: "El día en que este juego sin fin con las palabras se termine habremos muerto", escribió Valente<sup>10</sup>.

De este modo, la traducción de los poemas de Jabès y de Celan efectuada por José Ángel Valente, completa su poética y ayuda a la vez a explicar su obra: doble tarea hermenéutica, que alcanza, en todo caso, a la explicación del ser que escribe y del ser que lee, pues, en cada una de esas palabras que buscan una trascendencia por el lenguaje, habita el ser humano a solas con su memoria, memoria –cómo no– de un lenguaje que nos traslada, más allá de las palabras, a una experiencia esencial como forma o posibilidad de construimos.

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<sup>10</sup> "Memoria de Paul Celan, en la muerte de Giselle Celan-Lestranger, fines de 1991" (Valente 2000: 17).

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*Convergent Literary Echoes in Kafka's  
Die Verwandlung. What Intertextuality Tells  
Us about Gregor Samsa*

For Samaneh Gachpazian  
*Wo aber Gefahr ist, wächst das Rettende auch*

The entomological dogma prevailing in Kafka scholarship and the whole world of literary criticism, according to which *Die Verwandlung* relates the metamorphosis of Gregor Samsa into a monstrous vermin (bug), has proved incapable of unraveling the complexity of Kafka's most widely known work. In a series of articles, I have declared myself a heretic regarding that dogma, and I have argued that there is indeed a key for solving the interpretative riddle of *Die Verwandlung*. The solution lies in realizing that this novella contains two conflicting versions of the events – one according to which Gregor is a subhuman being, and another in which he is a human being, and also in considering the complexity of the victimary processes and the cognitive distortions that they entail, and paying attention to the manifold moral conflicts of the characters in Kafka's most celebrated story. Once a careful reading of the text has been made, *Die Verwandlung* turns out to be the text in which Kafka has reflected the formation process of a phenomenon of "corrupt objectivity", namely, the phenomenon which takes place in a victimary circle when the unanimity of the persecutors has been obtained, the victim has internalized the version of the victimary circle, and there are no independent spectators who could say that the victimary version is a distorted truth.<sup>1</sup> And this leads us to conclude,

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<sup>1</sup> For a detailed explanation of this concept ("corrupt objectivity") and its utility for solving the riddle of *Die Verwandlung*, see Bermejo-Rubio 2010: 155–160; and especially Bermejo-Rubio, Grete Samsa's inconsistent

in turn, that Gregor Samsa, for the Prague writer and for the characters in the story, is nothing but a human being. The aim of the present article is to survey the most plausible results obtained in the study of Kafka's story from the perspective of intertextuality, in order to prove that they support my reading.

Among the several myths and wrong ideas surrounding Kafka's work, one of them has been that of absolute and unmitigated originality. This idea has been rightly challenged by several scholars, whose investigations have proved that Kafka incorporated literary texts into his own writings (even when we find no mention of such texts or their authors in his Diaries and letters). Even if nobody can deny the extent of this writer's originality, it is possible to conclude that "Kafka was a synthetic writer [...] his greatest works were built on frames supplied by other authors" (Spilka 1980: 289).<sup>2</sup> Kafka's own statements allow us to track this path. For instance, regarding his unfinished novel *Der Verschollene*, which he began to write two months before having composed *Die Verwandlung*, the Prague writer himself noted in his Diaries that it is "sheer imitation" of Dickens' *David Copperfield*.<sup>3</sup>

It is crucial to realize that, despite so many claims about the alleged impact of fairy tales and fantastic literature such as Ovid's

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speech. The logic underlying the two conflicting versions in Kafka's *Die Verwandlung*, forthcoming.

<sup>2</sup> Regarding *Die Verwandlung*, I have argued elsewhere that the use of the image of lasting dirt in the third part of the story betrays a(n) (im)moral atmosphere characterized by the presence of impurity and remorse, and that this motif has probably been taken from Shakespeare's *Macbeth* (a work which is also cited in Flaubert's *L'Éducation sentimentale*, one of Kafka's favorite literary works). We have a sort of Kafkaesque equivalent of the Shakespearean image in *Macbeth* especially in Mr. Samsa's uniform (which is dirty in spite of all his wife's and sister's care); see Bermejo-Rubio 2011: 96–97.

<sup>3</sup> "Dickens Copperfield. 'Der Heizer' glatte Dickensnachahmung, noch mehr der geplante Roman. Koffergeschichte, der Beglückende und Bezaubernde, die niedrigen Arbeiten, die Geliebte auf dem Landgut die schmutzigen Häuser u.a. vor allem aber die Methode. Meine Absicht war wie ich jetzt sehe einen Dickensroman zu schreiben, nur bereichert [...]" (T 841).

*Metamorphosis* (see Heselhaus 1952: 353f; Beicken 1983: 69) or Apuleius' *The Golden Ass* on *Die Verwandlung*, no scholar has been able to prove it.<sup>4</sup> This is a particularly important point, given that the widespread entomological dogma invites us to think of the presence of such *Vorlagen* or pre-texts. Of course, other proposals – such as the one claiming that *Die Verwandlung* is an adaptation of the Medieval German epic *Gregorius* by Hartmann von Aue –<sup>5</sup> have revealed, at best, only very superficial similarities and are not convincing. Some of these proposals, however, deserve attention. The most plausible ones are examined below.

### Jacob Gordin, *Der wilde Mensch*

It is well known that between October 1911 and February 1912 Kafka repeatedly attended in Prague's Café Savoy many (about a dozen) performances of a Yiddish theater troupe from Eastern Europe, led by Jizchak Löwy;<sup>6</sup> his Diaries are full of testimony of his

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<sup>4</sup> Binder is right on this point: "Im Blick auf mögliche literarische Vorlagen zur *Verwandlung* ist zu sagen, daß keinerlei direkter genetischer Zusammenhang mit Ovids Metamorphosen und vergleichbaren Verwandlungsvorgängern im Märchen besteht, wie in der Nachfolge von C. Heselhaus [...] oft behauptet wurde" (Binder 1975: 155–156). The same could be said, however, about the alleged relationship between *Die Verwandlung* and the animal stories by the Danish writer Johannes V. Jensen (*pace* Binder 1983: 156–159; Binder 2004: 60–65).

<sup>5</sup> Politzer 1962: 77; Weinberg 1963: 237–239; Köhnke 1971; Winkelmann 1983. Winkelmann's article, for instance, is a magnificent example of the arbitrariness so often displayed in Kafka scholarship, insofar as it is based on the assumption that "Gregor Samsa is imprisoned in his room for seventeen months, just as Gregorius was chained to his rock for seventeen years". Unfortunately, this assumption is wrong, as Kafka's story develops from an indeterminate moment in autumn (probably November – December) to the next spring (end March), so not for 17 months at all, but only for 3, 4 or 5.

<sup>6</sup> It is interesting to recall that Kafka's father said to his son about Löwy: "Wer sich mit Hunden legt steht mit Wanzen auf" (T 223). In his "Brief an den Vater", eight years later, Kafka was to say: "Ohne ihn zu kennen, verglichst Du ihn in einer schrecklichen Weise, die ich schon vergessen



attendance and his enthusiasm for those performances. At the beginning of 1912, on the occasion of a Löwy performance, he even gave a public address in Prague on the Yiddish language. Evelyn T. Beck has argued that Kafka's breakthrough as a writer in the fall of 1912 is intimately linked with this experience (Beck 1970; Beck 1971). More precisely, this scholar has noted the many parallelisms between *Die Verwandlung* and a classic of the Yiddish theater, Jacob Gordin's *Der vilder Mensh* (*Der wilder Mensch*).<sup>7</sup> Kafka attended the performance of this piece on October 24, 1911, and in his Diaries (October, 26 and 28, 1911) discusses it at length, outlining its plot in some detail.<sup>8</sup>

The similarities are indeed striking. Both are stories focused on a family (the Samsas and the Layblikhs), and the centrality of Gregor in *Die Verwandlung* closely parallels that of Lemekh, "the savage one" in Gordin's play.<sup>9</sup> Both the Samsas and the Layblikhs are similarly to blame for their sons' declines: both sons are treated unfairly and without compassion, they are barely tolerated in the home, looked upon with disgust as outcasts whose very existence shames their families. They lie in their own rooms, and whenever either Lemekh or Gregor tries to join his family, he is shooed into his designated quarters and beaten by an enraged father. Both experience a process of progressive physical and psychological decay, and in fact both "crawl on the floor", which provides a direct and visual statement of the extent of their degradation.<sup>10</sup> Both conceal themselves when they hear their relatives coming, and, like Lemekh,

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habe, mit Ungeziefer". Gregor Samsa sees himself "zu einem ungeheueren Ungeziefer verwandelt".

<sup>7</sup> This work was also Löwy's "Lieblingswerk"; he was photographed as Lemekh (see e.g. Wagenbach 1994<sup>3</sup>: 152).

<sup>8</sup> T 196. Gordin seems to have been Kafka's favorite Yiddish author: "Gordon [sic] ist deshalb besser als Lateiner, Scharkansky, Feimann u.s.w. weil er mehr Details, mehr Ordnung und mehr Folgerichtigkeit in dieser Ordnung hat" (T 195).

<sup>9</sup> Five main characters in *Die Verwandlung* (father, mother, son, daughter and maid) have direct parallels in Gordin's work. See Beck 1971: 136–146.

<sup>10</sup> "Er krikht oyf der erd"; "Gregor kroch noch ein Stück vorwärts und hielt den Kopf eng an den Boden" (DL 185).



Gregor is grateful to be allowed to look at and listen to his family from the darkness of his room. In story and play alike, the son's transformation manifests itself in a loss of verbal communication (Lemekh's speech takes on the quality of a weeping groan). Both are described by similar epithets: Gregor is called by his mother "*mein unglücklicher Sohn*" (DL 159), and Lemekh is described as "the unsuccessful son" (*der nit gerutene zun*). Their psychological destruction reaches the point that they consider their deaths the best solution for them and their families.<sup>11</sup>

A particularly significant feature in common is that Gregor and Lemekh are presented as persons who become animal-like creatures as a result of drastic transformations. In this sense, it is a revealing fact that Lemekh, like Gregor, is compared to an animal and to a sacrificial victim. Gregor is obviously animalized from the very beginning of Kafka's novella, insofar as he perceives himself at the beginning as *Ungeziefer*, and also later, when his sister describes him as an animal (*Tier*) and a monster (*Untier*);<sup>12</sup> moreover, Gregor calls himself a "victim" (*Opfer*).<sup>13</sup> Regarding Lemekh, it is said that he is *vi a hun in bney adam*. This is a revealing expression – and, by the way, a nice example of the composite nature of Yiddish –: *vi a hun* corresponds to the German "wie ein Huhn"; *bney adam* is the Hebrew-Aramaic *bene Adam*, whose meaning is "sons of Adam", which is an evident Semitism for "men". Therefore, the expression applied to Lemekh means "like a hen among men". And this is aptly translated by E. T. Beck as "like an animal waiting to be sacrificed", insofar as the hen is a reference to the chicken (a white hen or a white rooster) that is to be sacrificed on Yom Kippur. Both protagonists, therefore, are clearly designated as victims.

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<sup>11</sup> Lemekh says: "Far mir un far aykh volt besser geven az ikh zol shtarbn (For me and for you it would be better if I died)". The narrative voice says about Gregor: "Seine Meinung darüber, daß er verschwinden müsse, war womöglich noch entschiedener, als die seiner Schwester" (DL 193).

<sup>12</sup> DL 189–191.

<sup>13</sup> DL 136.

Fyodor M. Dostoyevsky, *The Double*

In a letter to Felice Bauer, written some months after having written *Die Verwandlung*, Kafka refers to the four human beings he considers his "true relatives" (*meine eigentlichen Blutsverwandten*); besides Grillparzer, Kleist and Flaubert, he also mentions Dostoyevsky.<sup>14</sup> It is not surprising, therefore, that we find echoes of this writer in Kafka's works. In fact, several scholars have studied the echoes of *The Double* (*Dvoynik: Peterburgskaya poema*) which are to be found in *Die Verwandlung*.<sup>15</sup> This work of the Russian novelist centers on a government clerk, Yakov Petrovitch Golyadkin, who feels excluded from society; the novella, accordingly, depicts the sufferings of Mr. Golyadkin and his humiliated human dignity. Golyadkin behaves as a man on the verge of madness and then perceives a double appear before him, a man who looks exactly like him and bears his name, thus personifying his illness.

The very beginning of *The Double* presents striking correspondences with that of *Die Verwandlung*. Golyadkin wakes up from a long sleep, but he lies in his bed not being quite certain whether he is awake or still asleep and whether all that is going on around him is real and genuine, or the continuation of his confused dreams. Just like Gregor, Golyadkin pays attention first to the walls of his room (and the room is described as "small"), then to some objects in the room, and finally to the window, where – just as Gregor – he discovers a damp autumn day. Immediately afterwards, both protagonists close their eyes and try to sleep again.<sup>16</sup>

Other significant parallels emerge in the fourth and the fifth chapters. Golyadkin tries to attend a party at the home of his former

<sup>14</sup> September 2, 1913 (Br II: 275). For Dostoyevsky's works in Kafka's library, see Born 1990: 30–34.

<sup>15</sup> Spilka 1959: 291–298; Binder 2004: 85, 95, 131, 277. The alleged echoes of Gogol's works in *Die Verwandlung* (Ehrlich 1956; Parry 1962) could be more easily explained through Dostoyevsky's reception of Gogol.

<sup>16</sup> In the 6th chapter, when Golyadkin perceives his double, he wonders if he is in a dream, and the narrative voice says: "no, it was not a dream". Also the narrative voice in *Die Verwandlung* states: "Es war kein Traum" (DL 115).

protector, the councilor Berendyev, precisely on the day when the birthday of Berendyev's daughter, Klara Olsufyevna, is celebrated with a dance and music. In this scene, several parallels to the third part of *Die Verwandlung* are perceptible. Golyadkin stands in a dark corner, in the midst of rubbish, litter, and odds and ends of all sorts, "concealing himself for the time being and watching the course of proceedings as a disinterested spectator". He is "in expectation of a happy ending to his adventures". At a certain moment, he dashes into the midst of a social meeting to which he has not been invited. The other people, however, react by rejecting him, and "Golyadkin felt himself an insect". He claims a dance with Klara, but he is again rejected. Then Golyadkin is unceremoniously taken by some hands and guided straight to the door, swept away, and thrown out. It is after having had this experience of stark humiliation that complete loss of self-esteem, shame and the figure of the double appear.

Apart from the opening paragraph of both stories, there are obvious parallels between them: both heroes suffer from the effects of social exclusion and lack of affection, both must conceal themselves in the midst of rubbish because of the shame and the fear of being rejected, both are psychologically degraded through this very concealment, both see themselves as vermin, both imagine a happy ending to their unhappiness, both appear before other characters during a social meeting (a dance with orchestra in the case of *The Double*, and a violin performance in *Die Verwandlung*), and both are actually rejected by a young girl (Golyadkin by Klara, and Gregor by Grete – who will condemn him to death at the end of the story –).

### Leopold von Sacher-Masoch, *Venus im Pelz*

Several scholars have highlighted the possible links of *Die Verwandlung* with Sacher-Masoch's *Venus im Pelz* (Angress 1970; Waldeck 1972; Kuna 1972; Anderson 1988; *pace* Binder 2004: 130–131). This work, originally published as part of the collection *Das Vermächtnis Kains* in 1870, relates a story of a man's complete submission. The protagonist, the aristocrat Severin von Kusiemski, persuades his mistress, Wanda von Dunajew, to treat him as her



servant and slave, and he even signs a written contract obligating himself totally to her. The first obvious link with Kafka's novella is the fact that both are stories of a man's virtually complete self-denial and submission to other people. Kafka's is also a story of the complete submission of Gregor to his family. As Severin is financially dependent on his father and then his mistress, so Gregor is financially dependent on his father, even if he earns the money.<sup>17</sup> Both Gregor and Severin lead a life indiscernible from that of a servant: Severin travels with Wanda as her servant to Italy; Gregor works himself into the ground for his family, and his parents believe he will be set for life in his unsatisfactory job.<sup>18</sup>

Another significant coincidence lies in the similarity of names of the main characters. The name of Sacher Masoch's protagonist is Severin, but when he decides to give himself over to Wanda's whims, he is renamed Gregor by his sadistic and pitiless mistress as part of his subjugation and degradation: "Sie heißen von nun an nicht mehr Severin, sondern Gregor". Regarding the family name "Samsa", P. B. Waldeck has pointed to the possibility that it could be determined by the letters mas[och] (backwards) and sa[cher], from the compound family name of the author of *Venus im Pelz* (Waldeck 1972: 147–148; Rudloff 1997: 16f).

Even if scholars have emphasized the alleged Masochistic contents in Kafka's story, I do not agree completely with this view. What is undoubtedly relevant, however, is the fact that both protagonists are humiliated and treated with increasing brutality: in the case of Severin/Gregor, this brutality consists largely of frequent whippings by his mistress and long periods in which he is not allowed to see her; in Gregor's case, it consists of several physical injuries from his father, and progressive abandonment by his sister and mother. This entails a degrading process which results in the fact that they both are compared to animals, and even to objects.

<sup>17</sup> "Das Geld, das Gregor allmonatlich nach Hause gebracht hatte – er selbst hatte nur ein paar Gulden für sich behalten [...]" (DL 154).

<sup>18</sup> "Die Eltern [...] hatten sich in den langen Jahren die Überzeugung gebildet, daß Gregor in diesem Geschäft für sein Leben versorgt war" (DL 137).



Severin/Gregor is described as an "animal" (*Tier*), a "worm" (*Wurm*), and a "dog" (*Hund*), but also as a mere object (*lebloses Ding*), a toy (*Spielzeug*), and a nothing (*Nichts*). Gregor is also called an "animal" (*Tier*) by his sister, sees himself as a vermin (*Ungeziefer*) and his corpse is described by the cleaning woman as an object (*Zeug*).

Another common point in both stories is the importance of a lady in furs. Sacher Masoch's main character emphasizes throughout the novel that it is specifically the furs that excite and appeal to his eroticism (as it is clearly pointed out in the very title, *Venus im Pelz*). In *Die Verwandlung*, the most significant object in Gregor's room is the picture of a lady done up in a fur hat and a fur boa, sitting upright and raising up a heavy fur muff. The great significance of this object is perceptible not only in the fact that it is mentioned on the first page of the story, but also in that it is referred to again twice, one of them at a crucial point: when Gregor's mother and sister are removing the furniture from his room, Gregor leaves his hiding place under the couch and clings to the picture, daring anyone to attempt to remove it. The depiction of this scene makes it clear that there exist some kind of erotic ties between Gregor and the fur-clad woman in the picture.<sup>19</sup>

An interesting link between Kafka's and Sacher Masoch's works can be detected, although not on the level of the explicit contents. At the end of the story, Severin/Gregor is bound and whipped not only by his lover, but also by his rival Apollo, and then they both abandon him. But precisely this terrible end "cures" Severin/Gregor, who learns "the moral of the tale": "whoever allows himself to be whipped, deserves to be whipped" ("Daher die Moral der Geschichte: wer sich peitschen läßt, verdient, gepeitscht zu werden"). Such a lesson seems not to have been learned by Gregor Samsa, but by Kafka himself. *Die Verwandlung* is indeed a kind of

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<sup>19</sup> "Er wußte wirklich nicht, was er zuerst retten sollte, da sah er an der im übrigen schon leeren Wand auffallend das Bild der in lauter Pelzwerk gekleideten Dame hängen, kroch eilends hinauf und preßte sich an das Glas, das ihn festhielt und seinem heißen Bauch wohltat. Dieses Bild wenigstens, das Gregor jetzt ganz verdeckte, würde nun gewiß niemand wegnehmen." (DL 165).

*caveat* or cautionary tale, through which Kafka observes his possible destiny if he were to yield to his family's demands to work at their asbestos factory. In this sense, Gregor Samsa represents an *alter ego* in which Kafka has embodied his own weakness and feelings of guilt.

### Charles Dickens, *David Copperfield*

As we have seen, Kafka himself remarked that he was thinking of Dickens' *David Copperfield* at the time of writing *Der Verschollene*. Given that Kafka wrote *Die Verwandlung* only a few weeks later, there are good reasons to presume that the famous novel of the English author could have left its stamp also on the best known of Kafka's short stories, all the more because in Dickens the parental theme predominates. This has been indeed argued by Mark Spilka, who has presented a plausible case (Spilka 1959: 298–305).

This literary relationship is especially discernable in a scene from Chapter 4 of *David Copperfield*. Simply for having botched his spelling lesson, David is brutally whipped by his stepfather, who is actually the household tyrant. After vainly trying to defend himself David bites Murdstone's hand, and then he is beaten again and locked in his room for five days. The description of his captivity resembles in many aspects that of Kafka's protagonist ("imprisonment", "Gefangenschaft"). Like Gregor Samsa, David is shut off from his family after a household commotion; like Gregor, he is beaten by the parental authority; like Gregor, he is compared to an animal (an "obstinate horse or dog"); like Gregor, he is lying upon the floor; like Gregor, he crawls up from the floor to a glass; like Gregor, he experiences deep guilt feelings ("the guilt [...] lay heavier on my breast than if I had been a most atrocious criminal, I dare say"); like Gregor, it is difficult for him to recognize himself ("I crawled up from the floor, and saw my face in the glass, so swollen, red and ugly that it almost frightened me"); like Gregor, he is provided food by a woman (even the first meal is similar); like Gregor, he is kept from his mother; like Gregor, David is ashamed to show himself at the window; like Gregor, he has the strange sensation of never hearing himself speak; like Gregor, his time sense

is deranged ("The length of those days I can convey no idea to anyone; they occupy the place of years in my remembrance"); like Gregor, he is deprived of his possessions. In these and other details, David Copperfield's experience recalls that of Gregor Samsa.

### *New Testament Writings*

Even if Kafka was a Jew, the Samsa family is not Jewish, but an unmistakably Christian family (although religion is not an important matter for them); this is proved by the references to the saints, to Christmas and to the fact that, when his relatives and the cleaning woman see Gregor's corpse, they all cross themselves.<sup>20</sup> Of course, Kafka knew well the mythical interpretation of the first century Palestinian Jew Jesus of Nazareth offered by the Gospels and, more generally, the New Testament and the Christian tradition, according to which Jesus is a divine figure whose death has a universal soteriological meaning.<sup>21</sup>

The most interesting thing here is that, in that victim which is Gregor Samsa, it is easy to discern some echoes of the mythical Christ of the Christian tradition. "Kafka has given Gregor a number of Christ-like attributes" (Holland 1958: 147; Wokenfeld 1970). There are, of course, the following general similarities: just as Christ takes on the "guilt" (*Schuld*) of the whole world, Gregor had taken on the responsibility of working for the whole family, working himself into the ground to pay back his parents' debt (*Schuld* meaning both "debt" and "guilt"). Just as Jesus is abandoned by his disciples and betrayed three times by Peter, Gregor is progressively abandoned by his relatives, and the three times he goes out of his room he is rejected. Just as Jesus is presented by New Testament

<sup>20</sup> "Nun", sagte Herr Samsa, "jetzt können wir Gott danken." Er bekreuzte sich, und die drei Frauen folgten seinem Beispiel." (DL 195).

<sup>21</sup> In the summer of 1912, during his stay in Jungborn (Harz), Kafka met a certain Hitzer, "mit dem ich mich heuer im Sommer recht gut befreundet hatte und der mich in ganzem, langen Nachmittagen zu Jesus hatte bekehren wollen", as he writes to Felice Bauer (Br I: 245). Incidentally, this letter is dated November 18<sup>th</sup>, just one day after Kafka had begun to write *Die Verwandlung*.



writers as Isaiah's Lord's servant<sup>22</sup> and so as a figure "despised and rejected of men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief", Gregor's pains and sufferings are alluded to throughout the story.<sup>23</sup> Just as Jesus is slandered at his passion and becomes the victim of an (at least from the perspective of the Gospel writers) unfair process, so also Gregor is the victim of unfounded accusations (by the manager of the firm and his own sister) throughout the text. Just as in the New Testament faith's formulae Jesus is considered as an animal (a sheep or a lamb) which is taken to the slaughter (John 1:29; Acts 8:32 = Is 53:7; 1 Peter 1:19; 1 Corinthians 5:7), so Gregor is featured as an animal and a victim. And just as Jesus is seen as a scapegoat who bears the sins and weakness of the humankind in his own body (see 1 Peter 2:24), Gregor's dirty body reflects the guilt represented by the abandonment he suffers: "[...] war auch er ganz staubbedeckt; Fäden, Haare, Speiseüberreste schleppte er auf seinem Rücken und an den Seiten mit sich herum".<sup>24</sup>

The parallels become even more evident in the final part of the story and in the description of Gregor's death. Just as, according to the Gospels, darkness covers the earth before Jesus' death (Mark 15:33 and parallels), so darkness reigns around Gregor ("und sah sich im Dunkeln um": DL 193). Just as Jesus is immobilized on the cross, Gregor also realizes that he "could no longer move at all".<sup>25</sup> Just as Jesus experiences solitude and is forsaken, Gregor dies

<sup>22</sup> The New Testament writers, and the whole Christian tradition, have interpreted the figure of Jesus in terms of Isaiah's Suffering Servant (Is 52:13 – 53:12; see 1 Peter 2:21–25).

<sup>23</sup> In the first pages of the story we already find many references to Gregor's *Schmerzen* (see DL 116, 120, 121, 125, 131). Later, his *Leiden* (DL 138) and his *leidender Zustand* (DL 191) are mentioned.

<sup>24</sup> DL 184. "Dies scheint ein Wörtlichnehmen des Begriffs 'Sündenbock' zu sein. Ebenso wie der ursprüngliche Träger des Wortes, ist Gregor mit dem Abfall (den Sünden) der Gemeinschaft behängt" (Kiefer 1979: 271).

<sup>25</sup> In another passage referring to Gregor's being "nailed down" ("Gregor wollte sich weiterschleppen, als könne der überraschende unglaubliche Schmerz mit dem Ortswechsel vergehen; doch fühlte er sich wie festgenagelt": DL 171), Ronald Gray has seen an allusion to a crucifixion of the central character (Gray 1973: 87).



completely alone. Jesus is said to have died at the ninth hour (Mark 15:34f and parallels), which means 3 p.m. Gregor dies after the tower clock strikes three in the morning (3 a.m.). The description of the very moment of Gregor's death evokes Jesus' demise according to the Fourth Gospel; compare Kafka's text ("then, without his consent, his head sank down completely, and from his nostrils streamed his last weak breath")<sup>26</sup> with John 19:30 ("and he bowed his head and gave over the spirit"). Elisabeth Kiefer has also suggested that the episode in which, after Gregor's death, the cleaning woman jabs his corpse with the long broom evokes the passage in the Fourth Gospel (John 19:34) where one of the Roman soldiers stabs Jesus' side with a lance.<sup>27</sup>

All these Christological hints are not surprising. The death of Jesus of Nazareth was interpreted in the Christian tradition (from the Pauline writings on) as a sacrificial and expiatory event. Gregor Samsa has been unmistakably depicted by Kafka, as I have repeatedly remarked, as a victim of his family.

## Conclusions

This survey of the various literary works whose echoes seem to be found in *Die Verwandlung* does not refute Kafka's originality in the least. If we take into account the most convincing cases made in order to detect the pre-texts and literary echoes in this novella, however, we can draw relevant and unexpected conclusions. Beyond the obvious differences between *The Double* and *David Copperfield*, or between the intense eroticism of *Venus im Pelz* and the deep religious sense of the Gospels, we find in these works striking features in common. First, far from fantasy, monsters and metamorphosis, all of them unmistakably relate stories regarding

<sup>26</sup> "Dann sank sein Kopf ohne seinen Willen gänzlich nieder, und aus seinen Nüstern strömte sein letzter Atem schwach hervor." (DL 193–194).

<sup>27</sup> "Weil sie [die Bedienerin] zufällig den langen Besen in der Hand hielt, suchte sie mit ihm Gregor von der Tür aus zu kitzeln. Als sich auch da kein Erfolg zeigte, wurde sie ärgerlich und stieß ein wenig in Gregor hinein" (DL 194); see Kiefer 1989: 272.

human beings. Second, every main character is treated in their respective stories, at different degrees, with physical and/or psychological violence, and they accordingly undergo a sharp (physical and/or psychological) degradation; in one sense or another, the protagonists become victims of their fellowmen: Golyadkin is, time and time again, the butt of the jokes caused by his odd behavior, and at least on one occasion he is forced to remain encased in rubbish, as a heap of junk. Severin is turned by Wanda (and also by himself) into a miserable slave. Copperfield and Lemekh are locked up in a room; Jesus is ridiculed and subjected to the most ignominious kind of execution. Furthermore, the process of degradation reaches such an extent, that, in every case, the protagonist is degraded to a subhuman category and compared to an animal: Golyadkin (and Severin) to an insect, Copperfield and Severin to a dog, and Lemekh and Jesus generically to an animal ready to be sacrificed.

The fact that all these texts have these key basic elements in common does not seem to be sheer coincidence. If, as I have argued elsewhere, Kafka has reflected in his story a "corrupt objectivity" and therefore could not directly and explicitly tell the truth about Gregor Samsa, the realization of the fact that the works whose echoes we find in *Die Verwandlung* are stories about human beings becomes meaningful. This is yet another hint at the way *Die Verwandlung* should be read. What intertextuality tells us about Gregor Samsa, therefore, is that he is not an animal and a monster, but simply a human being – a human being, however, who is a victim, and accordingly undergoes a strong process of degradation.

All this fits very well with certain indications made by Kafka himself about his plans for publishing his novella with other works of his. In two letters written in April 1913 to Kurt Wolff, Kafka formulated the request of publishing *Die Verwandlung*, *Das Urteil* ("The Judgment") and *Der Heizer* ("The Stoker") together in a book which might be called *Die Söhne* ("The Sons").<sup>28</sup> Two years later,

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<sup>28</sup> Regarding these works, he states that they "gehören äußerlich und innerlich zusammen, es besteht zwischen ihnen eine offenbare und noch mehr eine geheime Verbindung, auf deren Darstellung durch Zusammen-

after having written *In der Strafkolonie* ("In the Penal Colony"), Kafka suggested to the publisher that this new story could be brought together with *Die Verwandlung* and *Das Urteil* under the title *Strafen* ("Punishments").<sup>29</sup> It should be clear that, beyond all the other links among them, a basic unifying factor of all these Kafka stories lies in the fact that *they all are stories about human beings and about the mistreatments they undergo in their relationships with their fellow-men*. Intratextual analysis confirms, therefore, intertextual research.

This is, in my opinion, yet another indication that the prevailing interpretative paradigm of *Die Verwandlung* – what I have called the "entomological dogma" – should be replaced by another paradigm which seriously takes into account the epistemological, ethical and literary complexity and relevance of this work of Kafka, and, therefore, seriously takes into account the human nature of Gregor Samsa. Only in this way we will finally be able to overcome "the commentators' despair" and to understand, once and for all, this masterpiece of the Western literary canon.

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fassung in einem etwa 'die Söhne' betitelten Buch ich nicht verzichten möchte [...] Mir liegt eben an der Einheit der drei Geschichten nicht weniger als an der Einheit einer von ihnen" (Zeller & Otten 1966: 30).

<sup>29</sup> See Kafka's letter to Georg Heinrich Meyer dating from October 15, 1915 (Zeller & Otten 1966: 35).



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*Estética ética de la biografía:*

Edgar Poe, de Ramón Gómez  
de la Serna

Para Luis López Molina

La presencia de Edgar A. Poe en la obra de Gómez de la Serna se remonta a sus primeros escritos: *Morbideces*, *Prometo*. *Revista social y literaria*, donde menciona a John H. Ingram, solvente crítico “poeniano” – el adjetivo es de Ramón –, y el relato “La hija fea” (Gómez de la Serna 1996: 471, 349 y 1050); tiene un hito significativo hacia 1918 en la traducción de *Nuevas historias extraordinarias*,<sup>1</sup> y culmina en 1953 con *Edgar Poe. El genio de América*. Esta biografía destaca entre las de su autor porque es la única, junto a la del Greco, que dedica a un creador foráneo; por la conjunción de teoría y práctica del género, que no vuelve a darse en ninguna otra de las suyas; y por ocuparse de uno de los fundadores de la estética contemporánea.<sup>2</sup> A pesar de la valoración positiva de la obra por la crítica (G. Gómez de la Serna 1963: 246; Ponce 1968: 119; Camón Aznar 1974: 447) y de la trascendencia de Poe en el currículum de su biógrafo, como queda apuntado, el libro no ha recibido suficiente atención de los investigadores. La causa acaso consista en que resulta un tanto informe, pues Gómez de la Serna prescinde casi de forma sistemática de las fechas y utiliza pocos nombres propios, además de mezclar los enfoques cronológico y temático. Pretendo analizar *Edgar Poe* desde el marco en que se inserta, el del modernismo

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<sup>1</sup> Fueron publicadas en Madrid por Mateu, sin fecha, pero el registro de la Biblioteca Nacional de Madrid sugiere el año 1918.

<sup>2</sup> Gómez de la Serna (2005a: 661), Pérez Gállego (1988: 74), Ackroyd (2009: 178). No sólo, en otro lugar nuestro autor lo considera dentro de lo que llama el “tríptico superlativo”: Beethoven, Goya y Poe (Gómez de la Serna 2001: 52).

européo, destacando los aspectos centrales de su forma, para llegar a la ética propuesta por un escritor habitualmente poco preocupado de ella en sus libros.

El prólogo informa al lector de la larga gestación del volumen, aunque sólo en los años inmediatamente anteriores aparecen en diversas revistas algunos fragmentos que se incorporarán al texto final (Gómez de la Serna 1949, 1950, 1951). La explicación dada a su impulso definitivo consiste en una *boutade*: “Poe fue el quinqué de su época en Norteamérica [...] y si hoy me decido al fin a lanzar su biografía es porque en una pared medianera que hay enfrente de mi ventana ha aparecido una mancha de humedad que parece un gran quinqué, tubo, globo, cuerpo” (Gómez de la Serna 2002b: 811).<sup>3</sup> La broma en sí importa menos que la mirada que se nos descubre, mirada que interpreta, o imagina, la mancha; pero sobre todo ha de subrayarse la identificación previa que el literato de las greguerías, enamorado y cuidador de todas las cosas, establece entre su personaje y la lámpara, es decir, la metáfora.

La misma metáfora vuelve a utilizarla en la especie de conclusiones que siguen a la muerte del héroe, entonces con pormenores de interés:

Poe es un quinqué puro e independiente en la noche, uno entre todos los quinqués, pero de los muy pocos que siguen iluminados con su milagro de luz perpetua. Esa es la extraordinaria señal de los pocos seres únicos que han merecido pasar a la inmortalidad entre los seres sórdidos que murieron con su cartera cosida al cuerpo, la muda, la repugnante cartera que no se abrió para ayuda del gran hombre.

El quinqué de Poe derrama su luz caritativa – la máxima caridad, la que reparte la amenidad que eleva las almas – no solo en derredor suyo, sino ahora [...]

Quinqué como un gran tulipán. Ritornello del quinqué. (960).

El origen del interés de Gómez de la Serna por dicho objeto en relación con el biografiado con certeza se debe al papel relevante que

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<sup>3</sup> Todas las páginas tras las citas de *Edgar Poe. El genio de América* remiten a esta edición.

Poe le concede en su “Filosofía del moblaje” (1973: 217, 221), donde lo llama lámpara de Argand.<sup>4</sup> La cita evidencia la naturaleza artística de la biografía que desarrolla el autor (Lee 2009: 91), así como la perspectiva subjetiva adoptada (Atwood 1989: 6; Hamilton 2007: 163), rasgos que lo identifican como modernista en la compañía de Lytton Strachey, Virginia Woolf o Benjamín Jarnés, y también del retratista Pablo Picasso. Además el núcleo de lo que es el libro se hace presente en el pasaje: la pugna entre la pureza del artista y su arte, por un lado, y la hostilidad material del entorno, por otro; lucha cruenta que encarna un modelo de estar en el mundo con consecuencias morales para el público lector. Todo ello va expresado con la indefinición estilística del idiolecto ramoniano entre la prosa poética y el ensayo. Incluso el final del fragmento me parece trascendente con ese “ritornello” o estribillo, con la particularidad de que, en rigor, aquí los estribillos serán otros.

Antes de pasar a ellos, ha de repararse en las ideas sobre la biografía expuestas en *Edgar Poe*, que han sido consideradas como la reflexión mejor elaborada del autor al respecto (Granjel 1963: 240; Serrano Asenjo 2002: 93–106). La actitud autorreflexiva de Gómez de la Serna se acerca a la expuesta en la “Filosofía de la composición”, pero resulta sumamente impreciso a la hora de afrontar el proceso real de la escritura (cfr. Hulle 2007: 327), aparte de establecer un subrayado del vínculo vida/escritura que no se encuentra en el clásico y controvertido ensayo de Poe (Cortázar 1973: 32; 1990: 37; Ackroyd 2009: 119). A Ramón, que escribía con tinta roja en señal obvia de la transfusión entre lo literario y lo humano más inmediato, le atañe “la biografía vital, que llora y ríe en sus páginas”; y añade: “Lo otro, el mamotreto, el poner en letra de imprenta las cartas, los elogios, la historia de los viajes y de las casas en que vivió, es documentación para ver si algo escoge de ello el creador de vivientes biografías.” (808 y 809). El planteamiento algo debe al famoso prefacio de *Eminent Victorians* de Strachey y es por

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<sup>4</sup> Gómez de la Serna aclara el problema de los nombres: “el quinqué que se debió llamar Argand, pues ese fue el nombre del verdadero inventor, un obrero al servicio de aquel físico, matemático y farmacéutico llamado monsieur Quinquet” (2002b: 811).



completo distinto de lo que lleva a cabo Arthur Hobson Quinn unos pocos años antes en su obra fundamental sobre Poe. Lo curioso es que, según se verá, Quinn y Gómez de la Serna llegaron a una conclusión no muy distante.

Lo que el experimentado biógrafo español teoriza sobre la forma se resume en la palabra “ráfaga”: “cada vez estoy más convencido de que para la revitalización de una biografía hay que escoger las diez o quince ráfagas de la existencia del biografiado, dejando de lado lo enterratorio y eclipsante de su figura” (809). En el coetáneo *Quevedo*, por vía de la sugerencia se insiste y concreta apenas: “En las biografías vale el soplo, el empujón, el cerrar los ojos y abrirlos de súbito, los momentos destacados, las ráfagas” (Gómez de la Serna 2002c: 969).<sup>5</sup> En realidad, únicamente la propia escritura biográfica precisa esta idea, así los diez capítulos que cuentan la vida propiamente dicha de Poe reciben el nombre de “ráfagas” (el libro lo completan el prólogo y tres apartados finales). Quizá cabría relacionar las indicaciones de Ramón con lo que Barthes denominó *biographème*,<sup>6</sup> pero parece más ajustado a las realizaciones del madrileño el compararlas con “the fertile fact” de Holroyd (2003: 30), “not trivial but the significance of the trivial in our own lives”. Al cabo, nuestro defensor de lo nuevo evidencia haber aprendido bien una tradición que utiliza con esmero los detalles de la vida privada en la escritura de vidas ajenas y se remonta al Dr. Johnson o a Edward Gibbon.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>5</sup> A mi ver, Gómez de la Serna consigue la mejor realización de esta idea en su “novela corta superhistórica”, que también es una historia de vida, *Doña Juana la Loca* (Serrano Asenjo 2009).

<sup>6</sup> Merece la pena situar el término en su contexto: “si j’étais écrivain, et mort, comme j’aimerais que ma vie se réduisît, par les soins d’un biographe amical et désinvolte, à quelques détails, à quelques goûts, à quelques inflexions, disons: des «biographèmes»” (Barthes 1971: 14).

<sup>7</sup> Samuel Johnson advertía que el primer objeto del biógrafo había de ser “lead the thoughts into domestic privacies, and to display the minute details of daily life” (citado por Holroyd 2003: 22). Gibbon en sus memorias señala: “el detalle de su vida privada, lo más importante y esencial para un biógrafo” (2003: 183).

Más elusiva todavía resulta una faceta de la escritura biográfica que descubre un par de pasajes posteriores de *Edgar Poe*, sólo que Gómez de la Serna no la presenta de entrada como característica de su praxis. Me refiero a la “invención”. Los pasajes son los siguientes: “Los biógrafos, que lo inventan casi todo...” (853); y: “Les gusta a esos «inventores» de biografías pintar a un Poe arrastrado por la multitud, haciendo que el genio se mezcle a los que no le leen ni le comprenden” (942). Claramente el autor quiere diferenciarse de estos últimos, pero la cita anterior entraña ambigüedad respecto al lugar en que se sitúa él mismo. Lo cierto es que Gómez de la Serna “inventa” o imagina en los momentos estelares de la obra, con excelente base documental, pero sobrepasándola en los pasajes analizados abajo; y todo el libro, como siempre sus biografías y retratos, tiene una intensa dimensión literaria que hace de él un historiador demasiado personal. Ayuda a entender su postura en este terreno el reparar en el alcance que otorga a la “creación”: “Lo no creador no es que no exista; existe, pero no como cosa que merezca el asombro que necesita lo original, lo que tiene chispazo, lo revelador” (870). La versión del género que practicó siempre podría llamarse “biografía creativa”, porque persigue los objetivos indicados; parte de un respeto escrupuloso a la idea que tiene de un determinado artista, pues siempre escribió sobre pintores o escritores, mas persigue lo original, el chispazo, lo revelador de esas existencias.

La opinión de Gómez de la Serna sobre la “Filosofía de la composición” de Poe estaba cargada de reservas y sentenció acerca de “The Raven” que: “Ese cuervo no se hubiera presentado nunca si Virginia no hubiera tenido la tisis galopante” (898). Aun así, el español da la sensación de haber aceptado un punto en concreto del ensayo del norteamericano, el referido al estribillo, a saber, el eje sobre el que pueda girar la estructura de la obra (Poe 1973: 65). El presente trabajo sugiere que la disposición de *Edgar Poe* gravita en torno a un doble pivote o “estribillo”: la miseria y el ideal.<sup>8</sup> Son los

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<sup>8</sup> El sustantivo “miseria” forma parte del título de la ráfaga 3ª: “Miseria, trabajo y amor”, y se menciona más de treinta veces en el libro (808, 809, 815, 823, 828, etc.). Llama la atención el repetido uso que Cortázar hace del término en su vida de Poe (1990: 24, 26, 35, 39, 44) Sobre la relación

dos hilos unificadores que reúnen y en su interrelación dan significado al conjunto del volumen, a primera vista disforme. Precisamente el entrelazado de ambos sostiene la dimensión pedagógica o moralizadora, tan propia del género y tan alejada de las poéticas habituales tanto del biógrafo, como del biografiado. Entre lo material de la miseria y lo espiritual del ideal se halla un contraste más de los que menudean en la escritura ramoniana (Hoddie 1979), pero también existe una correlación: al Poe de Gómez de la Serna afincarse en lo ideal lo conduce a la miseria. De ahí que la pobreza extrema sea testimonio de la fidelidad a sí mismo del creador.

La miseria del visionario de *Eureka* nos sitúa ante el trauma de la profesionalización del escritor en la época contemporánea. Ackroyd lo ha expresado así: “Sin duda, fue uno de los primeros escritores verdaderamente profesionales en la historia de la literatura americana; sin embargo, nadie acudía a comprar a su «mercado»” (2009: 68). En España, el proceso tiene en Larra un pionero que algo pagó por ello y en Gómez de la Serna un destacado representante en el siglo pasado (cfr. Martínez Martín 2009). Por consiguiente, se encuentra en unas condiciones especialmente favorables para entender y, en última instancia, “sim-patizar” o “com-padecer” a su personaje. Desde luego a él le resulta diáfana la conexión entre los afanes de Poe y los propios: “Las revistas le salvaron de la inanición absoluta –las revistas, que nos salvan siempre también a nosotros, corregidas y aumentadas” (847).<sup>9</sup> Sólo contando con esto, cabe apreciar en su justa medida el episodio que se estudia a continuación y que por semejanza apunta a la lucha por la vida del mismo biógrafo.<sup>10</sup>

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literaria entre Gómez de la Serna y Cortázar, v. el perceptivo trabajo de Remiro Fondevila (2006). “Ideal” o “idealidad” los encuentro en diecisiete ocasiones (817, 832, 833, 837, 842, etc.).

<sup>9</sup> Si bien la imagen que Poe tuvo de las publicaciones periódicas no fue tan complaciente en algún momento de su trayectoria según demuestra “Algunos secretos de la cárcel de las revistas” (1956: 563–565).

<sup>10</sup> Más aún, escribir biografías fue un factor destacado de esa lucha: “estoy desesperado porque hay que escribir biografías y biografías: es el encargo que abunda, y así perdemos nuestra existencia, ocupándonos de los otros en el pasado y el presente./ Claro que meto historia propia, ayes propios,



Ráfaga 3ª, “Miseria, trabajo y amor”. El suceso ha de ubicarse en el *cottage* de Fordham, a las afueras entonces de Nueva York, y en 1846, si bien Gómez de la Serna no lo fecha y en la organización en parte temática de la obra va relatado antes que otros hechos que en realidad lo habían precedido. Fue contado por Mary Gove-Nichols, testigo de los hechos. En una competición por saltar más alto con otros caballeros, Poe rompió sus botas, pues se encontraban previamente en un estado muy precario. El escritor pobre hubo de retirarse, porque no tenía otro calzado. La intervención de Gove-Nichols ante un editor presente que debía a Poe dinero por un poema hizo que le pagase de inmediato, con lo que “el genio de América” pudo adquirir unas botas nuevas.<sup>11</sup>

El centro de la anécdota, la rotura del calzado, es despachado con unas líneas por los biógrafos anteriores (Ingram 1887: 335; Quinn 1998: 509). En cambio, Gómez de la Serna lo elige como la ráfaga, en sentido estricto, que evidencia las necesidades materiales extremas de Poe, vale decir, su miseria. Para ello, en primer lugar manipula el tiempo y lo hace de dos modos: mediante la utilización del presente histórico y el pretérito perfecto compuesto, con lo que este tiempo verbal aporta de “persistencia actual de hechos pretéritos” (RAE 2009: 1721), ambas formas aproximan lo contado al lector y buscan causar un mayor efecto en él; y mediante el alargamiento de la duración del salto y sus preliminares, que subraya la trascendencia del hecho y crea tensión sobre el desenlace: “Está aún sobre la tierra en que puede patear, montículo de las afueras acotado en la escritura de su alquería holandesa. Está aún encima del santo suelo y frenético de alegría” (854). La elevación en sí queda concentrada en el único pasaje en estilo directo, unas meras interjecciones de asombro y alegría por parte de la concurrencia: “— ¡Uyuyuyuy! ¡Jajaja! Y Poe ha subido en el aire más de lo que él

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matices y vericuetos propios en esas biografías; pero siempre es «de otro» de quien trato” (Gómez de la Serna 2003: 674).

<sup>11</sup> Con probabilidad la fuente que utiliza Gómez de la Serna es Ingram (1887: 335–336), trabajo así valorado por Quinn (1998: 768): “Historically interesting, and usually discriminating”. El libro de Ingram, como consta en las “Obras citadas”, se tradujo muy pronto al español y precisamente en Buenos Aires, donde Ramón escribe y edita por primera vez su *Edgar Poe*.



creía poder subir./ Ha ascendido, sí; pero al caer ha sentido el despanzurrarse de sus botas" (854).

El biógrafo crea para simular la recuperación del tiempo ido e ilustrar una faceta de la existencia del personaje que lo define. En todo esto se concede gran importancia a lo visual y a los detalles. Por ejemplo, el cambio de tonalidad en los semblantes de las damas: "se habían puesto un poco pálidas, han reconquistado lo rosáceo para sus rostros" (855). La fugacidad del momento cristaliza literariamente en la transformación del color de la piel. Mas la imagen por antonomasia es la del objeto protagonista del percance, las "botas de caña color tórtola" (854). No hace falta decir que el testimonio de Gove-Nichols no menciona nada del color del calzado, pero la invención ramoniana expresa su percepción del esmero en su indumentaria del infortunado vate, además de ser la "tórtola" y el tono de su plumaje apropiados en el contexto de elevación aérea, aunque sea para caer, en que se inserta. Después completa el cuadro: "sus botas desfondadas como sapos aplastados, riendo por los mofletes rotos" (855).<sup>12</sup> El registro expresionista del autor expande la realidad de las cosas hacia el mundo de los seres vivos y los humanos mediante analogías turbadoras para el receptor, como turbados hubieron de verse los asistentes en aquel instante.

La greguería intratextual (López Molina 2007) de la última cita tiene en la acción de reír un factor especialmente inquietante. Y es que el genio de Gómez de la Serna se vale de la risa y la sonrisa para evocar la extraña atmósfera de esa tarde. Desde: "Va a reír y a llorar toda la posteridad ante este salto" (854); a una primera mueca del héroe tras el desastre: "tiene esa sonrisa amarga de bigote chino y sangre en las comisuras —como las bocas de los *clowns*— sintiendo arruinada su alegoría" (854), y el esfuerzo final que va a continuación de la mencionada para las botas: "Otra vez ha reído Edgar para no dejar destrozada la fiesta" (855). La risa de las botas

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<sup>12</sup> Interesa recordar ahora este juicio de J. M. Salaverría: "Es un Edgardo Poe sin morbosidad ni amargura, con una fantasía *extraña* a lo Poe, aplicada a desgranar sugericiones sucesivas sobre objetos que son inofensivos, cotidianos, y que de pronto el autor los inviste de una vida imaginaria y gesticulante" (en Gómez de la Serna 1998: 868).

encarna la tragedia de la vida del poeta y la risa del hombre la enmascara y presta dignidad a una figura que termina de perfilarse desde el lado del ideal.

Edgar Poe creía en la frenología del doctor vienés Franz-Joseph Gall y sus discípulos (Cortázar 1973: 28; Ackroyd 2009: 107), que estudiaban la forma del cráneo como indicativo de las cualidades psicológicas del individuo. El caso es que la forma de su frente llamó la atención desde muy pronto, por ejemplo ya Baudelaire relaciona sus protuberancias con el sentido de lo ideal (1988: 70; cfr. Poe 1956: 512), que es la facultad estética por excelencia. Gómez de la Serna, baudelaireano de pro, destacó la frente como rasgo físico más sobresaliente del personaje y, sin pronunciarse en firme sobre la cientificidad del planteamiento frenológico, lo tiene en cuenta al reconocer que Poe poseyó “lóbulos de la idealidad exagerados” (842). Sea como fuere, para él es evidente la continuidad entre la dimensión creadora o poética del hombre y la tendencia a lo ideal: “Movido por esa sed superior, por esa sed nunca apagada de la poesía, Poe llegó a la idealidad” (817); hasta el punto de equiparar por la sintaxis ésta y el sentimiento estético algo después: “La idealidad es lo que le guía y le sostiene, el sentimiento de lo bello, ese divino sexto sentido que aún es tan vagamente comprendido” (861). No estará de más aquí recordar que Poe define el principio poético, estrictamente, como la aspiración a la Belleza (1973: 108), con la mayúscula subrayadora tan propia de la ortografía subjetiva de un romántico.<sup>13</sup>

Teniendo en cuenta lo anterior se comprende la razón de ser y el alcance de la “ráfaga” analizada acto seguido, pues se trata de reconstruir precisamente uno de los momentos en que las musas

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<sup>13</sup> Hasta cierto punto, Gómez de la Serna evoca dicha teoría al imaginar al personaje en uno de los paseos cargados de significado con los que tan a menudo dibuja a sus criaturas: “El mundo no tiene más justificación ni más encanto que su aspiración a la belleza como al Paraíso. En todas sus horas debe el escritor artista tener encerrado y apretado eso como una semilla. No puede dejársele en el hormigal espectáculo comercial o industrial. Poe paseaba por donde iba su cráneo con eso dentro” (956).

visitan al poeta.<sup>14</sup> O más bien cabría decir la musa en forma de mujer de carne y hueso. Con la particularidad de que la propia dama lo contó y de ello sabemos, y muy probablemente supo Gómez de la Serna, por el diligente Ingram (1887: 389–391). La acción se sitúa en una tarde del verano de 1848, en casa de Marie Louise Shew, en 51 Tenth Street, junto a Broadway (Quinn 1998: 563). Shew contó la llegada del poeta a la casa, exhausto espiritualmente, con la sensación de tener que escribir un poema y molesto por el tañido de las campanas de una iglesia próxima, quizá las de Grace Church. La dama le dio papel y le sugirió una composición titulada “The Bells”, que acabará siendo una de las más famosas del autor sobre todo por la sonoridad de los versos.

Si en lo referido al salto y a las botas, Ramón construye toda la escena a partir de los escasos datos de Gove-Nichols; ahora la cantidad de información es sensiblemente mayor, de forma que se limita a añadir unos cuantos detalles que buscan vivificar las circunstancias en torno al surgimiento de la obra de creación. De manera reveladora sobre su modo de elaborar el discurso biográfico, la información de Shew es fragmentada en tres bloques: 1) presentación, 2) redacción del poema, y 3) el final del día y posterior regreso a Fordham; que van separados por excursos: el primero sobre la relación entre la mujer y el literato, y reproducción parcial de “Las campanas” (se cita, como en otros lugares, la traducción de Obligado 1942: 104–106); y el segundo con varias consideraciones sobre el objeto *campana*.

El arte de la biografía ramoniana se muestra en el bloque dos y singularmente en los matices preparativos de la escritura. La presencia de la mujer se torna carnal: “María Luisa va a entrar ablucionada y corporal, vestida de blanco, con la holgada blusa de seda con volados y encajes”, como parece coherente en el novelista del amor de *¡Rebeca!* El protagonismo de las campanas explica su

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<sup>14</sup> En otro lugar y en ilustre compañía, Ramón presenta a Poe en el trance de la creación: “En la Torre de Marfil se metía Shakespeare a escribir sus obras, en su Torre de Marfil Cervantes a escribir el Quijote, y en la Torre de Marfil Poe, y en la Torre de Marfil Baudelaire” (2005b: 717). Es otro “políptico” superlativo, ahora en el campo de las letras, v. n. 2.



personificación: “comentaban el atardecer con sus metálicos sonos”. Recupera la trascendencia de los gestos pequeños: en él “de desagrado y desfallecimiento”, ella “sonrió, y sentándose junto a él”. Junto a todo esto, las palabras del escritor, recordadas por Shaw,<sup>15</sup> reciben el añadido de los puntos suspensivos: “Esta tarde hasta me irrita el ruido de las campanas... No tengo tema...” (903). Los silencios que así se hacen presentes parecen significativos de la frontera a la que llega el biógrafo, pues el proceso de creación en sí apenas es descrito en su mera realización física, y sintetizado con una frase que alude al comienzo del poema: “en el trineo campanilleante los dos recorrieron enloquecidos y veloces toda la rampa del esbozo poemático” (904).<sup>16</sup> El peculiar historiador de la vida de Poe, a pesar de creador él mismo, enmudece ante el misterio de la poesía y opta por concentrar su tarea en los aledaños del fenómeno poético.

Gómez de la Serna, claro, es capaz de imaginarse a su personaje “por dentro” en el trance de la escritura: “Toda la noche le da detalles, y las bellas que sueñan un mayor amor que el que tienen al lado lanzan gritos desesperados y el poeta los anota febril pero lento, la pluma como un puñal que resbala como un bisturí en la carne del corazón” (965). Así reza el párrafo final del relato, con la audacia y clarividencia de la prosa poética y sus analogías. Pero cuando dispone de una fuente fidedigna y trata un episodio preciso como el comentado arriba, opta por un respeto escrupuloso del documento, apenas sombreado por un puñado de sensaciones cuasi proustianas. La mención del respeto a las voces del pasado acerca este nota a su desenlace.

Hay que hacer constar aquí una especie de paradoja en Gómez de la Serna, modernista tan beligerante en su defensa del arte puro y la belleza: en la narración de la vida de Edgar Poe, también en la de otros como Valle-Inclán, se convierte en un moralista. La base para ello consiste en la percepción del personaje como “justo, singular y

<sup>15</sup> Esas palabras, según Ingram (1887: 390), fueron: “me desagrada el ruido de las campanas esta noche, no puedo escribir. No tengo tema”.

<sup>16</sup> Los primeros versos del original dicen: “Hear the sledges with the bells—/ Silver bells!” (v. Obligado 1942: 161).



noble" (815), pero la verdadera clave de la dimensión ética asumida por el biógrafo se halla en cómo plantea la relación del sujeto con su producción literaria: "él tenía que traer a ese duro mundo la visión de la belleza siempre integérrima" (815). Al cabo, del caso particular, Ramón salta a una suerte de deontología profesional: el escritor, todo escritor digno de tal nombre se ubica "en la vigilia fuera de límite, donde él debe agonizar en una moralidad extrema" (871), y aquí el verbo "agonizar" lo entiendo tanto en su significado de estar en la agonía o "premuerte", como en su acepción etimológica de combate. Sin duda, en esta declaración hay mucho de autoconcepto, algo lógico porque Gómez de la Serna elige las vidas que ha de contar por semejanza con la propia, parecido basado en la naturaleza artística de los otros "yos" (Velázquez, Goya, Lope o Azorín), en Poe también sobre la existencia de unos determinados valores.

De ahí surge la idea del mártir, que el norteamericano encarna cabalmente y es un comentario habitual de sus lectores desde Baudelaire (1988: 46), a Darío.<sup>17</sup> A tan ilustre tradición se suma el escritor de *Automoribundia*: "no ha habido nunca un creador con su alta dignidad literaria ni tan ungido por el martirio" (807). En rigor, el puñado de ráfagas bien desiguales que constituyen *Edgar Poe* en gran medida funcionan como una reflexión sobre la dignidad de la escritura y sus repercusiones (cfr. Eakin 2004: 5; Quinn 1998: 695; Rosenheim 1998: xvii). La repercusión última sobre el héroe es la muerte: "cuando el gran artista se dedica a esas exaltaciones —he dicho «el gran artista»— es un mártir de la humanidad que consigue con ese martirio personal cuadros y poesía que amenizarán como nada la sórdida y comedida vida de los demás" (943). La cita plantea además las consecuencias para el público. Y lo que sirve para los cuadros y la poesía, también cabe aplicarlo a la escritura de biografías y su lectura. El autor de vidas ajenas se sitúa entre los "historiadores de alma pura, desinteresada e imparcial" (Gómez de la Serna 2002a: 135) y su labor tiene tanta trascendencia entre sus

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<sup>17</sup> Las palabras de *Los raros* mantienen su desgarró intacto: "Era [...] uno de esos divinos semilocos necesarios para el progreso humano, lamentables cristos del arte, que por amor al eterno ideal tienen su calle de la amargura, sus espinas y su cruz" (1929: 28).

receptores como esta: “El hombre más justo, más conciliador, más incapaz de firmar sentencias de muerte, será el que se haya asimilado sus biografías, el que sepa de cuántos grandes hombres es encarnación de solidaridad”.<sup>18</sup> Un conocimiento adecuado de las existencias de los otros significa una mejora moral en los lectores, algo que supieron bien los pioneros del género, por ejemplo Plutarco o Suetonio.

Sin embargo, cada tiempo tiene sus biografías características y la parte teórica de *Edgar Poe. El genio de América* reconoce la historicidad y, por ende, la caducidad de esta modalidad literaria (809). Cuestión diferente son los puentes que comunican las fatigas del personaje con las de su autor en similar pugna por la supervivencia. En todo caso, la propuesta de respeto por el otro que subyace en el libro estudiado puede considerarse como un valor universal y permanente (cfr. Eakin 2004: 15). Y la idea de que el prodigioso mago negro de “The Raven” se convierta en “bien de todos, en “luz de todos”, acaso sea uno de los momentos en que Ramón Gómez de la Serna más cerca estuvo de reconocer la función social del arte.

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<sup>18</sup> El pasaje de *Retratos contemporáneos* prosigue al poco: “¿Sabéis la obra y la vida de Poe? Pues entonces no os extrañe oír una voz que os diga: / – ¡Oye tú, Poe! / – ¿Qué? – podréis contestar con entera corrección” (Gómez de la Serna 2004: 37).

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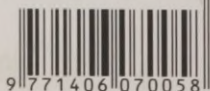
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