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L'allusion Paratopique: Vers Une Déconstruction Du Discours Religieux

Paratopic Allusion: Towards a Deconstruction of Religious Discourse

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ABSTRACT

Artistic and literary productions often navigate a complex landscape of discursive entities. Literary discourse, in particular, can encompass various ideological orientations that affirm, adhere to, or subvert a particular aesthetic. Within these dialogic dynamics, allusion emerges as a technique—if we may call it that—that situates literary discourse at the intersection of other discursive stances, creating a paradoxical coexistence of multiple discourses. Religious discourse, for instance, may be targeted by the subversive or parodic aesthetics employed by authors. The literary text, as an object of semiosis, becomes a site where religious paradigms are questioned and even deconstructed, utilizing interdiscursive techniques to both invoke and revoke religious discourse. Consequently, allusion, as a discursive nod, serves as a paratopic dynamic within literary discourse, functioning as a mechanism for discursive deconstruction. This study aims to demonstrate how allusion functions not only as a paratopic dynamic but also as a realization of an interdiscursive horizon. The analysis will focus on Jean-Paul Dubois' *Tous les hommes n'habitent pas le monde de la même façon*, Dostoevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov*, and the biblical tradition to reveal the intricate interplay between literary and religious discourse—specifically, biblical discourse—within a paratopic framework.

Keywords: Allusion, Paratopy, Interdiscursivity, Dialogism, Literary discourse

RÉSUMÉ

Les productions artistiques et littéraires trouvent sur leur chemin une myriade d'entités discursives. Le discours littéraire abrite d'autres orientations idéologiques en vue d'attester une affiliation, une adhésion ou subversion d'une quelconque esthétique. Parmi les dynamiques dialogiques, l'allusion reste un procédé, si tant est qu'on puisse le qualifier ainsi, qui met le discours littéraire à la lisière d'autres postures discursives dans une présence, voire une coprésence paradoxale de deux ou plusieurs discours. Le discours religieux pourrait être la cible d'une esthétique subversive ou parodique des instances auctoriales. Or, le texte littéraire comme objet de la sémiotique reste le lieu de la remise en cause, voire la déconstruction de paradigmes religieux où le recours à des procédés interdiscursifs serviraient d'outil pour convoquer et révoquer le discours religieux. L'allusion donc en tant que clin d'œil discursif fait office de dynamisme paratopique dans le discours littéraire et servirait de procédé de déconstruction discursive. L'objectif de cette contribution est de montrer en quoi



l'allusion demeure, non seulement une dynamique paratopique, mais également une actualisation d'un horizon interdiscursif. L'étude portera sur l'œuvre de Jean-Paul Dubois, *Tous les hommes n'habitent pas le monde de la même façon*, *Les frères Karamazov* de Dostoïevski et la tradition biblique pour lever le voile sur l'entrelacement du discours littéraire avec le discours religieux - biblique en l'occurrence - dans une perspective paratopique.

Mots-clés: Allusion, Paratopie, Interdiscursivité, Dialogisme, Discours littéraire

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Artistic and literary productions constantly interact with a number of discursive entities, nurturing a subtle and complex dialogue. Indeed, literary discourse is far from isolated; it is deeply imbued with other ideological and aesthetic orientations. The latter are often integrated implicitly or explicitly to demonstrate an affiliation with or subversion of certain aesthetics, whether political, social or religious. Among the processes that underpin this dialogical dimension, allusion plays a key role. This process, which could also be seen as a discursive wink, places literary discourse at the frontier of other ideological and discursive postures, creating a kind of paradoxical co-presence where several discourses superimpose and respond to each other. From this perspective, religious discourse appears to be a prime target for authors wishing to explore, question and even subvert well-established paradigms. In many literary works, religious discourse is not only invoked but also often revoked or criticised by means of subversive or parodic aesthetics. These devices enable authors to deconstruct, question and redefine paradigms that, for many, belong to the realm of the sacred and dogmatic. In this way, the literary text becomes a space of semiotic dynamism where values, beliefs and ideals are re-evaluated and sometimes called into question. From this perspective, allusion serves as a springboard for discursive deconstruction, offering readers a new way of perceiving religious discourse. The allusion takes the form of a wink to other texts or discourses, thus inviting an implicit dialogue between the literary work and the targeted discourse. This process is distinguished by its subtlety, as it does not seek to impose a direct critique, but to provoke reflection in the reader by setting up a paratopic dynamic. This term refers to the fact that the allusion is located on the margins, on the edge of another discourse. By virtue of its paratopic nature, allusion plays the role of actualising an interdiscursive horizon where ideologies and worldviews meet, confront and reinvent each other. It makes literary discourse a space for questioning and innovation, where the author engages the reader in a reflection on the values and beliefs underlying the sacred texts.

The works of Jean-Paul Dubois and Dostoyevsky, in particular *Les hommes n'habitent pas le monde de la même façon* and *Les Frères Karamazov*, offer particularly eloquent examples of this dynamic. These novels are marked by a dense intertextuality that

allows the authors to question the relationship between the individual and transcendence, as well as the foundations of morality and religious ethics. In Dubois's work, this intertextuality manifests itself in subtle references to biblical themes, which question man's ability to live in harmony with the values of benevolence and tolerance, while at the same time exposing the flaws and contradictions of religious discourse. In *The Brothers Karamazov*, Dostoyevsky is more interested in the question of evil and redemption, playing on biblical references and religious figures to highlight the existential tug-of-war of his characters over questions of faith and free will. This interdiscursive dialogue is not insignificant: it allows the authors to summon up religious themes in order to revoke or revisit them. By revisiting these religious paradigms, they open the way to a discursive deconstruction in which the sacred is no longer immutable but subject to critical re-reading. The allusion, far from merely evoking an idea or concept, prompts the reader to question the scope and relevance of religious discourse in the contemporary world. This discursive device creates a tension between the possible adherence to a religious ideal and the subversion of that ideal. Thus, allusion is revealed as a powerful tool for discursive deconstruction and reformulation within the literature. By challenging the reader, it prompts him or her to reconsider his or her own conceptions and examine religious discourse from a new angle. Through its role as a paratopic dynamic, it enriches literary discourse by endowing it with a critical and reflexive dimension, and makes each work a space where religious and literary discourse meet, intersect and transform, offering a living actualisation of an interdiscursive horizon.

Introduction

Les études littéraires ont exploré différents territoires textuels où le discours littéraire se révèle hétérogène et protéiforme. La littérature constitue la plaque tournante de plusieurs disciplines : sociologie, anthropologie, linguistique, psychologie, philosophie, etc. Chaque texte propose des pistes de lecture et suggère des horizons d'attente en fonction aussi bien de la stratégie textuelle que de la perception du sujet/lecteur. Une dynamique relationnelle ponctue donc le fait littéraire, en reprenant Paul Valéry, et place le discours littéraire à la lisière d'autres entités discursives. Toutefois, la relation interdiscursive n'est pas toujours visible, ni déclarée ou assumée, mais elle prend l'allure d'une boutade savante ou grinçante, d'une citation séditeuse extirpée de ses racines et glissée dans une trame parodique, etc. Plusieurs physionomies interdiscursives témoignent de l'hétérogénéité du discours littéraire et laissent exhiber la dynamique interdiscursive à plus d'un égard. L'allusion en constitue la matrice interdiscursive en ce qu'elle renvoie le sujet/lecteur à des substrats discursifs sans se déclarer et sans cristalliser les frontières génériques et esthétiques en vigueur. Sans être un procédé délibérément investi, l'allusion est une construction signifiante – signifiante – entre l'horizon d'attente du texte et du sujet/lecteur. Cette combinatoire entre deux visions du monde (texte et instance lectrice) insuffle la dynamique interdiscursive propre à la sémiotique. L'allusion comme dynamique relationnelle se greffe sur le dialogisme littéraire pour instituer une paratopie discursive. Cette contribution mettra donc en évidence le rôle de l'allusion comme dynamique paratopique en vue d'interroger le discours religieux dans le texte littéraire ; où les frontières génériques et esthétiques sont diluées dans la trame textuelle. Avant de démontrer la dynamique paratopique, nous allons d'abord nous arrêter sur la notion d'allusion et son importance dans les études littéraires avec une mise au point terminologique de la notion de paratopie discursive et ses corrélations avec la dynamique interdiscursive.

L'allusion interdiscursive

Le discours littéraire croise sur son chemin plusieurs entités discursives selon le mode et le critère de recoupements interdiscursifs. C'est l'une même des caractéristiques majeures de la notion de discours à savoir l'interdiscursivité. La relation entretenue entre les discours est tributaire des modes de renvoi : citation, plagiat, allusion, parodie, etc. Nous sommes du reste en plain-pied dans la dynamique dialogique entre les textes et a fortiori entre les discours puisque « l'orientation dialogique est, bien entendu, un

phénomène caractéristique de tout discours. C'est la visée naturelle de tout discours vivant. Le discours rencontre le discours d'autrui sur tous les chemins qui mènent vers son objet » (Todorov, 1981, p. 98). Le dialogisme demeure une caractéristique des productions discursives, voire « une constante de la littérature et de l'art » (Eco, 2006, p. 251). Or, l'allusion est un avatar des rapports interdiscursifs¹ en ce qu'elle établit une relation avec d'autres substrats discursifs ; ou pour employer la terminologie de Gérard Genette, l'allusion demeure « un énoncé dont la pleine intelligence suppose la perception d'un rapport entre lui et un autre auquel renvoie nécessairement telle ou telle de ses inflexions, autrement non recevables » (Genette, 1981, p. 54). La taxinomie de Gérard Genette campe du reste l'allusion dans le champ d'intertextualité, mais le rapport entre le texte et son intertexte reste implicite et nécessite une actualisation signifiante de la part du sujet/lecteur pour en saisir les contours. Cette définition pêche par son accès de relativisme puisque l'allusion en tant que rapport intertextuel et interdiscursif implicite ne fixe en aucun cas les modalités sémantiques d'actualisation. L'intelligence de sujet/lecteur n'est pas mesurable à l'aune d'actualisation des allusions interdiscursives, d'autant plus que l'allusion devrait s'appuyer sur des indices topiques, des horizons d'attente attestés ou des instructions textuelles pour en valider les renvois. Une refonte terminologique des renvois allusifs s'impose.

Nous pouvons donc à dessein utiliser la notion d'allusion dans son sens opératoire où le renvoi à d'autres discours se réalise par l'entremise des interprétants de tout ordre : motifs ou topoï dominants, structures sémantiques suggestives, un horizon d'attente ou une quelconque réminiscence de lecture ; il s'agit somme toute d'« une manière ingénieuse de rapporter à son discours une pensée très connue [...] un appel adroit à la mémoire du lecteur »². De ce point de vue, l'allusion échappe à la contingence de renvois et demeure un mode d'appréhension appartenant à la dimension de signifiante. Il n'est pas inutile pour nous d'adopter les renvois allusifs d'un point de vue sémantique, car l'étude du discours littéraire requiert des ancrages qui dépassent le simple recours à l'encyclopédie du sujet/lecteur, l'allusion est le lieu de recoupements signifiants sans pour autant négliger les stéréotypes de lecture. Le stéréotype du reste « est une forme de répétition interdiscursive : employer un stéréotype, c'est réitérer une parole déjà dite, c'est se placer sous l'autorité d'un discours préexistant » (Dufays, 2011, p. 62). La mobilisation des stéréotypes de lecture

1 L'interdiscursivité n'est finalement qu'une variante de l'intertextualité telle qu'elle est théorisée par Kristeva ; où tout texte est une mosaïque d'autres texte ; ou pour reprendre Barthe « tout texte est un intertexte » (Barthes, *Encyclopædia Universalis* [en ligne], consulté le 4 septembre 2024).

2 Charles Nodier, *Questions de littérature légale*, p.16 .URL : <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k617293/f7.image.textelimage> consulté le 15.10.2024

pourrait servir d'instructions sémantiques dans l'actualisation des allusions. Compte tenu de différents paliers d'analyse et les niveaux d'actualisations, nous pouvons dire que l'allusion se nourrit de combinatoires sémantiques tissant ainsi un réseau textuel où les traits allusifs s'entrechoquent et se croisent ; car « tout texte est fait à l'évidence de pièces et de morceaux préexistants, non seulement les morphèmes, mais les phraséologies, les formules stéréotypées, parémiologiques. En somme, tout texte est un centon » (Rastier, 1989, p. 29). La mobilisation des stéréotypes de lecture fera office donc de médiation entre les instances autoriales et les instances lectrices ; ou pour le dire à la suite de Ricoeur, l'actualisation par l'entremise des stéréotypes « consiste dans la médiation que la lecture opère entre le monde fictif du texte et le monde effectif du lecteur » (Ricoeur, 1985, p. 149). Par ailleurs, et sans se perdre dans des spéculations théoriques ou des débats d'écoles, il est à noter que les notions du texte et du discours sont interchangeables dans notre travail. Le discours est généralement étudié dans sa forme textuelle: le terme texte n'est qu'un qualificatif formel de l'appareil discursif.

La paratopie discursive

Si l'allusion dans sa dimension sémantique nourrit les trames textuelles dans une logique de construction de signifiante, la présence, ou la coprésence pour ainsi dire d'un ou plusieurs discours dans une même entité discursive dévoile une forme de présence ambiguë d'un corps discursif. Laquelle ambiguïté appelle la présence paradoxale de l'instance discursive (auteur, narrateur, genre, société, vision du monde, etc.). Cette démarcation aux contours incertains nous verse dans la notion de paratopie. Essentiellement basée sur la non-présence et la présence de l'auteur/écrivain dans son champ d'études, elle désigne une « localité paradoxale, paratopie, qui n'est pas l'absence de tout lieu, mais une difficile négociation entre le lieu et le non-lieu, une localisation parasitaire, qui vit de l'impossibilité même de se stabiliser » (Maingueneau, 2004, p. 54). De quelle localisation s'agit-il ? Quelle présence est mise en évidence ?

Il s'agit en effet de la position de l'auteur/écrivain dans sa dynamique de création où celui-ci assume sa position dans la société et maintient en même temps une distance par rapport à la sphère sociale. Pour le dire autrement, un ancrage paratopique se nourrit de la position discursive paradoxale, de la présence et non-présence qui se réalisent dans son discours, ou plutôt cristallisée dans son discours. Lequel discours emprunte à la société et à la mémoire de l'auteur ses constructions du *monde des possibles* dans la création d'une œuvre littéraire. La paratopie dans ce cas est un espace incertain d'expression

où les œuvres lues, les normes et les coutumes sociales instituent un discours hétérogène et composite que Maingueneau qualifie de discours constituant. Car « la littérature n'est pas seulement un moyen que la conscience emprunterait pour s'exprimer, c'est aussi une institution qui définit des régimes énonciatifs et des rôles spécifiques à l'intérieur d'une société » (Maingueneau, 2004, p. 15). Les régimes énonciatifs adoptés nous informent sur les modes discursifs et les espaces de recoupements interdiscursifs dans une œuvre littéraire. Même si la notion de paratopie ne fait pas référence à la dynamique dialogique, la présence et la non-présence par les voies énonciatives et discursives rappellent à bien des égards le dialogisme bakhtinien, la multitude de voix présentes et non présentes en échos – polyphonie – qui caractérisent le discours littéraire. D'où notre problématique qui tente de lever le voile sur les renvois allusifs comme mode opératoire de la paratopie discursive. Nous pouvons même l'étudier inversement en mobilisant la notion de paratopie en elle-même comme un avatar de la pratique d'allusion. Les situations paratopiques ne se réduisent pas donc aux prises de position autoriales et éditoriales, mais elles touchent les différentes instances narratives et discursives investies dans l'œuvre. La paratopie, dans son principe fondamental, inclut tous les espaces discursifs incertains, qui se muent progressivement en un prisme révélateur des esthétiques latentes et des dynamiques transtextuelles du discours littéraire.

L'allusion paratopique

Les entrelacements discursifs constitueront un terreau pour des renvois allusifs ; la structure paratopique du discours romanesque favorise l'ouverture des interstices où fleurissent la présence et la non-présence de l'interdiscours. Pour le montrer clairement, nous partons d'une situation ambivalente où le discours romanesque recoupe le discours religieux dans une verve grinçante et parodique. Il en va ainsi dans le roman de Jean-Paul Dubois, *Tous les hommes n'habitent pas le mode de la même façon*, dans lequel le narrateur Paul Hansen, en proie à une crise existentielle après le décès de son père, visite les réminiscences de sa vie et s'attache à une quête incessante du sens. Cette quête oblige Paul Hansen à se confronter à ses propres convictions et son rapport à toute forme de spiritualité. Le récit scrute donc les pérégrinations, les aventures et les mésaventures de la famille Hansen. Le narrateur s'arrête avec une fibre à la fois ironique et parodique sur les habitudes propres à chaque membre de la famille, mettant ainsi en exergue l'harmonie et les désaccords qui scandent leur quotidien. Parmi les scènes très parlantes dans cette œuvre, le narrateur s'attarde sur certains rituels dévoilant ainsi l'une des figures de situation paratopique:

Le pasteur continuait de préparer les repas et ma mère, de rentrer tard. Ils dînaient le plus souvent chacun de leur côté, en horaire décalé. Anna tenait les comptes de ses recettes, anticipait ses programmations, et profitait sans façon du monde tel qu'il se présentait. Johanès, lui, s'efforçait de tenir son rang, d'écrire en silence sur la parole de Dieu, bricolant l'apparence des illusions, improvisant un petit tour de prestidigitation avec ce qu'il avait sous la main, mais toujours sans le moindre chapeau, ni le plus petit lapin. (Dubois, 2019, p. 78)

Pasteur et amateur de voiture de course, le père du narrateur, Johanès Hansen, incarne la figure archétypique du protestant déterminé. Le narrateur rappelle la routine pastorale pour jeter en pâture certaines pratiques religieuses dépourvues de foi. Parmi ces pratiques, la préparation des discours enjôleurs pour hypnotiser les croyants ; le narrateur décoche ses flèches acerbes au discours religieux auquel la parole de Dieu fait allusion. S'agit-il d'une dénonciation ? d'une prise de position critique à l'égard des prestidigitations pastorales ? Le narrateur en donne la réponse par une image métaphorique des instruments discursifs - le chapeau et le lapin - pour dénoncer l'illusion inhérente au discours religieux. Tel un magicien, le narrateur peint et dépeint l'acharnement du pasteur Hansen, qui, lors de ses prêches, sortait un lapin de son chapeau, créant ainsi l'illusion d'une réalité insaisissable. L'allusion au discours religieux se nourrit de cette image métaphorique illustrant deux discours concomitants ; le discours romanesque racontant des routines conjugales et quotidiennes ; et la verve illusoire des hommes de l'église. La position même du narrateur semble paratopique en ce qu'elle dévoile l'appartenance à une famille danoise fidèle à ses coutumes et ses us, et son rejet inavoué de certaines pratiques sociales. Si le père Hansen « [bricolait] l'apparence des illusions » (Dubois, 2019, p. 78), c'est pour apaiser les âmes torturées et réunir les fidèles sous la chapelle protestante : Paul Hansen reste en proie à l'incertitude dont le sentiment d'angoisse existentielle alimente la présence paratopique d'un discours enjôleur prenant l'allure d'un tour de passe-passe. Entre son enfance, sa famille et ses pérégrinations, le narrateur continue à décrire sa vie mouvementée dont la vie carcérale occupe une place cardinale dans son récit. Lors d'un échange familial entre Paul Hansen et son compagnon de cellule, Patrick Horton, un goujat sans scrupule, les deux détenus croisent leurs points de vue sur la teneur du discours religieux et son rôle dans la société. Dans un acte que nous pouvons qualifier d'irrévérencieux, Patrick Horton, impavide et faisant fi avec une désinvolture inquiétante les normes sociales et religieuses, jette la Bible au coin du cachot au point de voler dans les airs de la cellule.

L'image des Écritures qui s'envolent demeure évocatrice de la déchéance du message religieux voire la mort symbolique de la foi religieuse. Le narrateur récidive en incarnant la déchéance de la foi, pour ne pas dire de l'institution religieuse, par la chute libre du livre sacré et l'image allégorique pousse même la fibre ironique jusqu'à son paroxysme « la bible fait un majestueux vol plané dans la cellule et comme un oiseau foudroyé par de la grenaille s'écrase au pied du mur piqué de salpêtre, derrière lequel on entend gratter les rongeurs » (Dubois, 2019, p. 78). Aux allures blasphématoires, la chute des Écritures témoigne de la fin des discours illusoires et la remise en question d'obscurantisme religieux. Le rejet blasphématoire ne nous fait-il pas allusion au nihilisme nietzschéen ? ne nous renvoie-t-il pas à la dialectique entre le monde d'ici-bas et le monde de l'au-delà ? Si la Bible donc « s'écrase au pied du mur piqué de salpêtre, derrière lequel on entend gratter les rongeurs » (Dubois, 2019, p. 78), c'est pour illustrer la fin silencieuse et imminente de certains présupposés de la métaphysique, c'est la mort de Dieu qu'on pourrait chercher dans un renvoi allusif à *Ainsi parlait Zarathoustra*

je vous en conjure, mes frères, restez fidèles à la terre et ne croyez pas ceux qui vous parlent d'espoirs supraterrrestres ! Ce sont des empoisonneurs, qu'ils le sachent ou non. Ce sont des contempteurs de la vie, des moribonds et des empoisonnés eux-mêmes, de ceux dont la terre est fatiguée : qu'ils s'en aillent donc !

Autrefois le blasphème envers Dieu était le plus grand blasphème, mais Dieu est mort et avec lui sont morts ses blasphémateurs. Ce qu'il y a de plus terrible maintenant, c'est de blasphémer la terre et d'estimer les entrailles de l'impénétrable plus que le sens de la terre ! (Nietzsche, 1903, p. 3412)

Le rejet de la Bible, certes un acte blasphématoire pour la conscience naïve, mais il demeure un appel allusif au nihilisme nietzschéen qui met en évidence le geste critique et salutaire pour s'affranchir des oripeaux de la métaphysique. Au reste, le titre de Jean-Paul Dubois, *Tous les hommes ne voient pas le monde de la même façon*, reste significatif en ce qu'il traduit déjà une crise existentielle où la multitude de points de vue verse le commun des mortels dans l'incertitude et la quête incessante du sens de la vie. Laquelle incertitude a fait office d'horizon topique qui se nourrit des allusions paratopiques : la trame textuelle oscille constamment entre le discours métaphysique et la visée critique et philosophique. L'allusion paratopique trouve déjà son compte

dans cette incertitude entre la voix déconstructionniste du narrateur et la foi religieuse héritée. C'est ainsi que le pasteur atterrit sur un espace incertain, sujet aux questionnements sceptiques :

Quand on est allé à Skagen, la dernière fois, j'ai parlé longuement avec le vieux pasteur de ces choses. Au bout d'un moment, il m'a dit : " Mais Johanes, moi non plus je n'ai plus rien, rien du tout, à part cette bouteille de scotch que je renouvelle quand elle est vide. La foi, c'est fragile, ça repose sur trois fois rien comme un tour de magie. Et qu'est-ce qu'il faut pour être un bon prestidigitateur ? Un lapin et un chapeau. À une époque, j'avais tout ça au creux de ma main. Aujourd'hui, plus de lapin, plus de chapeau, plus de magie." C'est exactement ça, fiston. (Dubois, 2019, p. 72)

La déchéance spirituelle du pasteur souligne la fragilité des convictions des hommes de la robe noire. La voix du pasteur représente la voie truffée d'incertitude et d'inquiétude. Les traits allusifs opèrent une « mutation de signification » (Eco, 2003, p. 278) en instaurant un dialogue critique entre le discours religieux censé enseigner et raviver la foi des fidèles, et le discours introspectif du commun des mortels. Le père du narrateur incarne donc la figure paratopique en ce qu'il se voit « [i]ncapable, au fond, de démêler les filaments du bien et du mal, incapable de savoir quel serait le credo du monde à venir, incapable de déceler en lui, cette nuit-là, ne serait-ce qu'une brindille de foi » (Dubois, 2019, p. 58). Il s'agit d'un dialogue interne vacillant entre la foi religieuse et le scepticisme critique. Deux visions du monde, antagonistes certes, mais formant l'essence même de la position paratopique toujours tiraillée entre les impératifs doctrinaux de la foi et les angoisses de la condition humaine. Qui plus est, le sémantisme de la construction métaphorique (chapeau, lapin, magie, etc.) « induisait une pluralité de sens » (Compagnon, 1972, p. 67) et renforce l'emprise ironique dans l'aveu du pasteur « Et qu'est-ce qu'il faut pour être un bon prestidigitateur ? Un lapin et un chapeau. À une époque, j'avais tout ça au creux de ma main. Aujourd'hui, plus de lapin, plus de chapeau, plus de magie." C'est exactement ça, fiston » (Dubois, 2019, p. 72). De telles constructions métaphoriques révèlent la fonction du discours religieux qui garantit la construction d'un monde idéal tel un chapeau, d'où l'en font surgir des vérités illusoires pour escamoter les doutes et l'incertitude de l'existence humaine. Le récit se situe somme toute entre deux positions discursives quasi paratopiques, l'une portant l'héritage spirituel incarné par la figure du pasteur et l'autre dessinant une voix séditeuse et poussant dans l'abîme les idéaux de la métaphysique. La dynamique paratopique articule différentes voix

discursives dans un mouvement centripète où chaque discours, d'une quelconque obédience, convoque et révoque en doute un autre.

Dans la même perspective paratopique, l'œuvre de Dostoïevski, *les frères Karamazov*, regorge de topoï classiques : art, politique, religion, philosophie, etc. Les questions métaphysiques pullulent dans les différentes parties du roman au point de constituer l'épine dorsale topique dans le récit dostoïevskien. La notion de Dieu occupe les esprits du temps et même les esprits éclairés. Dostoïevski campe deux personnages typiques pour discuter l'idée de Dieu en faisant allusion au déisme voltairien :

Vois-tu, mon cher, il y avait un vieux pécheur, au XVIII^{ème} siècle, qui a dit: Si Dieu n'existait pas, il faudrait l'inventer. Et, en effet, c'est l'homme qui a inventé Dieu. Et ce qui est étonnant, ce n'est pas que Dieu existe en réalité, mais que cette idée de la nécessité de Dieu soit venue à l'esprit d'un animal féroce et méchant comme l'homme, tant elle est sainte, touchante, sage, tant elle fait honneur à l'homme. (Dostoïevski, 1880, p. 472)

Entre la non-existence de Dieu et la nécessité de son existence, de là jaillit la position paradoxale entre la non-présence d'une conviction et la nécessité de présence confessionnelle. L'allusion au déisme voltairien en est révélateur « Si Dieu n'existait pas, il faudrait l'inventer » (Dostoïevski, 1880, p. 472). La posture paratopique en tant qu'inscription flottante se nourrit de renvois allusifs pour légitimer prudemment ses orientations ; la paratopie « invariante dans son principe, prend ainsi des visages toujours changeants » (Maingueneau, 2004, p. 113). C'est ainsi que le rejet d'une quelconque entité divine se voit mâtiné de l'existence de l'idée de Dieu. Il serait hâtif d'associer la plume Dostoïevskienne à une esthétique foncièrement paratopique, mais les prémices d'une écriture engagée se cristallisent dans ses questionnements subtils du fait religieux sans prendre part d'une doctrine particulière, de telle ou telle obédience. La pluralité des voix engagées dans la discussion en donne une tonalité paratopique et ouvre un horizon pluriel et critique. Les échos allusifs dans *les frères Karamazov* animent la fibre critique dans l'espoir d'éveiller la conscience de la société russe du XIX^{ème} siècle. En témoigne cette entrevue entre les frères Karamazov:

mon ami Aliocha, surtout au sujet de Dieu. Existe-t-il ou non ? Ces questions sont hors de la portée d'un esprit qui n'a que la notion des trois dimensions. Ainsi, j'admets non seulement Dieu, mais encore sa sagesse, son but qui

nous échappe ; je crois à l'ordre, au sens de la vie, à l'harmonie éternelle, où l'on prétend que nous nous fondrons un jour : je crois au Verbe où tend l'univers qui est en Dieu et qui est lui-même Dieu, à l'infini. Suis-je dans la bonne voie ? Figure-toi qu'en définitive, ce monde de Dieu, je ne l'accepte pas, et quoique je sache qu'il existe, je ne l'admets pas. (Dostoïevski, 1880, p. 378)

Aux allures d'une joute intellectuelle, ce passage, sous forme de dialogue entre deux personnages principaux, Ivan Karamazov et son frère Aliocha, explore les tréfonds de la question existentielle : l'existence de Dieu et la manière dont il perçoit le monde divin. La paratopie se cristallise d'emblée dans l'attitude d'Ivan Karamazov qui exprime une position paradoxale : bien qu'il reconnaisse l'existence de Dieu, de sa sagesse et de l'harmonie et l'ordre universel, il refuse d'accepter ce monde divin tel qu'il est, en raison du désordre et de l'injustice régnante dans ce monde. La paratopie prend donc forme en ce qu'elle se situe entre le topos du doute religieux et de la rébellion contre l'ordre divin, qui sont au cœur des préoccupations philosophiques de Dostoïevski. Ivan incarne une figure de l'intellectuel moderne déchiré entre la reconnaissance de l'ordre divin et l'incapacité d'accepter le monde tel qu'il est, ce qui conduit à une forme de révolte métaphysique. Cette position paradoxale dessine en outre une atmosphère allusive où le discours religieux est sujet à examen critique sous une forme dialogique entre le discours philosophique instillant le doute, et le discours biblique établissant l'ordre et la vérité. À première vue, nous sommes dans une tension entre deux visions du monde et a fortiori deux formes discursives. D'abord le discours philosophique exprimant l'archétype de la pensée cartésienne pour admettre, si ce n'est pas l'existence, du moins l'idée de Dieu. Ensuite les questions rhétoriques font office de figures d'insistance et de doute en même temps « Dieu. Existe-t-il ou non ? [...] Suis-je dans la bonne voie ? » (Dostoïevski, 1880, p. 378). De cette position ambivalente naît une adhésion paradoxale entre la croyance et le nihilisme, entre le doute éclairant et la foi du charbonnier. Si les interrogations rhétoriques renforcent le doute, l'allusion à l'intertexte biblique se profile à l'horizon dans le topos de création du monde, du cosmos pour ainsi dire « j'admets non seulement Dieu, mais encore sa sagesse, son but qui nous échappe ; je crois à l'ordre, au sens de la vie, à l'harmonie éternelle, où l'on prétend que nous nous fondrons un jour : je crois au Verbe où tend l'univers qui est en Dieu et qui est lui-même Dieu, à l'infini » (Dostoïevski, 1880, p. 472). Les traits allusifs

renvoyant à la Bible peuvent être actualisés à partir de l'isotopie³ de /création du monde/ dont les traits sémantiques inhérents sont /ordre/, /organisation/, /transcendance/ (Verbe, Dieu, sagesse, harmonie, univers, etc.) Deux voix se croisent donc dans ce passage, l'une critique et déconstructiviste, l'autre candide et crédule. La coprésence des voix antinomiques indique une « localisation parasitaire » (Maingueneau, 2004, p. 53), qui n'est pas prise au sens spatiotemporel, mais plutôt au sens d'inscription, voire d'engagement auctorial dans son discours. Engagement qui pourrait se traduire comme la présence de deux *mois* qui se déchirent dans une question existentielle ; l'une matérialiste et l'autre métaphysique. Ce déchirement des voix et le propre de la polyphonie discursive par le prisme de situations paratopiques ouvrant par là même des voies allusives – le jeu de mots voix/voie est délibérément évocateur –. La première voix/voie du narrateur est donc celle du moi sceptique, mais attaché à l'idée du Dieu comme l'illustre cette situation paradoxale, paratopique. La deuxième voix/voie est celle du moi croyant à l'ordre et à l'harmonie du cosmos qui trouve ses racines dans l'intertexte biblique

La terre était sans forme et vide, et l'obscurité couvrait l'océan primitif. Le souffle de Dieu se déplaçait à la surface de l'eau. Alors Dieu dit : "Que la lumière paraisse !" et la lumière parut. [...] Dieu nomma la lumière jour et l'obscurité nuit [...] Dieu dit encore : "Que la terre produise toutes les espèces de bêtes : animaux domestiques, petites bêtes et animaux sauvages de chaque espèce !" Et cela se réalisa. (Bible, 1997, p. 56)

Ce passage de la Bible constitue le renvoi allusif inavoué du personnage dostoïevskien, Ivan, suggérant l'origine et la création du monde par une entité divine: le Seigneur tout puissant. La création obéit à la volonté de providence de sorte que chaque élément nommé entraîne *ipso facto* sa création. La dénomination divine est intrinsèquement performative. La terre, le ciel et les autres parties du monde ne sont pas des dieux, à l'instar de la tradition mythique, mais de pures créations providentielles. De plus, les étapes de la création respectent un empan chronologique de sept jours ; chaque jour est dédié à une création particulière (ciel, terre, végétation, poisson, etc.) selon un ordre et une hiérarchie qu'on trouve dans les assertions d'Ivan « je crois à l'ordre, au sens de la vie, à l'harmonie éternelle, où l'on prétend que nous nous fondrons un jour »

3 L'isotopie est une notion très répandue dans la sémantique structurale, notamment dans *la Sémantique interprétative* de François Rastier. Nous pouvons la définir commodément par la récurrence des traits sémantiques dans un substrat textuel ou discursif (la distinction n'est pas pertinente dans ce palier d'analyse). Cf. (Rastier, 2009 : 12)

(Dostoïevski, 1880, p. 378). Il ne nous a pas déplu d'exploiter la chaîne isotopique relative à l'action /vouloir/, /faire/, /exécuter/et /créer/ condensée dans le sémème "Verbe" « je crois au Verbe où tend l'univers qui est en Dieu et qui est lui-même Dieu » (Dostoïevski, 1880, p. 378). L'isotopie qu'on pourrait qualifier de "création" se porte à notre secours pour actualiser des allusions décomposées en traits sémantiques afférents. Le propre de la création se confirme alors dans les deux voies/voix discursives. L'entendement, la volonté, la dénomination et puis la création selon un ordre défini : l'entendement, car Dieu avait dans son entendement l'idée de la création et vouloir la concrétiser relève de la volonté. Pour ce faire, la dénomination est l'acte péremptoire et performatif de la création du monde « Dieu nomma la lumière jour et l'obscurité nuit [...] Dieu dit encore : "Que la terre produise [...] Et cela se réalisa" » (Bible, 1997, p. 56). La récurrence du verbe dire et nommer, l'isotopie de "dire", met en évidence cette corrélation entre dire et faire. Les échos entre la Bible et *Les Frères Karamazov* de Dostoïevski dessinent cette allusion paratopique. L'auteur parvient à ébranler certains présupposés religieux très répandus dans la société russe sans toutefois marquer explicitement son adhésion à cette critique ouverte. L'allusion investie dans une dynamique paratopique oscille entre adhésion et remise en cause, offre davantage aux instances autoriales la possibilité de traiter des questions délicates et profondes dans une prise de position ambivalente : paratopique. Le dialogue entre la Bible et *Les Frères Karamazov* de Dostoïevski n'est qu'un exemple limite d'allusion paratopique et par là même une manière subreptice pour critiquer, voire révoquer certains paradigmes religieux tout en restant dans le doute. Les renvois d'un texte à l'autre se réalisent à travers la nature et l'espace paratopique du discours soumis à l'étude. Il va sans dire, en parodiant Yves Bonnefoy, que l'allusion est une substance dormante que les positions paratopiques réveillent.

Conclusion

La littérature reste toujours une conscience, si tant est qu'on puisse la qualifier ainsi, où une multitude de voix tente d'approcher la condition humaine selon différentes perspectives. La richesse et la complexité inhérentes au discours littéraire constituent un point cardinal de la dynamique interactive entre les instances autoriales et les instances lectrices. La trame textuelle abrite des voix disparates au gré des maniements discursifs et énonciatifs. L'allusion paratopique reste, sans être un procédé délibérément investi, une caractéristique de toute forme de discursivité où l'appareil énonciatif dessine une zone grise, des frontières entre la présence et la non-présence d'une

poétique, d'une esthétique ou d'une vision du monde. De plus, une lecture parodique s'opère à travers le prisme allusif du discours romanesque dès lors que les fibres des topoï religieux se distinguent dans la chair textuelle à plus d'un égard. Dans le cadre de la trame romanesque, le discours religieux est souvent glissé insidieusement en vue d'être strictement révoqué en doute. Cette convocation du discours religieux sert de point d'ancrage paratopique, permettant à l'auteur de jouer sur la symbolique des références sacrées, tout en leur attribuant une dimension ambivalente : le discours religieux en l'occurrence est convoqué pour être allusivement révoqué. Il s'agit de ce point de vue d'une position ambivalente dans le discours romanesque suggérant ainsi l'exploitation des *étymons* interdiscursifs pour entrer en dialogue avec plusieurs substrats et genres discursifs et le discours religieux n'est qu'un type parmi tant d'autres. Les échos allusifs constituent la plaque tournante orientant la dynamique textuelle et discursive. L'allusion comme dynamique paratopique ouvre des voies interdiscursives et permet par là même l'exploitation de la porosité des frontières esthétiques et génériques. Les renvois allusifs ne sont pas de simple clin d'œil à l'endroit du sujet/lecteur, mais des trajectoires intertextuelles où l'horizon d'attente du texte se greffe sur celle du sujet/lecteur. Quitte à se plier au syncrétisme générique, l'allusion paratopique s'avère une subtilité esthétique pour s'affranchir des binarités discursives aliénantes.

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The Symbiosis of the Internal and the External and the Temporalisation of Social Space in Coleridge's *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*

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ABSTRACT

When the Albatross falls from the Mariner's neck into the sea, it metamorphoses into a symptom and the Mariner can cope with the demands of the social space only if he can tell his narrative to others. His narrative, which is fictionalization of his own unorganised psychodynamics, creates an interface between his subjective space and the social space of the wider world. His narrative functions for him as a *sinthome*, a self-narrative through which he creates a sense of self-continuity between the internal and the external. This is also an acting out of the Lacanian idea of the Moebius strip, which turns the Euclidean representation of space inside out, and which temporalizes space. His tale lacks unity in the traditional sense, but it has (psychological) coherence as his narrative as a *sinthome* provides him with a semantic ground on which he can meaningfully bring together all the fragmentary elements at the threshold of the imaginary and the symbolic. In this essay, I aim to give a Lacanian hearing to the interface between the subjective and the social, and discuss different forms of space along this interface created by/within the narrative(s) in *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* using Lacanian ideas of symptom, *sinthome*, *jouissance* and the Moebius strip as my conceptual backcloth.

Keywords: Coleridge, *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, Lacan, *sinthome*, Moebius



Preamble

When the Albatross falls from his neck into the sea, rather than getting rid of it, the Ancient Mariner internalizes what is represented by the Albatross. It metamorphoses into a symptom that revisits the Mariner as an urge to tell his narrative to others. He can cope with the demands of the social space only if he can tell his narrative to others; thus, his narrative becomes a coping mechanism for him. Revealing its message to others but not to the Mariner himself, his narrative, which is fictionalization of his own unorganised psychodynamics, creates an interface between his subjective space and the social space of the wider world. His narrative can also be interpreted as an enigmatic message that becomes, both for himself and for his listener, a source of *jouissance*, the disruptive energy of the heterogeneous and fluid unconscious that invades the symbolic and converts its members into the opaque wisdom of the Mariner, as in the case of the Wedding Guest. In the aftermath of his encounter with the Mariner, the Wedding Guest cannot return to his previous social identifications and becomes disengaged from the social arrangements. In such a context, the Mariner's narrative calls into question the listener's relation to the symbolic and injects an alienating kind of energy into him. The Mariner becomes a subject who can achieve relief only after creating a rupture in the symbolic space through his narrative and luring others to his troubled psychic space. On the other hand, when we look at the fluid psychodynamics the Mariner is trapped in, it is also possible to say that the Mariner's narrative deals with the currency of the ego, which is an other and which is a two-partite construct involving the speaking *je* of the symbolic and the forbidden *moi* of the imaginary. His narrative functions for him as a self-narrative through which he creates a sense of self-continuity between the internal and the external. This is also an acting out of the Lacanian idea of the Moebius strip, which turns the Euclidean representation of space inside out, and which temporalizes space and provides an interesting corrective to Freud's structural/ topological model of the iceberg. In this essay, I aim to give a Lacanian hearing to the interface between the subjective and the social, and different forms of space along this interface created by/within the narrative(s) in *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* using Lacanian ideas of symptom, *sinthome*, *jouissance* and the Moebius strip as my conceptual backcloth.

In his *Anima Poetae*, when he talks about his poetic practice, Coleridge says that he is seeking for "a symbolical language for something within [him] that already and forever exists," (1893, p. 136). In *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, he seems to have found this "symbolical language" in the images and in their evocations charged with psychodynamic

resonances. The Mariner kills the Albatross with an impulsive act that becomes “the poem’s narrative, ethical and imaginative heart” (Stokes, 2011, p. 87) and which will shape the course of things in the forthcoming scenes. After he kills the Albatross, what the Mariner goes through speaks to the unconscious of the listener rather than to his consciousness. The ensuing psychic space is abundant with uncanny images that defy a rational treatment. They work on the listener/reader while words are inadequate to give expression to this interaction. However, he has to create a space within which these images can operate as tools to convey his experience, and he finds this space in the unmapped South Seas, which is outside the linearity and Cartesianism of the Western symbolic. In the world of these images, we have the operation of another kind of logic and its uncanny materiality as these images inhabit the Mariner’s unconscious.

Anne Williams departs from the Freudian readings of the poem as “classical psychoanalysis ... failed the ‘Rime’” and reads the poem as a poeticisation of the constitution of subjectivity within a Kristevan frame of thinking and “as a representation of semiotic intrusion into the symbolic universe” (1999, p. 240). She says that as a whole, the Mariner’s tale ignores the symbolic law of cause and effect and “his vivid images link with other powerful but usually tacit ways of making sense” (1999, p. 242). Williams underlines the correlation between the constitution of subjectivity and tale telling: the poem “enacts the process by which the speaking subject—the user of language, the teller of tales— is constituted.” In such a context, “the poem’s coherence resides in the interdependence of meaning and experience” (1999, p. 239). She further states that “realizing new, though unspeakable and unspoken, dimensions of reality,” “[n]ot only does the Mariner express the hitherto unimaginable, he also, peculiarly, represents the mother. He is an archetype... whose hypnotic ‘glittering eye’ ... implies the Lacanian phallic gaze of simultaneous identity and alienation.” She takes the poem as a “fusion of female with male” and refers to him as the “mariner mother” (1999, p. 241).

Although a Lacanian reading of the poem acknowledges the majority of the points in this Kristevan hermeneutic, it radically departs from it on the point of whether the Mariner’s tale aims to ignore the symbolic law or whether the Mariner can be regarded as the “mariner-mother.” A Lacanian reading suggests that rather than ignoring the symbolic Law, the tale creates for the Mariner an opportunity to be able to locate himself once more in the symbolic, and with his tale he reconciles the logic of the signifiers with the non-linear logic of the images through the Lacanian *sinthome*. Thus, the tale itself becomes a textual space where these different forms of logic intersect

within a *sinthome*. Although I take the Mariner's quest as an account of the anatomy of art in a Kristevan line of thinking, I depart from it suggesting that his tale is a *sinthome* that enables him to achieve his psychic coherence within the symbolic.

Williams takes the tale as a "revolutionary disruption of the law of the father" that fails "to mesh with the structures that impart meaning to experience" (1999, pp. 242-243). I reverse this hierarchy and suggest that the Mariner's experience is disruptive of the Law, but his tale is an attempt to relate to the coherence of the symbolic. The difference between a Kristevan and a Lacanian hermeneutic is that while the former cherishes the disruptive semiotic, the latter underlines the homogenising and the stabilising power of the symbolic. In the case of the Mariner, the narrative can maintain its stabilising function only for a short while and the Mariner has to tell his narrative over and over. In such a context, the narrative activity itself acquires a stabilising potential as in the aftermath of it, the Mariner is relieved of the tension his repressed psychic material created. Then, the tale represents the semiotic (Williams, 1999, p. 243) but it also symbolises it or translates it into the logic of the signifiers. The psychic significance of the Albatross and its relevance to his narrative occupy the centrepiece of any hermeneutic endeavour. In a previous attempt to read the poem within a Lacanian frame, Birlik (2010) focused on only the Albatross as the symptom but failed to extend her reading to the tale telling itself and the different forms of spatial logic that clash with each other in the poem. This essay seems to be a complementary afterthought to Birlik's previous analysis of the Albatross as a symptom as it aims to relate its psychological resonances to the narrative in terms of the intersection of different spaces.

Reduction of the Symbolic to the level of the Imaginary in the poem

The poem tells the story of a bizarre looking sailor who travels from one place to another. He captivates his listeners with his eyes, and he can achieve relief only after telling his tale to people whom he does not know beforehand but whom he can convert to his own plane of existence. This process is a vicious cycle for him as he creates a different site of existence through tale telling within which he can get rid of the anxiety he has, only for a short while. In the early lines, there are constant references to "his glittering eye" and its captivating power. The fact that the eye is used in the singular might be indicative of a totalizing specular captivity rather than a simple reference to the eyes. The word "glittering" adds up to this view as there is something uncanny in his "eye." Without following any code of courtesy, he starts telling his story, which

becomes a kind of foreshadowing element for us, indicating that the Mariner acts out of convention. The irony here is that he chooses a Wedding Guest, who, as the word wedding indicates, is a stabilizer of the conventions.

If we put the words the poem employs to talk about this old man under scrutiny, we notice that they are usually related to the way he tells his story, his eyes, anxiety, relief and his rootlessness, and their implications keep changing in the course of the poem. In such a context, space becomes important as the external setting determines the changing implications of these words or the Mariner's move from one context to another is characterised by a spatial logic particular to that context. In other words, the implications of these words are contextual and are re-contextualised as the kind of space within which they appear determines their semantic and evocative boundaries. To be able to analyse the changing implications of these words, then, first we should look at different forms of space in the poem, physical space, symbolic/social space, psychic space or narrative space, or sometimes a combination of all of them.

The Argument, which is given at the beginning of the poem, refers to two different kinds of space as the known and the unknown. It underlines that the poem tells:

How a Ship, having first sailed to the Line, was driven by Storms to the cold Country towards the South Pole; how from thence she made her course to the tropical Latitude of the Great Pacific Ocean; and of the strange things that befell; and in what manner the Ancyent Marinere came back to his own Country. (2004, p. 58)¹

This Argument implies that the course of events in the poem will take place in the unmapped, "cold Country" and the familiar social space of "his Country." In fact, the poem proceeds through the basic binary opposition between these two spaces and organizes the other binarisms along the division between them. The other polarities are between the two opposing forms of logic, subjectivity, temporality, law, and semantic system that dominate in these spaces. The same opposition extends into the polarity between the pre-linguistic and the linguistic, the imaginary and the symbolic, the Virgin Mary and Christ.

¹ In this essay, the quotations from the poem are taken from the 1834 edition of the poem in N. Halmi, P. Manguson & R. Modiano (Eds.), (2004). *A Norton Critical Edition: Coleridge's Poetry and Prose*. New York & London: W.W. Norton. The quotations are indicated by line numbers.

In the early lines, when the Mariner talks about the location of their departure, topographical elements attract attention. He refers to the Kirk, the hill and the lighthouse, which are all, in a Freudian sense, phallic images, and the combination of which refers to commonality and a shared social space. Within a psychoanalytical frame of thinking, we can say that the Kirk represents the Father, the lighthouse represents civilisation and the hill represents phallic elements in a patriarchal culture. The early lines establish the first example of binarism between what the earth with its vertical Kirk, hill and lighthouse and what the sea with its horizontal shapelessness, amorphous and fluid nature represent. He says that they are driven by a storm blast towards the South Pole, where no familiar being in man or animal shape lives. This uncanny space of the sea accommodates a special/spatial kind of logic that is dominated by images, and which allows the Mariner to act out his unconscious psychic mechanisms. This untrodden space is the uncanny world of images, of which he cannot make sense with his reasoning mind:

And now there came both mist and snow,
And it grew wondrous cold:
And ice, mast-high, came floating by,
As green as emerald.

....

The ice was here, the ice was there,
The ice was all around:
It cracked and growled, and roared and howled,
Like noises of a swound! (lines 51–62)

Due to the snow fog, there is no clear visibility in this world of images. Their ship is visited by a friendly Albatross; however, without a valid reason, the Mariner kills the Albatross with an impulsive act. In its aftermath, the weather gets friendly for a short while but it does not last long. The Albatross is avenged shortly afterwards by a non-definable space that is horrifyingly surrealistic:

The very deep did rot: O Christ!
That ever this should be!
Yea, slimy things did crawl with legs
Upon the slimy sea.

About, about, in reel and rout
 The Death-fires danced at night;
 The water, like a witch's oils,
 Burnt green and blue and white. (lines 123–130)

Instead of the Cross, his friends hang the Albatross around his neck. They cannot speak and pray in this space, which indicates that the death of the Albatross has something to do with their acculturated positions. As if “choked with soot,” they can no longer speak and the space is invaded by the uncanny elements. Then, a spectral ship arrives with its crew of Life-in-Death and Death. After the appearance of Life-in-Death, this space becomes even more surrealistic and assumes the non-linguistic elements of what Lacan calls the Real, the pre-linguistic brute reality without consciousness, which does not come to light in the symbolic (2006, p. 324):

I looked upon the rotting sea,
 And drew my eyes away;
 I looked upon the rotting deck,
 And there the dead men lay.

I looked to heaven, and tried to pray;
 But or ever a prayer had gusht,
 A wicked whisper came, and made
 My heart as dry as dust.

....

The cold sweat melted from their limbs,
 Nor rot nor reek did they:
 The look with which they looked on me
 Had never passed away. (lines 240–256)

This is the space where there is no other human soul and where God does not reign, “So lonely ‘twas, that God himself / Scarce seems there to be” (lines 599–600). The external world in this unmapped territory is depicted by the uncanny images that are “gothically sublime” (Stokes, 2011, p. 89). The overwhelming presence of these images operating on a logical mechanism different from the one we are familiar with implies that the Mariner regresses to the Lacanian imaginary register. However, this regression implies not going back in time but the reduction of the symbolic, the domain of the

Law/paternal metaphor, to the level of the imaginary, which bespeaks a beyond in language. In this psychic space, the Mariner cannot disconnect himself from the images in his immediate surroundings and cannot have a sense of who he is free from them. In such scenes, "the boundary between perceived and perceiver" dissolves (Ward, 2013, p. 73). In a similar line of thinking, Brice says, "[w]hile Coleridge seems to deliberately personify nature by attributing human-like qualities to otherwise inanimate objects, these same objects play a constitutive role in articulating and defining the very category of 'personhood' through which they are purportedly described" (2007, p. 97). Likewise, Haven suggests that "[b]y his physical presence, the Mariner stands as a bridge between the familiar and the unfamiliar, between the commonplace reality of the outer, public world and the extraordinary reality of the inner world of consciousness" (1969, p. 20). We can take these images as a metonymic extension of his psyche or we can say that he regresses from the plane of intersubjectivity (of the symbolic) to that of the intrasubjectivity or the identificatory processes in the imaginary.

We might feel compelled to ask the reason for this psychic regression and change in space to make sense of the forthcoming scenes. The pre-symbolic connections with the mother cannot be literally re-established once the infant goes through castration, but the adult re-establishes these connections in symbolic modes in the face of a traumatic experience, as in the case of Hamlet, or due to an external element that triggers psychic regression in him. This could be the reason that justifies the Mariner's psychic metamorphosis in the uncanny space of the South Seas; he regresses to the imaginary after his encounter with the Albatross. Obviously, this bird becomes the signifier for something the Mariner cannot tolerate in his unconscious. With the impulsive act of killing it, he wants to relieve himself of the disturbance created by the bird. Due to the lack of enough biographical detail, there is no way for us to tell what it represents for the Mariner, but the course of events in his life after he kills the Albatross hints that the Albatross was also a signifier of *jouissance* for him. "Lacan redefined the pleasure principle as *jouissance* or a sense of Oneness, and reshaped the reality principle to refer to a separation evoked by language and Law (Castration), which ends the mirror stage" (Ragland-Sullivan, 1987, p. 139). *Jouissance* is the subversive experience that, on the one hand, gives him pleasurable pain or unconscious pleasure and, on the other hand, poses a threat to his assumed ego unity in the symbolic. Thus, the Albatross is also the signifier of ambivalence, signifying different things to his unconscious and consciousness. It signifies a friendly bird bringing good luck with itself to his conscious self; however, what it signifies to his unconscious shatters all the symmetries in his ego boundaries.

Within a Lacanian universe, the prohibition of *jouissance* characterises the symbolic structure of language: "That is clearly the essence of law-to divide up, distribute, or reattribute everything that counts as *jouissance*" (Lacan, 1998, p. 3); therefore, *jouissance* is forbidden to the speaking subject. Then his act of killing the Albatross might result from his impulse to maintain his position and his identifications in the symbolic (Birlik, 2010, p. 88). This impulsive act also seems to be an objectification of an inner drama in his psyche.

We might also ask, why is killing the Albatross so important and why is he avenged so harshly? He pays a dear price for violating the rules of hospitality by killing the Albatross because it is loved by the Polar Spirit; this is the justification given in the poem for all the pains he suffers. In Lacanian terms, if we take the Polar Spirit as a metaphorical incarnation of the (m)Other,² this justification makes more sense. As explained above, since he regresses to the imaginary after his encounter with the Albatross, by killing this bird, he wants to transform himself from the domain of the (m)Other to the domain of the Law, the shared Other. However, ironically, this killing, rather than consolidating his ego unity, leads to the opposite end; it drags him forcefully to the imaginary register of the pre-symbolic. The text does not provide ample evidence about his psychic material regarding why this killing leads to the opposite end. This point remains one of the grey areas left unclarified in the poem. However, this ambiguity should not be taken as a shortcoming; in fact, it is due to such loopholes in the Mariner's narrative that we go back and read the poem over and over as these loopholes enable us to dig up different hermeneutical implications in each reading.

The fact that the sea is a domain where the mariners pray to the Virgin Mary rather than to Christ and where, in the words of the Mariner, the Albatross around his neck replaces the Cross refers to another binary opposition between the spaces where the paternal metaphor and the (m)Other reign. The Albatross hanged around his neck indicates that he was translocated from one space of identification to another, from the domain of the Other/the Father to the domain of the (m)Other, or from intersubjectivity to intrasubjectivity. In this domain, rather than the binary oppositions being stabilized, categorized and rationalised by the symbolic, he encounters the imaginary real, which communicates itself through the images and which is an extra-linguistic domain. "Here

2 In Lacanian epistemology, the Other has a double nature as "the Other as both 'inside' and 'outside'; as both 'discourse of the unconscious' and the social substance" (Hook, 2008, p. 57). To avoid any conceptual confusion, the first will be referred to as the (m)Other and the second as the shared Other or simply as the Other.

the words and their semantic layers become dysfunctional and all the natural phenomena are relocated in a phantasmagoria where the uncanny elements reign" (Birlik, 2010, p. 88). Very suitably, after killing the Albatross, the Mariner cannot command words and pray as they are the components of the domain of the paternal metaphor, the Father. The imaginary register is dominated more by the specular rather than other kinds of images (Lacan, 2006, p. 77); therefore, what the eyes perceive is significant in this register. Very suitably, the text seems to be haunted by references to either the "eye" of the Mariner or the eyes of other mariners.

As stated above, these images, rather than depicting the external nature, seem to project the inner drama of the Mariner. In such a context, rather than a language of reference or denotative language, his narrative employs an evocative language. This view can also explain the metonymic nature of these images. They appear as fragmentary and discontinuous in the absence of linearity. In this world, the working mechanisms of the causes and effects seem to indicate a different kind of logic. Images have to be taken as the signifiers whose signifieds cannot be located in the symbolic as they defy the logic of the symbolic or the logic of the signifiers in the symbolic. Here, one cannot help but remember Lacan's idea suggesting that the unconscious is structured like a language but its line of logic is different from the logic of the symbolic (Lacan, 1992, p. 37).

After killing the Albatross, as a penance, the Mariner is taken by Life-in-Death and the other sailors are claimed by Death. Their death is a strange kind of death; they die with their eyes open. This is something less than a literal death as it highlights the psychic repositioning of the Mariner, who is captivated within the imaginary while his friends are still in the symbolic. They have already died to the intrasubjectivity to which the Mariner regresses. As "the great 'No' of life" (Mellard, 1991, p. 163) or the Great Master (Lacan, 2006, p. 100), death is the biggest castrating element in a Lacanian frame of thinking, and our culture is based on murder. This murder is a reference to what happens to the authentic psychic material during primary repression and linguistic castration. Then, we can take Life-in-Death and the Mariner's relationship with her as another indication of regression to the pre-castration domain of the imaginary from the domain of language, Death.

When he looks down at the sea, he sees the slimy creatures, which might be taken as an objectification of the imaginary real of the pre-symbolic. However, when he blesses them unaware, he incorporates them into the domain of language, thus making

them part of the symbolic, which gives him relief. The act of blessing is full of symbolic connotations as it implies attaching spiritual significance or granting acknowledgement to the slimy creatures in religious terms. This can only take place in the domain of the paternal metaphor. The snake is an archetypal phallic image, and by blessing the snakes, the Mariner transposes them from one phallic domain to another, from the domain of the (m)Other to the domain of the shared Other. This is followed by the fall of the Albatross to the sea, which is a replay of the process of the previous transformation of the snakes:

O happy living things! no tongue
 Their beauty might declare:
 A spring of love gushed from my heart,
 And I blessed them unaware:
 Sure my kind saint took pity on me,
 And I blessed them unaware.

The selfsame moment I could pray;
 And from my neck so free
 The Albatross fell off, and sank
 Like lead into the sea. (lines 282–291)

As can be seen in the above lines, the fall of the Albatross and the return of his ability to pray take place at the “self-same moment.” He can incorporate both the snakes and the Albatross into his language. Shortly afterwards, it rains and the Virgin Mary gives him relief as he is touched by the “gentle sleep from Heaven / That slid into [his] soul” (lines 295–296). In the aftermath of this blessing, the Albatross leaks into the sea, but this physical separation points at a more intense form of connection: the Mariner internalizes what the Albatross represents, that is, he once more represses its signified in the unconscious, and due to this act of repression, he transforms the bird from a literal to a metaphorical level. Now the Albatross implies more than the physical presence of the bird, it has unconscious resonances/implications which are beyond the grasp of the Mariner (and also of the reader) as they are repressed. This is also a transition from the world of images to the world of words (Birlik, 2010, p. 90). Very suitably, only when the Albatross leaks into the sea can he start praying. However, he cannot get rid of its disturbing implications as it disappears physically to be resignified psychically for the Mariner. In fact, it “becomes a symbol of despair” (Reid, 2006, p. 78) due to what

it signifies to the Mariner's unconscious or due to the unconscious psychic material it corresponds to. The ambiguity in this correspondence is one of the hermeneutical loopholes in the Mariner's narrative that enriches the implications of the poem.

He can achieve relief only when he can put the Albatross and what it represents into words, that is, when he articulates in words what he experienced in the extra-linguistic domain. This paradoxical act of putting into words something that defies the logic of signifiers and achieving relief in its aftermath can also be taken as a symptom, which for Lacan is "the signifier of a signified that has been repressed from the subject's consciousness" (2006, p. 232). As stated previously, the symptom is the return of the repressed material, but this process also involves a compulsion to repeat as the symptom is a signifier whose signified is located in the unconscious. That is, the Mariner cannot carry its psychic signified into the domain of language. If he could achieve this transition, he could assert this enigmatic signified within the logic of the signifiers of the symbolic and achieve a total relief and the symptom would disappear. That is, inserting this disturbing material into the language would lead to getting rid of its disturbing aspects.

The Act of sublimation and its aftermath

What is the significance of his act of blessing the snakes, in psychoanalytic terms, then? Blessing the sea snakes is the first instance of sublimation in the poem. At this point, what Haven says about the changing implications of the snakes is interesting:

The Mariner does not go from this place to that place, from this time to that time. What changes is not his location but his relation to the world around him, the structure, so to speak, of his experience. The water snakes whose beauty he blesses are the same creatures whose loathsomeness repelled him. (1969, p. 20)

The snakes as the phallic archetype, in fact, trigger his energy to be transformed to the site of the shared Other from the site of the (m)Other. He displays an urge to "move along the linguistic chain" and to be part of the social network (Birlik, 2018, p. 248). In other words, the Mariner is seeking the intrinsic link between his desire and the symbolic. When he sees the Hermit on the Pilot's boat, he is happy as he can confess what he did to the Albatross and be absolved of his sin. The fact that he wants to confess as soon

as he sees the Hermit can be taken as another indication of his urge to be integrated into the symbolic, the domain of the paternal metaphor, and to be acknowledged by the Father.

Shortly after his confession to the hermit, he recognises his country with its Kirk, hill and lighthouse. This is his re-entry into the phallogentric space of the Law. However, he cannot position himself in the symbolic on a stable ground as it becomes impossible for him after his contact with the Albatross and what it represents. As stated above, this regression changes into a symptom as the energy of the ego remains dysfunctional to repress thoroughly the disturbing material represented by the symptom.

The Albatross is integrated into the world of words, but the Mariner has to grapple with its residues. It leaks into the sea, leaving behind an unbearable anxiety that revisits the Mariner in the form of a compulsion to repeat his narrative. This is another way of saying that the Mariner relates himself to the symbolic space, but there is still something deeply anchored in him that resists the logic of the signifiers. After his return to the symbolic space, he starts to see the ocean, not white or not imbued with uncanny imagery, but green. However, he also has reminiscences of what it was like after his encounter with the Albatross:

And now this spell was snapt: once more
I viewed the ocean green,
And looked far forth, yet little saw
Of what had else been seen— (lines 442–445)

He feels that he is being haunted by “a frightful fiend,” a demonic being he cannot put into words. This too is an imaginary residue that cannot be contained by and within language:

Like one, that on a lonesome road
Doth walk in fear and dread,
And having once turned round walks on,
And turns no more his head;
Because he knows, a frightful fiend
Doth close behind him tread. (lines 446–451)

When the Mariner tells his story, which has the overtones of a ritual enactment of his psychic material, to the Wedding Guest, there is another ritual going on inside the bride's house. Rather than going to the Wedding, "'Tis far sweeter" to him "To walk together to the kirk/With a goodly company!" (lines 602–604). In Lacanian terms, his lack of interest in the social arrangements implies that the Mariner's incorporation of his unconscious desire within social signification is not without trouble. His return to the symbolic can be taken as an extension of his urge to integrate into the space of the paternal metaphor. However, this interpretation falls short in explaining why he is doomed to rootlessness or why he prefers going to the Church to pray rather than to the wedding. His remedy to all the worldly problems is Love, and he says, "He prayeth best, who loveth best / All things both great and small" (614–615). Now, he acknowledges the metonymic extension of the Father / Law, "For the dear God who loveth us / He made and loveth all" (616–617). This is also the sublimation of his love as in the case of the mystic. Thus, his transition from the space of the Virgin Mary to that of the Father's comes full circle.

Narrative as the *sinthome*

We have two cases of the return of the repressed psychic material in the text. The first one is the Albatross, which appears in the form of a signifier. The second case that comes into being in the aftermath of the Albatross's metamorphosis into the signifier of the Mariner's symptom is his narrative, which designates a signifying formulation. It bears some resemblance to the Albatross as the symptom but it is also more than it as it is in the form of a statement. Both the Albatross and the narrative are products of the same psychic mechanisms, but they differ in their implications. Through his narrative, he can achieve a re-living of experiences and the abreaction of the affect attached to them. Affect implies the "[d]ischarge of the emotional energy associated with a psychic trauma that has been forgotten or repressed; the process of bringing such a trauma back to consciousness" (OED). However, the articulation in speech of the truth about desire remains impossible. In other words, he cannot pass from the affective to the intelligible; therefore, his narrative works on the others and creates a metamorphosis in them, but its implications remain a mystery for the Mariner himself.

After confessing to the Hermit, he cannot enjoy long-lasting relief from his symptoms; in fact, it metamorphoses into a narrative that assumes the elements of what Lacan regards as the *sinthome*. There is an interesting parallelism between the Mariner's

transition from the Albatross as the symptom, the bird, to his narrative about the Albatross and Lacan's transition from the symptom to the *sinthome*. In his seminars and writings, in the late 50ies he took the symptom as a ciphered message that does not "call for interpretation" that is "which is not a call to the Other but a pure *jouissance* addressed to no one" (Wilson, 2015, p. 37). From this linguistic definition of the symptom as a signifier, he moved to the definition of the *sinthome* as a statement which is "a symptom cultivated as an artistic activity" and "a mode of exploration... externally and internally, what was distant and what was denied" (Brivic, 2008, p. 1). For him, the *sinthome* is unalterable and, in his later period, he added the *sinthome* as the fourth ring to his topological model of the Borromean knot given below.

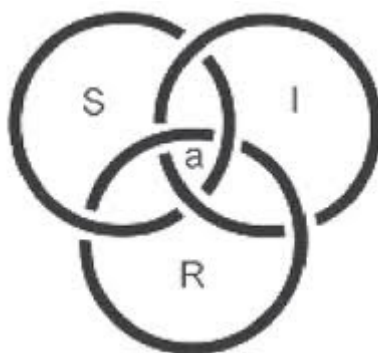


Figure 1: The Borromean knot.

The Borromean knot reflects schematically how Lacan bases his register theory on a spatial logic. This knot assumes an ontological significance as "in order to sustain consciousness, we must be capable of feeling (imaginary), using language (symbolic), and encountering surprise (Real)." They depend on each other "looping into each other in such a way that if any one is opened, the other will come apart" (Brivic, 2008, p. 12). The *sinthome* as an "addition to the Borromean knot of RSI allows the subject to cohere" (Evans, 2006, p. 192). It is beyond meaning and "designates a signifying formulation beyond analysis, a kernel of enjoyment immune to the efficacy of the symbolic." Far from calling for some analytic 'dissolution', the *sinthome* is what 'allows one to live' by providing a unique organisation of *jouissance*... (Evans, 2006, p. 191). For Lacan, the *sinthome* also implies "the invasion of the symbolic order by the subject's private *jouissance*" (Evans, 2006, p. 192) and allows the Borromean knot to be temporarily rearranged (Harari, 1995, p. 163). It also leads to a kind of self-creation or achieving psychic continuity. We can see all the organising elements of the *sinthome* in the

Mariner's narrative, which, as a representational account, as a praxis, helps him to organize his *jouissance*. In the form of a *sinthome*, his narrative keeps his ego intact in the domain of the symbolic as it helps him "to cohere." Then, the Mariner as the creator of a narrative can be taken, as in the case of Joyce, as "someone working with the exploration of psychotic patterns for a liberating purpose" (Harari, 2006, p. 46).

The Mariner's narrative can also be taken as an attempt to cross from one logic to another, from the imaginary to the symbolic. He can bear the anxiety he feels in the symbolic only if he can tell his story to others, then this process injects a new kind of energy into him. His transition from the imaginary to the symbolic is the bliss and the curse of the artist, as well. The poem can be taken as a poetisation of the psychic mechanisms regulating the artist's world; at this point, it becomes self-reflexive. In a similar line of thinking, Thurston identifies "the *sinthome* with writing itself" (qtd. in James, 1965, p. 166). At this point, it might be interesting to look at what Brivic says about the correlation between writing (narrating in the Mariner's case) and self-creation through art in the space of the *sinthome*:

I see the *sinthome* as deranging language and subjectivity in order to create new possibilities. It allows one to change volition by apprehending one's identity as a construction. It is promoted by writing as the entrance into a self-created world in which one produces the subject. ...A founding move of the *sinthome* is to see one's life as a fiction, a synthetic home. One's life is always a fiction (especially when it is written), and to see it as fictional is the way to become free, to unfold an alternative route, to change roles. As soon as one sees one's role, one is outside it, ex-sistent. (2008, p. 15)

The Mariner re-homes himself in the symbolic through his narrative, which becomes "a synthetic home" to him. His narrative both liberates him from the disturbing psychic material and offers an opportunity for self-creation.

The symbiosis of the internal and the external

The poem problematizes the interface between the subjective and the social, the individual and culture by concerning itself with the psychodynamics of the Mariner, who holds a transferential relationship to his listeners. His listeners wake up a wiser

man the following morning or, as in the case of the Wedding Guest, give up the idea of going to the wedding. His narrative testifies to the coexistence of the subjective and social space, and how they merge into each other as in the topology of the Moebius Strip, which:

seems to have two sides but in fact has only one (and only one edge). Locally, at any one point, two sides can be clearly distinguished, but when the whole strip is traversed it becomes clear that they are in fact continuous. The two sides are only distinguished by the dimension of time, the time it takes to traverse the whole strip.

The figure illustrates the way that psychoanalysis problematises various binary oppositions, such as inside/outside, love/hate, signifier/signified, truth/appearance... The opposed terms are thus seen to be not discrete but continuous with each other. (Evans, 2006, p. 119)



Figure 2: The Moebius Strip.

The metaphor of the Moebius strip underlines how meaning is generated through “the inexorable relationship that exists between subjectivity and discourse” (Arrigo, 2004, p. 160). It also implies the temporalization of space and objectifies the Lacanian idea that truth never exists in its entirety at any point but involves a series of stages, each of which pertains to truth only in the process of reaching it (Lacan, 1998, p. 93). The poem as a whole is a narrative flow about “a series of stages,” that is, about repression → regression → repression again, which embodies in itself all kinds of spaces I referred to in the beginning of the essay.

Conclusion

In *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, there are two distinct lines of logic; thus, there are two distinct representations of space that organise the other forms of space along the division between them: the space of the symbolic, which is given through the details like the Kirk, the hill, and the lighthouse, is vertical and the space of the pre-symbolic or the imaginary is located on the unmapped and fluid horizontal sea. The psychic space of the Mariner and the textual space of the poem shift back and forth between the symbolic and the pre-symbolic spaces. The symbolic space is invaded by the primal signifier and the signifiers in it are in alignment with its logic; however, the pre-symbolic space is revealed through the images that work through the logical mechanisms of the unconscious. When the Mariner regresses to the imaginary register after killing the Albatross, the space around him can be communicated through the images whose signifieds lie elsewhere. When the Mariner blesses the sea snakes unaware, he translates these images to words or he translocates them from the imaginary register to the logic of the symbolic. When he translates what the Albatross signifies to him into the form of a narrative, he transforms it from a symptom in the form of a signifier to the *sinthome* in the form of a statement. However, it does not bring with itself total coherence as the Mariner is still overcome by residues of his repressed psychic material in the form of compulsion to repeat his narrative. Through his narrative, which as an extended statement becomes an interface between the imaginary and the symbolic, the Mariner invents a new kind of representational space to organize his *jouissance*, thus subverts the opposition between the subjective and the social spaces or the opposition between the affect and intelligible material. By revealing the dyad of the subjective and the social spaces, the narrative in the poem also explores, among many other things, how cultural or external events are shaped by the unconscious mechanisms.

By way of conclusion, in *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, "it is indeed a problem to know the dancer from the dance" (Mays, 2013, p. 98) as the poem objectifies the psychodynamics of the Mariner himself. His tale lacks unity in the traditional sense but it has (psychological) coherence as his narrative functions as a *sinthome* for the Mariner and provides him with a semantic ground on which he can meaningfully bring together all the fragmentary elements at the threshold of the imaginary and the symbolic.

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“Long Live the Weeds and the Wilderness Yet”: Critical Plant Studies and Gerard Manley Hopkins’ Plant Poetics

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ABSTRACT

Regardless of their scientifically established vitality and agency, plants are still typically visualized as dormant elements of nature and allocated minimal importance. In literature, equivalently, plants are treated as insensate, unresponsive background elements and ornamental devices, which are perennially overlooked. It is due to the inception of critical plant studies that plants are brought into public attention as vitally awake, cognizant individuals playing active roles in the composition of the universe as well as literature. As a response to cultural and literary neglect of plants in human life, critical plants studies underpins the mattering of plants and embarks on investigating human-plant relationships from an interdisciplinary perspective. To this end, biological and botanical understanding of plants is appropriated into the literary representation of plants with the intention of superseding the metaphoric existence of plants in literature with that of biological standing. This study, accordingly, deals with the plant poetry of a prominent Victorian poet, Gerard Manley Hopkins (1844-1889) whose poetry allows an insightful access to the astoundingly complicated and animated world of plants and in this way, attempts to build a non-dualistic and non-oppressive human-plant relationship through his poetry. Thus, “Asboughs”, “Spring”, “Binsey Poplars”, and “Inversnaid” are specifically chosen poems presenting a perfect case study to demonstrate Hopkins’ attentiveness towards plants. The study will further uncover Hopkins’ botanical consciousness and environmental awareness propelling him to condemn humans’ brutal exploitation of plants which predominantly stems from an anthropocentric view of plants as lifeless commercial objects that can be used and consumed.

Keywords: Gerard Manley Hopkins, Critical Plant Studies, Agency, Nature, Victorian Poetry



At the apex of its industrial development, the Victorian age has undergone an immense transmutation in its socio-cultural conditions, ensuing its conversion from a small-scale agricultural industry into a technologically fostered factory system that enabled the mass production and speedy distribution of materials. Running alongside its speedily altering silhouette with aggrandized cities and urbanized lifestyle, the relentlessly enhancing manufacturing industry soon transpires into an emblem of Britain's economic prosperity and national pride at the great cost of the country's natural heritage of uncultivated and unsullied lands, exempt from human intrusion. This newly burgeoning industrial age has become a vivid eyewitness of an unheralded ecological crisis occasioned by the human sacrilege of green forests and wilderness areas in the name of economic expansion, construction of railways, coal mines, and factories, which conjointly take a disastrous part in the disruption of the ecosystem and a total devastation of the natural entities. As B.W. Clapp writes, "[b]etween 1800 and 1875, for instance, coal that could not be sold was either burned at the pithead or flushed into rivers and streams; slack and dust was simply piled into heaps" causing irretrievable pollution of waters while "[i]n the air, a mixture of carbonic acid, sulphuric acid and nitrogen oxides checked the growth of some trees and destroyed others" (2013, p. 166). Likewise, in Simmons' estimation, "[i]n 1800, the UK consumption of coal was 10 million tons, in 1856, 60 million tons", underscoring a dramatic escalation in British industry's coal consumption, which caused an extensive carbon release into the atmosphere (2001, p. 150). From the beginning of the 19th century, the exorbitantly rising coal consumption of Britain became the neglected compliant of the increased acidity levels and the toxicity of the breathable air, culminating in the mass demise of air, water, and earth and endangering the proliferation of human and nonhuman life on earth while "literally fueling Britain's rise as the most powerful manufacturing, trading, and imperial power that the world had ever seen" (Thorsheim, 2018, p. 1).

The capitalist anxieties of the 19th century Britain about making the utmost economic profit out of every natural source have triggered the exacerbation of the Anthropocene interferences on the planet which, in return, have not only prompted sweeping atmospheric defilements but also the internalization of the anthropocentric mindset, which engraves a mechanical view of the universe in the minds of Victorians, according to which nature is not a living entity but a financially expandable material that can be benefited from and thrown away. Against the backdrop of this anthropocentric worldview, which concedes a ruthless utilization of natural entities, Gerard Manley Hopkins distinguishes himself as an outstanding poet whose theological education

does not eclipse his ecological perception of the world, breaking radically away from the mainstream Victorian society's human-centered ideology of nature as a disposable material. Delineated as one of the "environmentally ardent poets" by Jude Nixon, Hopkins does not comply with the radical fracture in humans' physical and emotional contact with nature taking place concurrently with the introduction of machinery into human life (2006, p. 208). Therefore, this study focuses on Gerard Manley Hopkins' plant poems from the recently arising theory of critical plant studies, which shows an assiduous commitment to reinstalling the biological and spiritual connection between humans and plants.

Critical Plant Studies

The post-humanist endeavor to reduce the cataclysmic impacts of the Anthropocenic age has stimulated the proliferation of ecocritical studies into multifarious directions like material, elemental, animal, and plant turn. Recent scientific debates about the intentionality and rationality of the other-than-human world have not only spurred the emergence of critical animal studies but also instigated the sprouting of critical plant studies which attributes personhood, intelligence, and sentience to plants. As a substitute to the "Anthropocene's singular focus on human agency", Natasha Myers suggests a new vegetal turn in literary studies, which she coins as "*Planthroposcene*" (2017, p. 299), a "call to change the terms of encounter, to make allies with these green beings" (2017, p. 300). Apart from Myers' call for making peace with plant beings, Michael Marder, in his book *Plant Thinking*, denounces the "ethical neglect" of plants on account of humans' misconceptions about plants' being "less developed or less differentiated than that of their animal and human counterparts and that therefore, vegetal beings are unconditionally available for unlimited use and exploitation" (2013, pp. 2–3). Expunging this manipulative human relationship with plants, Marder offers a radical shift in the human perception of plants and suggests a new way of thinking with plants that is what he calls as "plant-thinking" which is explained as "thinking without the head", refusing a human-oriented rationality and requiring a "de-humanized" and "plant-like" thinking (2013, p. 10). With their lucrative undertaking to construct a more ethical and responsible human attitude towards plants, both Myers and Marder are devoted to attenuating the large-scale ecological predicaments caused by the current epoch of the Anthropocene, which inordinately attributes too much value to humanity and expedites "the marginalization of nonhuman forms of agency and matter" (Dürbeck & Hüpkes, 2020, p. 4). As it is pointed out clearly by the scholars of critical plant studies, humans' plant neglect is the fundamental reason which lies deeply

at the root of human-caused problems like global warming, climate change and deforestation. Hence, critical plant studies appears as an interdisciplinary theory covering a "broad framework for reevaluating plants, their representations, and human-plant interactions" in literary, scientific, cultural, political, and philosophical grounds (Gagliano, Ryan, & Vieira, 2017, p. xvi).

The invalidation of the popular public opinion about plants' incapacity to wield any kind of agency owing to their firmly grounded life in soil and their lack of feet to enable them to move like humans or animals is placed at the head of the agenda of critical plant studies. Regardless of human repression, "plants exert their agency and vitality by injecting their own qualities into the material universe" (Bulut Sarıkaya, 2024, p. 25). Bringing in scientific discussions about the startling agency and intelligent plant behavior, critical plant studies prescribes a radical paradigm shift in the traditional human perception of plants by revealing the biological complexity and purposeful behavior of vegetal beings. In this regard, a dedicated plant biologist, Anthony Trewavas, associates intelligence with organisms' special skills of problem solving and claims for the plant intelligence by stating that a "tree gathers and continually updates diverse information about its surroundings, combines this with information about its internal state, and makes decisions that reconcile its well-being with the environment" (2014, p. 100). Problems that plants face in their social vicinity are multi-dimensional such as the "uneven distribution of light, minerals, soil structure and water, competition by other plants, variation in rainfall and wind, and variable degrees of damage by disease pests and herbivores", emerging as crucial issues that should be estimated meticulously by plants (Trewavas, 2014, p. 90). Similarly, an eminent entomology professor, Richard Karban, substantiates the highly advanced competence of plants and writes:

In addition to sensing, plants communicate among tissues on the same individual to coordinate their responses to the environment. They eavesdrop on neighboring individuals to acquire information about future risks of competition, disease, and herbivores. They communicate with those microbes that allow them to forage more effectively and with animals that facilitate mating and move their seeds to locations where they are likely to thrive. (2017, p. 3)

Notwithstanding all these scientific evidences which prove that plants are socially mindful rational organisms who do not need a human or animal brain to think reasonably, cultural

conceptualizations insist on categorizing plants as insentient, non-intelligent, unresponsive, and “underdeveloped, inferior life forms” (Bulut Sarikaya, 2024, p. 5). This is the crystal clear proof of the accreditation of humans’ anthropocentric predilections and dualistic mindsets with an erroneous propensity to fix intelligence and intentional agency solely on humanity. That is exactly what the newly emerging field of critical plant studies altercates with. John C. Ryan, one of the leading theorists of critical plant studies, ascertains that the prejudiced human attitude to vegetal existence, “the premise of the overlooked, or marginalized plant” is placed at the center of critical plant studies, “the nascent area of inquiry into the vegetal world that incorporates diverse theoretical perspectives and methodological frames, including those of neuro-botany” (2018, p. 5).

Viewing plants as dynamic agents not only in nature’s own system of networking but also in the literary domain is the optimal intention of critical plant studies, which calls for the integration of the botanical perception of plants into literary representation. To this end, Patricia Vieira introduces a distinct form of plant writing, *phytographia* which opens literary texts to the inscription of plants so that plants will not be objectified and disempowered in textual representations but play active roles in the composition of literary texts (2017, p. 218, emphasis in the original). *Phytographia* allows the confluence of plants and humans, nature and culture, and text and matter. As Vieira points out, *phytographia* “denotes one such encounter: the coming together of the wordless, physically inscribed language of plants with an aesthetically mediated form of human language in literature” (2017, p. 223). In other words, *phytographia* releases plants from the confinements of metaphoric representations where they become stable, motionless tools of human imagination. Like Vieira, Ryan considers phytography as a posthumanist form of plant writing that “involves dialogue with emerging forms of botanical research” to understand plant behavior and communicative skills and invites humans to look into the world from the perspective of plants (2020, p. 102). Hence, instead of humans being the authors of plant stories, phytography “confers to plants the right to narrate their own stories” (Ryan, 2020, p. 102). Plants are not capable of writing their stories only physically in the material universe through photosynthesis, but they are also literary active agents composing their own stories and narrations.

Plants’ being storied beings is, indeed, not an improbable concept and resonates strongly with Iovino and Oppermann’s materialist paradigm of the universe as a “storied matter” which denotes the idea that the universe is composed of meaningful, intentional, and communicative interaction between nonhuman entities whose stories are all

interlaced with each other (2014, p. 2). Iovino and Oppermann argue that the whole planet is constituted by "transformative stories built by telluric powers, magnetic forces, clashing and melting elements, and dawning forms of life extend the past of the earth into our present, determining the way all beings articulate their relationships to the world" (2014, p. 7). Every animate or inanimate being in nature is accomplished in "producing configurations of meanings and discourses that we can interpret as stories" (Iovino & Oppermann, 2014, p. 7). Analogously, apart from being avid participators in a purposeful interaction with their environment in the material universe, plants, in the literary sphere, emerge as the authors of their own stories and turn literature into a reciprocal exchange of human and plant persons' inter-species interactivity, instead of humans' being centralized subjects as the only creative and valuable authorial voices of literature. In this regard, critical plant studies undermines the anthropocentric privilege of humans as the only rational producers of meanings and restores the power of representation into plants. As Karen Barad convincingly argues, there is an "ongoing materialization" in the universe which comes into being through its "differential becoming" (2007, p. 180). Every natural entity in the universe has its own unique way of expressing and exerting itself. Within this differential becoming of the universe, plants are also invested with a power of making their own histories and telling their own stories. As Barad affirms, the "rings of trees mark the sedimented history of their intra-actions within and as part of the world" (2007, p. 180). Not only with the tree rings, carrying the physical traces of its history and life story but also with repositioning themselves towards the sun, their distinguished performance of photosynthesis, vitally necessary phenomenon for the continuation of life on earth, which, even in the 21st century, cannot be achieved through any means of technology or machine, and their everlasting capacity of replicating themselves by producing new leaves and branches, plants are endowed with sufficient vegetal and literary agency to write their own stories and leave their inscriptions.

Thereupon, critical plant studies ushers in a new tradition of plant writing that requires reuniting the material world with the textual world where plants will inhabit literature with their biological identity and not with their metaphoric insinuations. The substitution of plants' virtual reality with that of their actual reality enhances the prospects of human-plant entanglement, which would enable humans to come to the awareness of their biological interconnectedness with plants and abdicate their anthropocentric prejudices, keeping them apart from and superior to plants. Initiating a new plant turn in literature, critical plant studies manifests the intersectionality of

human and plant narratives in which plants are not positioned as muted, background materials, but allowed to undertake active roles in the composition of literature, shaping and redesigning humans' cultural constructions of the nonhuman world and in this way, aiming to achieve a seamless transition from the cataclysmic age of the Anthropocene towards an age of—what is labeled by Myers as—the Planthroposcene where plants are recognized as the most indispensable units of the universe without which life would not be possible. Appropriately, a prominent Victorian poet, Gerard Manley Hopkins' poetry opens an entirely new scientific portal to the astounding world of plants, which is full of biological complexity, vitality, and convivial interactivity going on unrelentingly.

Plants in Hopkins' Poetry

In his seminal article titled "The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis", Lynn White argues for the futility of expecting religious solutions for the contemporary environmental problems and accuses Christianity for the ecological crisis, which, he believes, will continue to increase "until we reject the Christian axiom that nature has no reason for existence save to serve men" (1967, p. 1207). In retaliation for White's incredulity in the reconcilability of religion and ecology, Gerard Manley Hopkins (1844–1889), the 19th century priest and poet, becomes a brilliant model for the possibility of alternative solutions for environmental problems without disqualifying religion at all. With his refutation of the uncompromising nineteenth-century outlook of religion in complete discrepancy with the scientific conceptualization of the universe, Hopkins is featured as an unconventional poet of the Victorian period who extensively explores the enrapturing possibilities of the intersection of religion and science. On account of such unique exceptionality of the poet that does not comfortably fit within the traditional Victorian poetry, Dean Flower envisages Hopkins as a "surprisingly contemporary" poet who works for the "protection of environment, celebration of biodiversity, or criticism of mankind's unkindness to the earth" (2020, p. 138). Lynn Domina's ecotheological reading, on the other hand, is intended to "reveal Hopkins's understanding of divine presence in the world more explicitly" (2020, p. 186). "A fervent believer in God's immanence in creation", as Constantini observes, Hopkins "was also animated by a keen interest in science, which encouraged him to look at the world objectively" (2008, p. 494). This reconciliatory proclivity to conflate religious doctrines with scientific discoveries induces Hopkins to develop an ecological as well as a spiritual view of the universe that is constantly transmogrifying and actively evolving. Hopkins' eco-spirituality enables him to look into nature as a consecrated place, a sanctuary reflecting God's presence.

Indeed, as a keen observer of nature, Hopkins's poetry is rife with his scientific curiosity about the unremitting activism and energy of plants, which are inflicted by a divine power and constitute an unabating enticement for the poet's poetic imagination. Hopkins's understanding of nature revolves around the notion of "inscape" implying a nature "characterised by incessant motion" that is a vitally active, agentic, constantly transforming and evolving material universe in which human and nonhuman embroilment is consecrated spiritually to the veneration of God (Parham, 2010, p. 133). According to Hopkins, "all the world is full of inscape and chance left free to act falls into an order as well as purpose" (Hopkins, 1959, p. 230). Nixon confirms that Hopkins's "discourse on inscape and the energy of instress charges nature with creative, self-organizing processes" (2002, p. 139). In his journals, Hopkins identifies the end of March and the beginning of April as the best "time to study inscape the spraying of trees, for the swelling buds carry them to a pitch...in these sprays at all events there is a new world of inscape" (1959, p. 205). It is unimpeachably this idea of plants that is vitally alive and actively evolving living beings that carries Hopkins much ahead of his time since the plant agency is a nascent theoretical premise of critical plant studies, reverberating most recently as an offshoot of ecocriticism that has not arrived on the scene until the end of the 20th century.

Respectively, "Ashboughs" is a momentous poem that involves Hopkins' personal reflections on human and plant life, interwoven with each other. Apart from uncovering Hopkins' particular scientific interest in plants, the poem is quite significant in its display of plants as the physical embodiments of the relational dynamics between the material and the textual world of poetry. The poem opens with the confession of the poet that his eyes are not illuminated enough to capture the intricate heterogeneity of this complex cosmic universe, which is glittering with never-ending activity and inventiveness:

Not of all my eyes see, wandering on the world,
Is anything a milk to the mind so, so sighs deep
Poetry to it, as a tree whose boughs break in the sky.
Say it is ashboughs: whether on a December day and furled
Fast or they in clammyish lashtender combs creep
Apart wide and new-nestle at heaven most high. (Hopkins, 2008, p. 159)

The poet deciphers a gripping connectivity between the human mind, poetry and a tree whose branches reach into the sky while its roots go deep into the earth and, in

this sense, working fervently to form a symbiosis between heaven and earth. Elongating with its branches towards manifold directions, the ash tree is observed by the poet in a state of reconfiguring a network of interconnectivity between different natural entities by eroding unassailable boundaries between human and non-human species and proves itself as highly responsive and attentive to every incident happening in its physical and social environment. Besides, the ash tree also exhibits an immense skill of permeating into the human mind, nurturing it and, comes into being, in Hopkins' words, a "milk to the mind", sighing poetry to it (Hopkins, 2008, p. 159). Considering the poet's religious identity as a Catholic, Jesuit priest, it is quite noteworthy that the human persona is not seated at a secluded and superior position to nature; on the contrary, humans are envisioned amidst and reliant on this extremely vital universe, absolutely unprivileged, physically and emotionally interrelated to the physical universe. Human reason and imaginative capacity, in that sense, are not presented as exceptional human characteristics, but they are confirmed to be constituted and nurtured by nature, especially by plants. In view of that, Hopkins' poem overturns the anthropocentric tradition of writing in which the human mind produces a nonhuman nature through linguistic constructions and metaphoric representations. The human imagination appears, in the poem, as an artifact of plants who are embodied with stories to be told both in the material and literary platforms. Oppermann states that the universe is full of "biological, and cosmic stories that compel us to envision the physical world as storied matter, teeming with countless narrative agencies that infiltrate every imaginable space and make the world intelligible" (2013, p. 57). Similarly, Hopkins' imagination is shaped by ash-boughs who are craving for making new liaisons and transactions. The branches of the ash tree "touch heaven, tabour on it", and "hover on it; here, there, hurled, / With talons sweep" (Hopkins, 2008, p. 160). The interplay between the physical universe and human poetic imagination triggers the breeding of a "plant script" which enables its readers to look into the world with a botanical perception, allowing them to recognize how plants can inscribe themselves on the material world through their roots, seeds, branches and leaves, and the textual world by penetrating into the human mind (Ryan, 2017, p. 131). Therefore, Hopkins' poem certifies itself as a phytographic poem that entails "the interface between the inscriptions of plants in the world and the residues of botanical lives in literary productions" (2017, p. 131). Rather than using plants as motionless instruments of human literary activity, Hopkins' phytographic poem focuses on revealing the agentic faculty of plants in shaping and composing the human imagination.

The poem endorses human-plant entanglement not just merely in the physical and literary spheres but it embodies recurrent references to the spiritual magnitude of plant beings, imagined by the poet on an ethereal plane. The nurturing power of plants, in this regard, is derived from God who bestows sacredness on every human and non-human being indiscriminately. A precise emphasis is laid on the ash-boughs, which in the winter season dwell in the form of "new-nestle at heaven most high" waiting to proliferate in spring (Hopkins, 2008, p. 159). Enciphering the movements of ash-trees in a religious discourse, Hopkins' poem suggests that ash trees are more than simple biological organisms, acting mechanically and randomly and nurturing humans physically, but they are consecrated with a divine power, operating intentionally to build a spiritual magnetism between humans, the physical universe and God. The poem ends with an allusion to this magnetic power of plants that attracts humans and nonhumans to each other and ensures a constantly evolving and thriving universe where: "Of greenery and old earth gropes for, grasps at speed / Heaven with whom she child things by" (Hopkins, 2008, p. 160). What is quite interesting in this quotation is that Hopkins' botanical evaluation of the natural world is displayed to be surpassing his religious convictions in such a way that God is not presented as the sole source of life but, "old earth" also appears to be nurturing every human and nonhuman beings, described in the poem as "things" in it, orchestrating linkages between humans, plants and God (Hopkins, 2008, p. 160). It should not be gone unnoticed that the poem's first version uses the expression of "she child us by" (Hopkins, 2008, p. 159), while "us" is replaced by "things" in the second version of the poem (2008, p. 160). Significantly enough, this cannot be seen as an inadvertent choice of words, but the poet deliberately uses an all-encompassing term of "things" which includes human and nonhuman species, rather than using an exclusive word of "us" which will include merely human species, separated from its opponent, "them". Hence, sacredness and spirituality are not ascribed definitively to humans, but all "things" in nature are opined to be soulful and intentional actors. Hopkins' faculty of seeing a soul in plants is reminiscent of Elaine Miller's notion of "vegetative soul" which refers to the extremely advanced sensitivity and responsiveness of plants to their environment and "radically opposed to the figure of organisms as autonomous and oppositional; its [plant's] stance toward the world is characterized by the promise of life and growth" (2002, p. 5). The sanctity of vegetal existence, in Hopkins' poem, is an averment of the material disclosure of a celestial energy inflating the plant impetus to blossom and form connections with diverse species. Expressed differently, the everlasting desire for entwinement with other species and the power of reproduction in plants are consecrated traits uplifting them into the sublime and mirroring God's dexterity.

In conjunction with “Asboughs” which portrays plants as willful actors of nature, “Spring” is another exceptional poem dealing with the re-awakening of nature at an accelerated pace in the Spring season. The poem depicts Hopkins’ intrinsic alertness to the biological variation and nature’s self-sufficing system of revitalization, doggedly evolving co-production, and meaningful interaction between multifarious species:

Nothing is so beautiful as Spring
 When weeds, in wheels, shoot long and lovely and lush;
 Thrush’s eggs look little low heavens, and thrush
 Through the echoing timber does so rinse and wring
 The ear, it strikes like lightnings to hear him sing;
 The glassy peartree leaves and blooms, they brush
 The descending blue; that blue is all in a rush
 With richness; the racing lambs too have fair their fling.
 (Hopkins, 2008, p. 115)

Instead of considering plants as lesser life forms underneath animals and humans, the poem presents a dis-anthropocentric and equitable view of the world where plants, animals, and humans are uniformly invested with agency, intelligence, and spiritual value. The metaphoric expression of weeds in “wheels” impeccably conveys the vegetal agency which is most obviously discerned in the long shooting of leaves and branches, spotlighting an intentional motion in plant behavior that stems from an ultimate motive to move forward and exert itself in its own distinguishing way (Hopkins, 2008, p. 115). In his coherent assessment that reason is not a distinctive human attribute, Emanuele Coccia reconfigures reason as “the cosmic faculty of the variation of forms” (2017, p. 108). Reason, as Coccia claims, is a “*cosmic* and *natural* faculty (which exists in the physical world, not in the human body, and coincides with the natural course of things) of the fashioning of matter” (2017, p. 108, emphasis in the original). The seed, rhizome, branches, and leaves in this respect are explicit revelations of an intellect in plants, allowing them to think reasonably and reproduce themselves in the material world. Likewise, Hopkins’ poem envisions weeds as reasonable life forms that can calculate the exact time period to blossom, towards which path to advance forward, give meaning and a purpose to their life, and thus, write their own stories in the physical universe.

Apart from their faculty of reasoning, plants are monitored by the poet to be in a fervent engagement of an inter-species communication with humans, animals, the

earth, the air and other entities. While a thrush lays its eggs on the branches of a tree, the tree does not remain unresponsive to the bird and its songs. The "echoing timber" harbors the image of a communicative tree that can indulge in meaningful conversation with its environment (Hopkins, 2008, p. 115). Norman Wirzba asserts that plant life is a "dialogical life" and although this dialogue is not "conducted in words, it is certainly carried on in the transmission of chemicals that number in the thousands" (2021, p. 84). From this standpoint, the echoing tree in Hopkins' poem is consistent with the dialogical life of plants and their unique skills of building relationships with their environments by sending chemical signals around them and finding alternative ways of communication by using other-than-human language. In almost every line of the poem it is emphasized that every natural entity has a corporeal existence in the material world, which comes into being through a process of complex and progressive interactivity between its individual parts. Humans are not necessarily extricated from this ongoing material entanglement between natural entities. As the poem affirms, nature's articulacy "rinse[s]" and "strikes" the human ear like "lightenings", charged with electricity, fuelling the human mind and body with sparks of energy and vitality (Hopkins, 2008, p. 115). As a substitute to a human-dominated universe where all agency is allocated to the human subject and every nonhuman being is diminished into static objects, Hopkins' poem depicts its human persona as completely immersed in the material universe where plants and animals vibrantly permeate into the human body. The human body, as a part of the material universe, finds itself in the middle of a reciprocal interactivity with plants and animals, what is called by Coccia as "immersion", that is defined as "an *action* of mutual compenetration between subject and environment, body and space, life and medium" (2017, p. 37, emphasis in the original). Plants, as Coccia argues, present an outstanding case in point, precipitating "a global modification of the cosmic environment, in other words of the world that they penetrate and by which they are penetrated" (2017, p. 38). In the same vein, in Hopkins' poem, humans, plants, and animals are not inactively juxtaposed in nature but they interpenetrate into each other so much so that each one, in the end, allows itself to be designed and shaped by the other.

Hopkins' biological perception of plants and the critical role of plants in the preservation of wilderness are more palpably visible in "Inversnaid", which reflects the poet's adulation of England's wildland areas, abstained from human infringement. Departing from the romantic appreciation of nature for its beauty, the poem epitomizes an avouchment of scientific and ecological understanding of nature, according to which

even the outwardly most negligible element in nature is, in fact, inherently valuable and irreplaceable peremptory for the universe. Upon his winter visits to the Scottish Highlands, the poet is enthralled by the uncontaminated landscape, waterfall and a small river with ash trees around it. A vitally alive and undisrupted view of a wild nature away from the conventional urban Victorian environment is recorded by the poet with these words: "Wiry heathpacks, flitches of fern, / And the beadbonny ash that sits over the burn" (Hopkins, 2008, p. 138). The poem pays a specific attention to the wild plants such as heath plants and flitches along with ash trees, growing at the bank of the brook, and thus, unravels Hopkins' botanical attentiveness to the imperative function of wild plants within the ecosystem that should not be perceived as trifle in comparison to the greater universe. Weeds' lively entanglement with their physical environment becomes for Hopkins a principal source of interest, spurring him to ponder upon the "vegetal existentiality" that invokes plants' physical "modes of being-in-the-world" without diminishing them into abstract conceptualizations, bereaved of their agency and vitality (Marder, 2013, p. 11). From a critical perspective of plant studies, which, most basically, "challenges the privileged place of the human in relation to plant life" (Stark, p. 180), it can be argued that Hopkins' poem re-configures humans' system of moral consideration to encapsulate plant life, not to exclude it. Weeds and trees, in that respect, are not uprooted from their physical spatiality in order to be turned into imaginary objects of poetry; on the contrary, they are shown uttermost respect and an ethical concern for being in the world physically and spatially, rather than metaphorically. Hopkins' attentiveness to vegetal existentiality is unearthed more bluntly in the following lines:

What would the world be, once bereft
Of Wet and Wildness? Let them be left,
O let them be left, wildness and wet;
Long live the weed and the wilderness yet. (Hopkins, 2008, p. 138)

Hopkins, in this quotation, directs an implicit criticism at the high-speeded industrialization process which continues uninterruptedly during the Victorian period, considering each element of nature as a capitalist commodity material to be exploited. Hopkins expresses his anxiety about the devastating consequences of Britain's industrial development, which, he fears, will not leave any area of "Wet and Wilderness" which, by all means, include wild plants (Hopkins, 2008, p. 138). Hopkins' thinking with plants allows him to understand the exigency of preserving the multifariousness of plant species to

prevent the loss of biodiversity, which is responsible for the disruption of the ecosystem. The conflation of "the weed and the wilderness" entails a distinctive plant awareness which enables the poet to see weeds not as the lowest forms of life and unwanted plants growing everywhere invasively and in need of being removed (Hopkins, 2008, p. 138). Conversely, Hopkins perceives weeds as the most crucial units of the ecosystemic balance, the termination of which would bring the collapse of the whole ecosystem. Considering the industrial infrastructure of Victorian Britain, which is built upon the exploitation of natural resources, Hopkins' call for the protection of wilderness and wild plants appears as a rightful remonstrance for the expeditious loss of biodiversity and the ubiquitous human motive to control and dominate the wilderness to open sufficient space for infringing industrial activities. This anthropocentric motive manifests itself as the greatest impediment to the likelihood of a less corrosive, non-dualistic, and non-hegemonic human-plant relationship. Randy Laist writes that "mastering a certain portion of plant kingdom" to a great extent by industrialization, "allowed human beings to urbanize, and ironically, to stop having to think about plants all the time" (2013, p. 10). In accordance with Laist's holding industrialization accountable for humans' plant negligence, Hopkins stresses the pivotal role of wetness, wilderness, and weeds for the preservation of nature's intricate system of biodiversity, which is under an outrageous menace posed by the 19th century industrial activities, causing human-plant estrangement. Elizabeth Hope Chang provides a lucid insight into the unscrupulous human-plant relationship in Victorian Britain, which widely depends on exercising intimidating control over the plant kingdom, irrespective of natural plant growth and points out that:

[C]ultivation of plants, like other kinds of human interventions in the nineteenth century, was a sign and symptom of modernity. The changes that nineteenth-century up-to-date cultivation imposed—bringing together plants from around the globe on railways and steamships; popularizing their forms and variations in new kinds of print media; and making plants change color, size, shape and lifespan at human command—were proof of technical skill. (2019, p. 2)

The roots of the abusive and unethical human-plant relationship, as Chang compellingly argues, hinge heavily on the Victorian mindset, which untenably aligns the domestication and cultivation of plants with modernity and technological improvement. This anthropocentric ideology, which reduces plants into lifeless objects at the service of

humankind, bestows upon the human subject every authorial right to manipulate plant life by changing, altering, and commercializing plants for economic gains. In a similar manner, Hopkins' poem alludes to humans' industrial and economic colonization of plant kingdom, precipitating the loss of plant species at the highest plane of the Victorian Anthropocenic age.

In the course of the capitalist-industrial development of the Victorian age, despoiling the possibility of a non-domineering human-plant intersection, Hopkins writes another poem, "Binsey Poplars" which focuses on the problem of deforestation, showing an aggressive escalation on behalf of outstretching urban territories for humans' industrial activities. The poem is inspired by a real event of the cutting of aspen trees at Godstow on March 12, 1879, which Hopkins mentions in a letter to his friend, Richard Watson Dixon: "I have been up to Godstow this afternoon. I am sorry to say that the aspens that lined the river are everyone felled" (1990, p. 123). The poem tackles specifically the issue of environmental disaster caused by the human conduct of plants as financial materials and insentient mechanical objects. Grief-stricken over the cutting down of all the trees along the riverside, the poet counterposes the dualistic mindset of Victorian society, which sets apart humans and nonhuman beings as two opposite forces, as well as its ethical norms arranging a valid ground for annihilating trees in the best interests of humans. The following quotation gives a clear voice to Hopkins' vexation at the total extermination of aspen trees:

My aspens dear, whose airy cages quelled,
 Quelled or quenched in leaves the leaping sun,
 An felled, felled, are an felled;
 Of a fresh and following folded rank
 Not spared, not one
 That dandled a sandalled
 Shadow that swam or sank
 On meadow and river and wind-wandering weed-winding bank.
 (Hopkins, 2008, p. 127)

Hopkins' poignant receptiveness to the fallen trees is reflected vividly in the first line where he calls aspens as his "dear", an expression which not only carries an undertone of ethical concern and a respect for the natural life span of the aspens but also signifies a feeling of intimacy and a sense of emotional connectedness to the trees (Hopkins, 2008,

p. 127). Hopkins' botanical perception enables him to see the astounding biological complexity and agency of plants, which are more apparently observed in the second line of the poem. The leaves of trees are depicted as "airy cages" preventing the "leaping sun" from reaching into the earth straightly (Hopkins, 2008, p. 127). This is a substantial climatic role of trees and forests in filtering the direct fallout of the sunlight, and thus, balancing the heat by cooling the weather. Furthermore, another unique talent of plants, that is, photosynthesis, is described as the sun rays being "quenched in leaves" (Hopkins, 2008, p. 127), a vitally significant natural phenomenon accomplished exclusively by plants without which a single act of breathing for human and nonhuman beings on earth would not be possible. Monica Gagliano delineates this event as a "purposeful solar-tracking behavior" and writes that plants are "renowned for feasting on the radiant energy of the sun to photosynthesize, the process by which they convert light into food to nourish themselves and sustain life on Earth" (2016, p. 20). Gagliano's placing a stress on the purposefulness of plants in their performance of photosynthesis is, in effect, an underscoring of their intentional agency as well as their acute awareness of their environment. Michael Pollan considers it as a "genius" of plants that humans "really fail to appreciate" (2002, p. 5). Photosynthesis is explained as "an astonishing trick, to be able to take sunlight and water – very common elements – and create sugars, food, energy" (Pollan, 2002, p. 6). Analogously, Hopkins, in his poem, accentuates this awe-inspiring agentic faculty of plants in immersing sunlight and modifying it into energy and oxygen. Nevertheless, far from approbating the autotrophic capability of plants, humans are enticed to dismantle this profoundly operating system by destroying trees for economic and industrial expansion. Humans' capitalist exploitation of plants is insinuated in the poem as a catastrophic upshot of a human-centric ideological mechanism that arranges for humans an ethically valid ground for the total extermination of trees for gaining economic profit. Underpinning the biologically imperative role of plants in the ecosystem, Hopkins attempts to rectify human ignorance of plants, in other words, humans' "plant blindness", a scientific denomination coined by Wandersee and Schussler as a specific human indisposition to realize plants as indispensable biological agents of the ecosystem, "the inability to recognize the importance of plants in the biosphere and in human affairs" (1999, p. 82). In that respect, Hopkins' poem is contingent upon preventing humans' plant blindness in order that they may relinquish looking at plants as pecuniary objects out of which can be made economic profit. Calling fallen aspens as "dear, beloved kindreds" can be seen as Hopkins' unfeigned attempt to show the prospect of constructing alternative forms of human-plant relationship that should be predicated upon love, respect, and emotional identification rather than upon utilitarian principles, stressing the instrumental and

economic value of plants. Additionally, drawing attention to photosynthesis by describing how the sunlight is soaked by the leaves, Hopkins, in fact, unshackles plants from the imprisonment of metaphoric representations and employs a scientific view of plants by maintaining that the material universe, more particularly plants, are more complicated and stupendous than humans' imaginary, symbolic conceptualizations projected upon plants. The structural design of the poem, composed in the shape of a tree with its long and short lines, also reinforces plants' ascendancy over Hopkins' poem with their physical existentiality rather than with symbolic implications. Therefore, it can easily be seen that aspen trees physically inscribe themselves in the poetry of Hopkins. In Vieira's words, "plants' signature is their inscription in the world through their bodily manifestations" (2017, p. 218). Resting on Vieira's argument, not only in the physical universe but also in the textual sphere, plants are capable of leaving their signatures as it is observed in "Binsey Poplars". In his discontentment with destructive human behavior towards plants, Hopkins intends to rehabilitate humans' plant blindness by showing, through scientific evidence, that plant life matters in itself and cannot be forsaken for anthropocentric human egomania, which is a lethal weapon used for destroying everything that is not human. As the poem asserts, "[s]trokes of havoc unselfe / The sweet especial scene" (2008, p. 128). Attributing identity and personality to plants, Hopkins reinforces that plants are not just passive consumption materials vouchsafed unto human service but they are completely alive, vibrant living beings, possessing a unique identity different from humans, and thus, deserve respect and vigilance.

Conclusion

Gerard Manley Hopkins' distinctive plant awareness and the scientific essentiality of plants in human and nonhuman life on earth are laid bare through the lens of critical plant studies, which invites the botanical and biological perspectives of plants into the literary domain. Plants, most assuredly, do not occupy poetic representation as passive background materials, but they are discerned to be at the center of Hopkins' poems as attempted to be perused in this study. Plants in Hopkins' poetry are portrayed with their agentic credentials with an ability to dissolve ontological barriers between human and nonhuman beings on the basis of their intelligibility and intentionality. Hopkins' plant poetry shows a remarkable devotedness to re-designing an entirely new non-human-oriented relationship with plants, which requires an overall change of human perception of plants from being inert objects towards living individuals. Delineating human life as deeply rooted in the plant kingdom, Hopkins' plant poetics encourages

thinking with plants and molding of a more intimate human-plant entanglement that will be less aggressive and less destructive. From this vantage point, Hopkins' poems move beyond poems on plants towards poems by plants, more precisely, phytographic poems in which plants exert their agency and vitality and thus leave their physical traces on the textual spheres.

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Travelling and Cycling: Borders and Borderscapes in Thomas Stevens's *Around the World on a Bicycle*

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ABSTRACT

This study focuses on the representation of borders and the role of the borderscape in the travelogue *Around the World on a Bicycle* (1887) written by Thomas Stevens. As the text is examined as a narrative of bordering and debordering practices in the context of recent theoretical approaches to border lines and borderscapes, such practices invite a comprehensive analysis as regards their function and role in the life and identity of the traveller. Travel writing is mostly embedded with tendencies and burdens to meet requirements emanating from colonial and oriental discourses, whereas Stevens adopts a challenging outlook on his journey with the precise mission of moving forward, and inevitably crosses borders to circumnavigate the world. Instead of visiting a particular landscape, country, or people, he transcends great distances to accomplish this mission, which dissociates him from many travellers in the travelling world. His settings enable readers to observe the interaction between others on each side of a border. Through repetitive encounters between Thomas Stevens and the borders on his path, social, cultural, ethnographic, and individual dimensions of these incidents initially create and, then, call for the discussion of borderscapes as they expose various forms of identity resulting from the dichotomy between such notions as home and away. Therefore, this study illustrates the diversity of interactions and identities formed by means of border crossings and borderscapes in the context of Stevens's travelogue about his journey on a bicycle around the world.

Keywords: Border, bordering, borderscapes, travel, Thomas Stevens



Introduction

The traveller has always been imagined as a person on the move and the traveller's identity imagined as an example of an ever-changing entity. Since the traveller finds himself in a constantly changing environment due to his movements, the other that encounters him in trips exists continuously in opposition to the markers of his identity. Many differences of social, cultural, religious, geopolitical, linguistic, and ethnic sources can be accounted for the representation of the other on the unknown side of the border line that separates the traveller and the other from each other. In the case of border analysis, the other is an outcome of meeting unknown people in unknown landscapes. In a phenomenological sense, the lack of prior knowledge about the other refers to the experience of being different from the social reality of a person, which constitutes the core of the traveller's interpretation and definition of the other in comparison to himself. Travel writing has been traditionally unable to escape the difficulties of having to represent the other in juxtaposition to the traveller, encountered as the narrator. In travel accounts, the narrative of the traveller inevitably deals with borders of all sorts, beginning with actual borders most obviously separating states and nations, and involving many aspects of difference resulting from cultural variations. This study aims to discuss Thomas Stevens's narrative, the longest journey on a bicycle in human history, focusing on borders and borderscapes in relation to transnational and intercontinental movements to conclude that he creates an individualistic and peculiar interpretation of borderscapes challenging the primary definition of the border and its imminent theoretical impact of reciprocity as well as hostility.

In that regard, this cycling narrative, an example of nonfiction, is approached from the perspective of borders as symbols of social, cultural, religious, and essentially discursive differences in addition to geographical and topographical alterations. While the border turns into a zone of mutual interaction based on similarities and differences in relation to the representation of identity, several new identifications seem to appear in line with the narrator's point of view towards these concepts. Hence, dominant discourses on borders, cultural affairs and representation of the other are vigorously altered to maintain the focus of the journey, which is indeed as simple as riding a bicycle around the world. Since this travelogue is not mainly interested in borders, let alone travel writing, the narrative offers wonderfully knitted opportunities to see how an Englishman can possibly track the changes resulting from crossing borders one after the other in a very long sequence. The scope of the textual analysis is limited to the first volume of Stevens's narrative, starting with his journey in San Francisco until

his arrival in modern-day Türkiye. This scope enables a restricted examination of borders and borderscapes in a purely Western background.

This analysis rests on the discovery of borderscapes since they emerge as means of individual interaction beyond the scope of the border lines that separate people from each other. The text particularly reflects the author's/traveller's/cyclist's attitude in the changing role of borders. Stevens's travel writing has remained almost obscure outside the cycling community until the discovery of its existence by the author of this study when it was translated into Turkish. As Stevens rides his bicycle for thousands of miles and visits many countries on the way, he interacts with many border lines both within the US and along national states in Europe, creating a Western frame of reference. Due to his main purpose of cycling around the world, which is indeed the prominent matter on his mind all along, it is possible to track changes in his identity because of his social and cultural environment. Stevens's borderscapes transcend the traditional understanding of borders, associating them with the fundamental discursive artefacts of becoming and belonging for the traveller moving around.

The Framework Posed by Borderscapes

In the light of contemporary border studies, the border is no longer a single line that detaches a state or a landscape from another. Its conceptualization has moved beyond its association with geopolitical terminology. It is not a fundamental symbol of distinguishing "us from them, civilization from barbarity, and knowledge from non-knowledge" (Nyman, 2024, p. 95). These contrasting images usually call for othering process that is embedded in the meaning-making process with a huge historical context. The representation of social and cultural background is highly influential in such notions because the identity of the other turns into the subject matter in such cases. While the traditional understanding of the border approaches it as a barrier and a form of difference, contemporary theory, as explained below, sees it as a means of surpassing limits and crossing over distinctions. Due to the process of deconstructing the border, its rigidity decreases, and it adopts a flexible character. As Brambilla argues, "research interests increasingly shifted from an initial focus on border as territorial dividing lines and political institutions to border regarded as social-cultural and discursive processes and practices" (2015, p. 15). The outcome of this recent shift is the treatment of borders as an interdisciplinary concept that invites the contribution of many fields beginning with literary studies. Brambilla delineates the theoretical scope as follows:

This new interdisciplinary interest in borders is a result of the major changes in world politics in the last twenty years. Among these, the most notable is the collapse of the Soviet Union and the dissolution of the order imposed by the Cold War, [...] the process of change due to globalisation, [...] greater integration and global consciousness and [...] a renewed demand for certainty, identity and security followed by the spread of protectionist policies on the economic level and feelings of anti-immigration. (2015, p. 15)

Due to the limitations posed by their adjusted and stabilized imagination in the past, the borders can nowadays be analysed in line with a contemporary approach to mark their significance in the representation of identity marking.

The emphasis placed on borders as symbols of a differentiating past and the disintegration of social and cultural variations requires the embodiment of a new term for their critical analysis. In that regard, the term "borderscape" stands for the representation of national, continental, social, cultural, and geographical borders in Stevens's travelogue, which involves a global and transnational discourse quite earlier than the exact use of these terms. Thus, the introduction of borderscapes is useful at this point. As Brambilla states, "the concept of borderscape offers us to highlight the constitutive role that borders in modernity have played in the production of political subjectivity, thereby showing the potential of the borderscape as a space for liberating political imagination from the burden of territorialist imperative" (2015, p. 18). This act of liberation offers great opportunities for the interpretation of borders from new perspectives. Bordering and debordering as acts of practice, performance and performativity constantly change the thinking of border's role and duty: "The transition from the concept of border to that of bordering, at the centre of the processual shift in border studies, allowed borders to be viewed as dynamic social processes and practices of spatial differentiation" (Brambilla, 2015, p. 15). Such dynamism and spatiality enable the treatment of borders in constant transition from one form to another and a new interpretation appears on their function as well as location once they are displaced from their imminent role.

Furthermore, the appeal of the term borderscape can be explained as follows: "The concept of borderscape seems to owe its appeal to its vagueness" (Krichker, 2021, p. 1224). In addition to the border being a controversial term regarding its connotations,

the borderscape contributes to the open-ended discussion through the involvement of physical and cultural elements as precursors of interaction. In their comprehensive argument on bordering and borderscapes, Dell'Agnese and Szary comment on difficulties as well as prospects presented by this term:

Nowadays, speaking about borderscapes is almost a fashion, even if there is no unequivocal definition of the term. Quite the contrary, the word, a portmanteau that combines aspects of landscape and border, brings with it all the unresolved ambiguities of the two separate notions and multiplies them. (2015, p. 5)

The borderscape can be outlined as a combination of physical, geopolitical and sociocultural elements. According to Dell'Agnese and Szary, the borderscape can be delineated in three main definitions as either "an area, shaped and reshaped by transnational flows, that goes beyond the modernist idea of clear-cut national territories" or "simply as a crasis [a blend or contraction] of the words 'border' and 'landscape' [...] on the role of boundaries transforming the territorial configuration of adjacent lands" (2015, p. 6). Clearly, boundaries set by national order to regulate and control affairs between states come forward as the meaning of the term in the first place. In that regard, borderscapes are determined by states and the geographical areas around them are also involved in their perception. Differences that can be tracked down by material conditions as signs of political authority belong to this definition.

Similarly, the borderscape appears as a piece of land that is shaped by geopolitical boundaries separating international lines of sovereignty. Landscapes, regions and divisive lines of border can be considered as constitutive parts of this complicated notion. The third definition, however, clarifies the relevance of the term even better for a critical approach: "A borderscape is just a way of representing/perceiving the area around the border" (Dell'Agnese and Szary, 2015, p. 7). Representations, descriptions and aesthetics of borders dealing with bordering processes form a unity at the core of this discussion to account for the distinction stemming from the perception of the landscape as a geographical and cultural entity rendering it objective beyond interference as opposed to individual interpretation defining it anew in a subjective perspective in every encounter. As a result of the traveller's attitude that can be considered within the context of a meaning-making system, "meanings are made and remade by the perceiver-observer" who is the rider or cyclist in this case (Dell'Agnese and Szary, 2015,

p. 7). Beyond the visual dimensions of the border and landscape, the borderscape enables a highly interactive relationship in the trio between the border, the landscape and the one who crosses. Hence, a three-dimensional critique of border lines as forms of mutual action along crossings will be useful to express the outcome of this interaction. Constant movements depicted in the travelogue accompany recurrent changes in borders that can be treated as forms of cultural production due to the productivity triggered by mutual interest. Despite being symbols of uncertainty and the uncanny in a sense, borders and borderscapes can thus be treated as areas of sharing, participation and the coming into existence of new identities. At every instance of border crossing, the traveller exposes himself to a routine transformation deeply affecting himself and his consciousness.

Thomas Stevens's Travelogue and Borderscapes

This analysis of Stevens's reflection of borders should start with a theoretical framework. First, a border can be defined as "boundary," "edge," "fringe" or more relatively "a line separating two countries or other areas" in the Oxford English Dictionary. As one like Stevens traverses over a long distance such as the globe, one passes through many border lines in their physical form, which is only a minor part of the distinction made by the concept. In the last three decades, contemporary border studies have revealed that borders are not simply physical entities. In addition to their physical form, borders are accompanied by political, social and cultural dynamics. According to Kolossov and Scott,

the study of borders in society has progressed remarkably since its geographically bounded beginnings in the nineteenth century. Border studies today reflect continuity and change in scientific thought and are also a result of innumerable contributions to the conceptualization of social space and its workings. (2013, p. 1)

The shift regarding the definition of border studies shows us that there is much more to the borders than their physical form. Thus, borders have turned into an arena to observe the clash between local and global since studies about them have "removed from a dominant concern with formal state frontiers and ethno-cultural areas to the study of borders at diverse socio-spatial and geographical scales, ranging from the local and the municipal, to the global, regional and supra-state level" (Kolossov and Scott, 2013, p. 1). Similarly, Hedetoft believes that "a major facet of border studies

considers borders not as impenetrable barriers designed to keep things in or out, but rather permeable membranes" (2003, p. 153). The constant process of inward and outward movement of people and goods across borders has turned them into a matter to be discussed "in the study of identity, mobility and subjectivity" (Cooper and Perkins, 2012, p. 56). In particular, identity and subjectivity require a deeper analysis into cultural issues that include subjects such as nationality, ethnicity, religion and gender in addition to geographical features. Different from traditional border studies on state territories and spaces of distinction, a much more comprehensive attitude covering political, social and cultural matters is necessary and applicable to put forward a thorough analysis of borders and borderscapes.

The meaning of borderscapes can be discovered in their impact on human beings who are separated from each other in short distances indicated by territorial divisions. The relationship between the lines of borders on a map and people living on either side is highly complicated due to the changing lifestyles, traditions and habits determined by these borders; indeed, a conflict of cultural affairs must be addressed at this point. Accordingly, as Zartman states, "borders run across land but through people. On maps, they appear as fine one-dimensional lines, whereas on the ground they have many dimensions. Borderlands are boundaries in depth, space around a line, the space where state meets society" (2010, p. 1). In this respect, human communities living along the borderlines and the territory adjacent to the border itself render a specific identity in addition to major communal traits that we observe in a larger community. As regards the problem of belonging and becoming in relation to the static and flexible traits of being, Simon argues that borders are the places "where no one ever feels at home" (1997, p. 12). Obviously, the continually changing lines of borders play a definite role in such feelings since they are all fabricated and prone to changes at any time. As for the social conditions around borders, Zartman further claims:

Borders [are] areas where the sharpness of ethnic and other cultural limits and differentiations clashed with the groups' need to interact with other groups on the other side of the dividing lines. Walls and moats tend to dissolve into hills and marshes, with their own syncretic characteristics. (2010, p. 4)

Different cultures and ways of life either come together or are divided into sections because of the borders. The ultimate inquiry needs to ask about the conditions of such

people who feel the effect of power relationships out of their control. Hence, questions on identity, socio-political and economic matters, power-knowledge, international relations and cultural affairs arise when we attempt to move across borders. This point shows that borders are more than simply lines drawn on a map and have their sense of reality in everyday life to determine cultural values and social norms.

Accordingly, representation of borders and borderscapes reveals contradictory forms of separation and unity based on meanings observed across and around them, indicated by Stevens's travelogues written in a three-year journey around the world. The interaction with borders starts within American territory as he rides his penny-farthing¹, from San Francisco to Boston. In these early chapters of adventures, borders have a meaning no more than changing landscape and names of settlement along the road. As he moves across the Sierra Nevada, the changing borders impress him as follows:

Nothing but the limited power of men's eyes prevents him from standing on the top of the mountains and surveying, at a glance, the whole glorious panorama that stretches away for more than two hundred miles to the west, terminating in the gleaming waters of the Pacific Ocean. (Stevens, 1887, p. 1)

The scenic beauty of the famous mountain range in western America separates the Valley of California and the Great Basin. This border set by nature and geographical elements symbolizes farewell to home and the beginning of a journey around the world. The contradictory mixture of excitement and melancholy stemming from the emotional tone of leaving one's home behind creates a personal border for the narrator.

Later, passing through San Pablo, Elmira, Davisville, and Omaha, the cyclist arrives at Sacramento, "the beautiful capital of the Golden State" (Stevens, 1887, p. 4). For him, the American River in Sacramento is another natural border. He says, "[a]fter crossing the American River the character of the country changes and I enjoy a ten-mile ride over a fair road, through one of those splendid sheep-ranches that are only found in California and which have long challenged the admiration of the world" (Stevens, 1887,

1 An early prototype for the modern bicycle, the penny-farthing, also called a high wheel and famous in the 1870s and 1880s during Stevens's journey, has an exceptionally large front wheel and a rather small rear wheel designed with solid rubber tyres. In addition to being extremely difficult to mount on due to its enormous height, it was quite uncomfortable to ride on, as various complaints and descriptions in the text indicate.

p. 4). He is impressed by ranches that extend over dozens of acres in the region and comments that “I remember the pleasant ten-mile ride through this park-like pasture as one of the brightest spots of the whole journey across America” (Stevens, 1887, p. 4). Since such natural borders do not imply any cultural changes, they simply symbolise unity and harmony in nature. The river and the mountain range form a natural borderline for the cyclist:

Standing on this ledge, the rocks tower skyward on one side of the track so close as almost to touch the standing train; and on the other is a sheer precipice of two thousand five hundred feet, where one stands on the edge and see, far below, the north fork of the American River, which looks like a thread of silver laid along the narrow valley. (Stevens, 1887, p. 17)

Geographical borders draw attention in the area closer to the starting point of the journey. The landscape, thus, becomes a memorable image for the narrator since he perceives the line of territorial division from a personal point of view. Borders emerge in the role of interstate movement in America, which shows that borderscapes reach over to spaces within the boundaries of national imagination. Moreover, they symbolize a process of becoming apart from being for the traveller as he moves across them. Thus, natural, national, and personal meanings of borderscapes integrate into a greater meaning as these borderscapes transform into individual constructs. The movement of the cyclist paradoxically forms a unity between these markers of division.

Similarly, the traveller’s path over the deserts of Nevada plays a similar role in viewing geographical or natural borders. The first impression of the desert on the traveller appears as follows: “Gradually I leave the pine-clad slopes of the Sierras behind, and every revolution of my wheel reveals scenes that constantly remind me that I am in the great ‘Sage-brush State.’ How appropriate indeed is the name” (Stevens, 1887, p. 21). This representation of natural borders is aligned with a socio-cultural line of division from the traveller’s perspective since this episode contains an encounter with a native Indian with whom the cyclist tries to speak. After a few attempts to address the Indian, he comments on his short ignorant reply, “given with the characteristic brevity of the savage” (Stevens, 1887, p. 21). He sees that “now that the ice of his aboriginal reserve is broken, he manages to find words enough to ask me for tobacco” (Stevens, 1887, p. 21). Upon this brief conversation, he makes fun of this native Indian who is suffering from a sick foot as follows:

The ride through the crisp morning air has been productive of a surplus amount of animal spirits, and I feel like doing something funny. I volunteer to cure his sick foot by sundry dark and mysterious manoeuvres that I unblushingly intimate are heap good medicine. (Stevens, 1887, p. 21)

This socio-cultural encounter on state borders just at the beginning of the journey shows that cultural boundaries matter more than geographical borders when it comes to social interaction. The traveller's social values at home influence his relationship with the native Indian, which clearly creates a borderscape through his way of perceiving this mutual space around the border. The lines of socio-cultural separation seem to disappear, as he is involved in a unifying encounter. Furthermore, until this point, the traveller has adopted an affirmative tone in introducing his vehicle in many towns whenever he has met Americans, who saw a bike for the first time in many episodes:

There seems to be quite a sprinkling of Spanish or Mexican rancheros through here, and after partaking of the welcome noon-tide hospitality of one of the ranches, I find myself, before I realise it, illustrating the bicycle and its uses, to a group of sombrero-decked rancheros and dark-eyed señoritas, by riding the machine round and round on their own ranch-lawn. (Stevens, 1887, p. 5)

All through here the only riding to be done is along occasional short stretches of difficult path beside the track, where it happens to be a hard surface; and on the plank platforms of the stations, where I generally take a turn or two to satisfy the consuming curiosity of the miners, who can't imagine how anybody can ride a thing that won't stand alone. (Stevens, 1887, p. 8)

These encounters, among many other examples of the same attitude (Stevens, 1887, pp. 12–16), signify his attempts to overcome differences on personal grounds that can be extended to social and cultural aspects by means of his bicycle, which enables him to constitute a common ground with others. His reaction to a person that we can define as the other in terms of cultural borders marks the status function of borders and alters the perception of their restrictive and facilitative qualities. Hence, Stevens starts forming these borderscapes on American territory and landscape regardless of border splits.

The striking point in all this commentary lies in the fact that he refrains from adopting a judgmental attitude towards these people whose lives are across cultural borders, and from condemning them because of their lifestyle despite himself being a young Englishman raised within Western social norms. Now, in this episode, the traveller crosses cultural borders like his experience with the Mormons. Yet, his attitude is quite the same in both cases since he is only interested in the journey. Political borders of states, geographical/natural borders between landscapes as well as cultural borders between people cease to exist so far in his adventures. These acts of border crossing expose the existence of borderscapes exemplified in such social interactions. Regardless of their various sorts, borders transform into spaces of unity and coming together through the traveller's individual perception. Moreover, after visiting these regions inhabited by the Mormons and the Communist Germans of Iowa, his next stops are Boston and New York where Stevens sets sail across the Atlantic to go to Liverpool in the UK (Stevens, 1887, p. 70). On 4 August 1884, he "rolls into Boston and whispers to the wild waves of the sounding Atlantic what the sad waves of the Pacific were saying when he left there, just one hundred and three and a half days ago, having wheeled about 3700 miles to deliver the message" (Stevens, 1887, p. 90). The geographical borders of North America come together with the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans, while Stevens finds himself in a rather gloomy mood instead of a cheerful one. Although one supposes his spirits to be raised by his achievement, the memories of his journey until this point haunt his mind recklessly. The borders along the west and east coasts of north America in their greatness creating the feeling of sublime and geographical terms of separation are brought together in his imagination and narrative. Thus, borders and landscapes transcend the territorial configuration of adjacent lands due to their separation from each other in almost four thousand miles, which creates a notion of borderscape exceeding definitions and theoretical expectations.

The traveller's arrival in Britain, indeed his home, is highly astounding in terms of his reaction to crossing borders over the Atlantic. Contrary to traditional representation of borders as symbols of difference, he again creates a thoroughly personal conception. Since he is an Englishman living in the US, he could have complained about differences in ways of life and emphasized the separating impact of border lines. The social and cultural disparities that led to political and historical clashes between the US and the UK could have been sources of commentary on borders. He could have even reflected his uneasiness resulting from his bordering experience on both sides of the equation. Nonetheless, his depiction clearly illustrates that he does not feel any kind of boundary

between these two countries and societies, although there are geographical, historical, political, social and cultural borders between them. Right after getting on the steamer that takes him back to his homeland, he only dwells upon scenes such as an iceberg he observes in the ocean or the misty landscape in Liverpool. His following commentary proves that there is no border between the US and the UK from his point of view.

All the way from San Francisco to Newhaven, there is a consciousness of being practically in one country and among one people—people who, though acknowledging separate governments, are bound so firmly together by the ties of common instincts and interests, and the mystic brotherhood of a common language and a common civilisation, that nothing of a serious nature can ever come between them. (Stevens, 1887, p. 97)

We can defer from the excerpt that borders exist only in our minds. Although Stevens must pass through customs as a sign of division between the two states, he simply does not agree with their existence. The same traveller, who travels across American states and tells us stories of boundaries separating people from each other, claims that there is no border and separation between the US and the UK. Depending on the attitude of this traveller and in line with the theoretical framework, borders are obviously proven too difficult and complicated to define.

Evidently, borders can also be seen within dynamic processes and spatial separation in terms of their practice. As the above explanation illustrates, the concept of the border has evolved into “the notion of bordering practice” (Brambilla, 2015, p. 17). Following the imaginary border line, the notion is reduced to a performance as an alternative. Therefore, it can also be considered within the meaning-making system and conferred a temporal status instead of a fixed meaning. Regarding Stevens's status as a migrant on American soil, Rajaram and Grundy-Warr's comment must be reviewed:

The border is conceived as a tool of exclusion, one that can be strengthened and fostered to protect a community and a society against a phantasmic threat of otherness that tends to become flesh in the demonized and abject figure of a migrant or refugee. (2007, p. x)

Hence, it can be argued that borderscapes are created in the traveller's multidimensional mobility so that his perspective is offered in relation to the borders. From an individualistic

point of view, the traveller perceives these borders, which have no striking impact on him, and landscapes, repeatedly depicted in amazement, differently, and makes his meanings of them as an observer.

Afterwards, Stevens continues to cycle across borders on Continental Europe. Once he gets off the boat on the French coast, however, his attitude towards borderscapes is drastically transformed as follows: "Although upon a foreign shore, I am not yet, it seems, to be left entirely alone to the tender mercies of my own lamentable inability to speak French" (Stevens, 1887, p. 97). Since he is aware of the changing linguistics in France, the traveller realizes that this is a foreign landscape after crossing borders at the Channel. This is obviously challenging in terms of borders, due to difficulties in communication and social relationships. His perception of French territories shows signs of restraint and caution: "But now I am verily among strangers, and the first thing talked of is to make me pay duty on bicycle" (Stevens, 1887, p. 97). The journey across France starts with his protest of having to pay tariffs for his bicycle and resumes with the officer's change of mind not to charge him upon half-an-hour's idle walk at the customs house, which seems like a cultural shock for him: "It is a fairly prompt initiation into the impulsiveness of the French character" (Stevens, 1887, p. 97). For this reason, the traveller's attempt to start friendships and overcome linguistic burdens in addition to socio-cultural borders culminates in his meeting an English man, also a cyclist, who helps other cyclists continue their paths across Europe. The narrator explains the comfort of finding an acquaintance in crossing borders as follows: "Fortunately, there lives at Dieppe a gentleman named Mr. Parkinson, who, [...] is quite an enthusiastic wheelman, and, among other things, considers it his solemn duty to take charge of visiting cyclers from England and America" (Stevens, 1887, p. 97). In addition to all other descriptions of borders, we see a personal variation in the form of individual social relations. Personal borders determine one's intimacy with others and transcend those symbolized in socio-cultural values and the landscape. Therefore, the traveller begins to reflect calm and cheerful manners, ignoring his anxiety caused by being a stranger upon crossing borders in the company of an acquaintance whose existence is a source of relief. The rest of this journey across French territory is dominated by detailed descriptions on landscape and people's manners as well as daily tasks that are easily observable outdoors. The traveller strives for a truthful and accurate narrative about these strangers and their lifestyle against all odds. Since he is a cyclist, his primary concern is again about the quality of roads that determine whether he can ride his bicycle for long distances or must carry it along with him from a sensible perspective. As far as personal interest

matters, he is extremely comfortable in France and joyfully depicts the changing environment, both natural and socio-cultural.

As the journey expands across Europe, multiple meanings are attributed to socio-cultural, geographical, and especially linguistic differences. Usually, these references create implications on a personal level. In this respect, one event after Stevens leaves France is noteworthy in that he narrates his feelings of trouble and unrest about cultural differences between French and German manners, which can be interpreted in terms of borders. This event about the attitude of a German citizen is the cause of his complaint: "An insolent teamster who, having his horses strung across a narrow road – way in the suburbs of Saarburg, refuses to turn his leaders' heads to enable me to ride past, thus compelling me to dismount" (Stevens, 1887, p. 121). It is difficult to speculate on his motive to mention such an event, but we know that he does not speak French and German at all and has been overly cautious since leaving the American and English territories. Obviously, Stevens creates a personal border to stay away from the other based on linguistic and cultural differences out of caution. It must be noted that this attitude is rare in his entire journey and limited to special incidents involving single characters. The description of his dissidence from intrusive behaviour reveals a site of distinction for the cyclist since his conception of a personal border based on socio-cultural differences generates a borderscape that puts emphasis on his personal difference in terms of manners, gentility, and refinement resulting from these values.

Likewise, the traveller occasionally refers to differences resulting from items that he deems to be artefacts of civilization after he starts riding his bicycle in Europe. One such incident takes place in Saverne, close to the German border, where he is trying to purchase a tool for his bicycle. He comments as follows: "Taking my nickelled monkey-wrench into a hardware store, I ask the proprietor if he has anything similar. He examines it with lively interest, for, in comparison with the clumsy tools, the wrench is watch-spring to an old horseshoe" (Stevens, 1887, p. 122). The shift between border lines and landscapes is linked to a sense of realization when the cyclist interacts with German people across borders. The wrench he is trying to purchase is the marker of a borderscape between the traveller and the visited lands from the perspective of progress symbolized by industrial tools in this episode. Although he does not seem to act in a harshly judgmental manner, Stevens still compares the progressive notion of his homeland to the backward condition of this country. Although there is no physical border near him, the cyclist is aware of the borderscape that is embedded in his perception throughout Germany.

Right after Saarbürg, the traveller rides his bicycle into Germany through Alsace, which was French territory until very recently. What is striking in this transition is the military practices on both sides of the border lines between France and Germany. The national border is protected by the military on political grounds and the traveller happens to pass through this territory at such a moment. The soldiers on both sides of this border exemplify cultural differences as well. Stevens depicts the scene as follows:

These German troops appear to march briskly and in a business-like manner in comparison with the French, who always seem to carry themselves with a tired and dejected deportment; but the over-ample and rather slouchy looking pantaloons of the French are probably answerable, in part, for this impression. (Stevens, 1887, p. 121)

In this instance, the border is a symbol of political, military, national as well as cultural distinction. The traveller can quite easily claim that he has crossed over the border between France and Germany just by looking at soldiers practicing for combat. Political and national borders are supplemented by social and cultural borders, which results in an act of transnational bordering for the cyclist. As Okolie claims, “transnational border crossing inevitably underscores a form of epistemological border crossing; a crossing-over to new knowledge, to encounter the strange” (2024, p. 63). Meeting the strange, or even the uncanny, for the traveller is part of the epistemological journey that readers come across in his narrative. Stevens learns more about the other and rejoices that this learning process is enhanced by border crossings. As Okolie further asserts, “before transnational border crossing, the migrant lives in some level of ignorance of the other, having little or no knowledge of the operations within the space s/he is about to enter” (2024, p. 63). Indicated by these latest episodes in Germany, a process of awakening in addition to self-identity and self-awareness can be discovered from the perspective of a traveller who gradually begins to act like a migrant, taking on the responsibility of adapting himself to the way of life on the other side of the border. From this point onwards, Stevens experiences a process of learning, along with cycling. This observation of the border comprises a basis for social and cultural separation creating a divided landscape, which results in a conflict and repression to turn Stevens into the other, putting him on a different subject position.

Nevertheless, Stevens’s journey in Austria-Hungary comes forward with the resemblance in the mountainous areas like the Sierra Nevada and the Austrian mountains

(Stevens, 1887, p. 127). Once he finds himself along the Danube, he feels as if he were suddenly back home: "My route along the Danube Valley leads through broad, level, wheat fields that recall memories of the Sacramento Valley, California. Geese appear as the most plentiful objects around the villages: there are geese and goslings everywhere" (Stevens, 1887, p. 135). Similarly, the route between Budapest and Paks is compared to previous roads and natural elements:

From Budapest to Paks, about one hundred and twenty kilometres, the roads are superior to anything I expected to find east of Germany. [...] Instead of the poplars of France and the apples and pears of Germany, the roads are now fringed with mulberry trees, both raw and manufactures silk being the product of this party of Hungary. (1887, p. 137)

The natural border dominates the tone in the narrative in these parts of Europe since he cannot observe an immediate juxtaposition between people and their lifestyles disregarding social, cultural, and political borders. The forms and functions of borders are multiplied to create a personal interpretation for the traveller's perspective. Thus, borders' marginality is transformed into a central and immanent position. The traveller's innateness coming from the transcendence of the borders changes his status as migrant and other.

This journey across the borders of Slovenia and Serbia is distinguished in terms of his reaction to these encounters because, in both countries, the traveller is accompanied by members of the bicycle clubs who are indeed very keen on acting like tour guides for a cyclist who has been pedalling for a long time. Hence, at the Budapest Bicycle Club, Stevens meets Mr. Kosztovitz (Stevens, 1887, p. 135) who befriends him quickly and introduces people and the environment in the rest of the journey. Likewise, the traveller is taken to the Bicycle Club, named *La Societe Velocipedique Serbe* in French, in Serbia, and another friend, Igali, joins his campaign to support the mission as a cyclist (Stevens, 1887, p. 152). Until arriving at modern-day Türkiye, except for a brief passage through Bulgaria, Stevens maintains his journey in the company of these cyclists. Since he makes use of acquaintances along with these men in social and cultural spheres, he mostly focuses on personal endeavours to follow social relationships around him, including descriptions of the natural environment and behaviours as well as the clothing of native people peculiar to their local customs. Somewhere near Belgrade, the traveller comments on the changing environment, drawing attention to briefly the notion of the Orient:

Unmistakable evidence that one is approaching the Orient appears in the semi-Oriental costumes of the peasantry and roving gypsy bands, as we gradually near the Servian capital. An oriental costume in Eszek is sufficiently exceptional to be a novelty, and so it is until one gets south of Peterwardein, when the national costumes of Slovenia and Croatia are gradually merged into the tasselled fez, the many-folded waistband, and the loose flowing pantaloons of Eastern lands. (Stevens, 1887, p. 141)

Although he has been crossing some border lines until this point and continues this process into Turkish territory, physical borders as static territorial lines seem to have already vanished in the eyes of the traveller. In addition to the guidance provided by fellow cyclists, the traveller focuses on the socio-cultural dimension of the changing environment. This dynamic and adapted spatial relationship erodes the boundaries created by the physical existence of border divisions. Conceptual transformation in Stevens's approach highlights the importance of multiple layers of borders by means of his personal interpretation of them through borderscapes that reflect a combination of landscape, territories, and political and socio-cultural levels of bordering processes. Therefore, Stevens first dislocates and later relocates borders based on the unities they form through borderscapes.

Conclusion

In conclusion, encounters at borders construct borderscapes beyond the physical entity of these lines of separation. While the traveller involves himself in agreement and mutual consent in some bordering acts, he discovers diversion and multiplicity in others. The interpretation of the other tends to change in accordance with the bordering experience of the traveller. The introduction of the borderscape reveals that borders are and have been, for a very long time, subjects of discursive practices in their ambiguity and dependence on the perspective of interpretation rather than being solid and permanent symbols of division. This revelation leads to the acknowledgement of transnational and intercontinental identities of unity based on socio-cultural alliances and common backgrounds as well as territorial resemblances. Stevens's travelogue clearly illustrates that the border lines between San Francisco and Türkiye consist of many border crossings that can both separate and unite communities by means of geographical, political, socio-cultural, and territorial elements. While borders in this comprehensive travel account seem to indicate acts of crossing characterized by

differences, Stevens offers a great number of connections through cultural affairs, turning the concept of border to a bordering and then, debordering practice. In response to the recent questions and problems faced by border studies, an interdisciplinary approach to borders is useful in the light of their conveyance in the past.

Furthermore, physical and sensual transitions influence the traveller in the sense that he crosses borders through not only geopolitical lines of territory, but also spatial lines of unity around socio-cultural similarities and contact. The second aspect creates an epistemological awareness regarding the traveller's identity. Hence, the traveller's confrontation with social and cultural encoding practices rises to instances of deference and consent. The cycling traveller as a marginal subject of this process of mutual observation across borders reveals an intrinsic desire to get to know the other as an opportunity to overcome anxiety and worry resulting from deference. Accordingly, the narrative of travelling is an illustration of the traveller's exposure of his identity to the detriment of the unknown. Therefore, Stevens's representation of the borders between San Francisco and Türkiye can be connected to a new and challenging conceptualization through borderscapes that play a unitary and consolidating role between the traditionally and historically dividing border lines on the maps. While the border may refer to separation and division between people, it may simply be ignored in accordance with the traveller's point of view depicted in this work of nonfiction including various aspects of the bordering process. Meanwhile, as the observer, perceiver, rider, and traveller, Stevens experiences an intrinsic process of self-discovery and undergoes a transformative phase that discloses markers of his identity, hence enabling a multidimensional approach in the light of his adventures. It can also be argued that this new interpretation of identity is given shape along with the writing process, which is undeniably an essential part of the travelling experience. As Stevens alludes at many points in his entire travelogue, these adventures are regularly recorded in his writings and occasionally sent back to the US for publication. Stevens, the author of these accounts, must have been greatly influenced by his reckoning on nights dominated by solitude far away from his home. The impact of this emotional and psychological borderscape is much greater than the physical borders he crosses during his journey.

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The Deconstruction of Language in Anthony Burgess's *A Clockwork Orange*: A Postmodern Analysis

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ABSTRACT

This study evaluates the deconstruction of language in Anthony Burgess's novel *A Clockwork Orange* and highlights the postmodernist aspects of the work. The Nadsat language created by Burgess provides a perspective for the study of postmodern issues; and accordingly, the themes of fragmentation, ambiguity, and deconstruction seen in the language of the story are explored. This artificial language in the novel appears to challenge traditional linguistic frameworks by using ambiguity, irony, and wordplay to challenge established meanings and disrupt communication. Correspondingly, the study examines how the Nadsat language designed by Burgess is adopted by the characters, the significance of its use, and the rationale behind it. Rather than relying on a universally known formal language, the story presents a different way of communication among the characters, which both hints and shapes their identities. Based on the analysis obtained from the employment of Nadsat, the study concludes that the characters use Nadsat language to challenge norms, question the authority, and construct their identities. This indicates the postmodernist tendencies in Burgess's work and, more specifically, how language operates on the structural and thematic levels of the novel. Finally, in the novel, the Nadsat language is fundamental both narratively and thematically; thus, it offers readers a chance to witness the dynamics of power and limits of language.

Keywords: Nadsat, Deconstruction, Postmodernism, Anthony Burgess, *A Clockwork Orange*



One of the influential works in presenting the complicated aspects of language within a postmodern context, *A Clockwork Orange*, has been considered a convenient topic for this essay. Accordingly, this study shows how Nadsat questions conventional approaches to linguistic authority, communication, and meaning rather than arguing that the novel thoroughly deconstructs language. Through discussing the structure, etymology, and function of Nadsat in the text, the article illustrates how this constructed language encapsulates larger postmodern concerns without fully deconstructing English itself. As a result, the study investigates how Nadsat functions within the novel to subvert traditional linguistic norms, rather than concluding that Burgess entirely deconstructed the English language.

As a literary and cultural movement, postmodernism questions language stability and consistency by focusing on fragmentation, ambiguity, and the multiplicity of meaning. It is a crisis of language and a distrust of grand narratives (Bishop & Starkey, 2006). Jean-Francois Lyotard, regarded as one of the mainstream philosophers who has developed the postmodern concept, defines the term postmodern as “incredulity towards meta-narratives” (1984, p. XXIV), which means encouraging scepticism towards traditional norms. On the other hand, according to Whelan’s description: “if postmodernism had to be defined in a few words, it might be as destabilisation brought about by diversity” (1999, p. 291). Consistently, diversity in races and cultures results in instability of cultural identity, diversity in knowledge and ideas gives rise to uncertainty about the truth, and diversity in meaning leads to destabilisation of language. Similar to the definitions of postmodernism in the field, Burgess attempts to show his own way of understanding postmodern traits in the book by deconstructing the language and showing how complicated communication, meaning, and the making of reality are.

The novel begins by introducing Nadsat, a fictional argot used by the characters. Although it will be explained in detail in a latter part, Nadsat is simply a mix of Russian, Cockney, and adolescent slang. It creates a feeling of another community and alienation from society and everyday culture as a subversive linguistic code. Such linguistic experimentation is consistent with postmodern concerns when the focus is on language deconstruction because, as Hassan (1981) proposes: “Postmodernism...reveals itself in the dispersal of the human —that is, of language— in the immanence of discourse and mind” (p. 35). Language, as a key instrument of human communication, has changed throughout time and continues to influence and be affected by human interactions. While the actual origins of language are unknown, linguistic theories imply that language

has played an important role in human evolution since the dawn of civilisation. Given its versatility and fundamental role in human existence, language is likely to survive and be successful for as long as humans live. Therefore, it is necessary to perceive language not as a component of existence but as an entirety of existence. In this sense, Burgess's use of Nadsat not only shapes the world of his novels but also reflects the postmodern concern for language destabilisation and challenges conventional linguistic structures.

Through the use of Nadsat, the novel presents several other literary devices and methods, including irony, humour, and double entendre, all of which justify the postmodern nature of the novel. However, it should be noted that these devices are not unique to Nadsat but are employed more broadly in the novel to underscore its postmodern characteristics. This situation challenges fixed meanings and changes conventional ways of communication in the workplace. Moreover, these instances of linguistic destruction demonstrate the fluid and changeable nature of language. For this fluidity in language within the postmodern context, Barthes implies that language is not a fixed and transparent medium; instead, it is a system of signs that can be interpreted and changed in endless ways (1977, pp. 163–166). In this way, language is made into a flexible medium to express a multiplicity of views and challenge previously established meanings.

Burgess, with the creation of Nadsat, questions the limits of formal language, which invites the reader to consider the flexibility of language and the power dynamics implicit within language. Nadsat functions as a battlefield in which the protagonists, specifically Alex and his gang, construct their own identities and show resistance against both the language of authority and societal rules. However, this linguistic rebellion contrasts with the government's adoption of formal language and psychological conditioning to control and suppress individuality, which can be seen in the effort to "cure" Alex of his violent tendencies. The clash between these contrasting linguistic groups reveals the complex link between language, identity, and power, which is a major subject of postmodern criticism. Through an evaluation of how language influences and reflects these dynamics, postmodernism reveals the fundamental structures of control existing in established narratives.

Ultimately, *A Clockwork Orange* explores language in its fragmented and deconstructed form, which fits neatly within a postmodern framework. Correspondingly, this essay

aims to uncover the novel's playful and experimental use of language—particularly its creation of Nadsat—to better understand its role in postmodern literature and its wider impact on contemporary discussions about language and meaning.

Language as a Postmodern Issue

In postmodern literary criticism, the investigation and deconstruction of language are essential and play a fundamental function (Hassan, 1982). In this regard, postmodern writers are greatly influenced by prominent intellectuals like Jacques Derrida and Roland Barthes, and they have produced a comprehensive literature that covers the language concerns of the postmodern movement.

The postmodern outlook on language denies the concept of unified, explicit, and constant communication. Rather, language is recognized as a multifaceted phenomenon that is vulnerable to numerous interpretations and is influenced by social, cultural, and historical incidents. Postmodernists clearly express that language is not a pure way of communicating objective facts. Madison (1988), for instance, argues that one of the main points of postmodernism is that there is no such thing as the right way to understand something (p. 267). Comparably, according to Lyotard's view, the postmodern period is characterised by a notable transition of language that contests the traditional notions of communication. He asserts that language is not a unified, unambiguous, and unchanging form of communication. However, it is widely perceived as intricate and diverse, with diverse interpretations and influences from social, cultural, and historical factors (1984). This viewpoint emphasises the instability and ambiguity of language and highlights its fragmented nature. In this regard, the postmodern outlook of Lyotard and other scholars in the field on language serves as a basis for comprehending the treatment of language in *A Clockwork Orange* and its correlation to postmodern literature.

Within the scope of postmodern language, fragmentation is one of the most important linguistic phenomena. It comes from the complex web of language customs and regional dialects. In this process, language fragments itself into many forms, vocabularies, and discourses. This fragmentation not only underscores the diversity and flexibility of language articulation and but also allows for the creation of new narratives and meanings. Derrida (1997), as stated in his *Of Grammatology*, argues that language is naturally fragmented, with no fixed or definitive meanings (p. 70). Derrida's approach shows the difficulty of a singular or a stable system of meaning in language. When this is considered from the

perspective of Burgess's Nadsat, the established definitions at the end of the book do not guarantee linguistic consistency within the text. Nadsat, as stated before, is a hybrid slang with invented vocabulary. Therefore, it results in a tension between familiarity and foreignness. This linguistic fusion is likely to render the meaning vague and create a sense of uncertainty for the reader. Therefore, while the Nadsat dictionary presents clear definitions for the words, their function within the book frequently varies, depending on the character and the reception by others. For instance, the following excerpt describes an informal and violent situation, including a Nadsat word in it: "There was a bit of a fight last night, wasn't there? There was a bit of shuffling with nozhes and bike-chains and the like. One of a certain fat boy's friends was ambulated off late from near the Power Plant and hospitalized, cut about very unpleasantly, yes" (Burgess, 1977, p. 33). The term "nozhes" (knives) in this sentence is used in a casual manner. This demonstrates that violence has been normalised in the characters' lives, so the severity of the action is trivialised with the expression "a bit of shuffling." In a similar manner, "bike-chains" becomes a brutality tool and it underlies the improvised violence of their actions. The use of understated language, exemplified by the phrase "cut about very unpleasantly," creates a conflict between the violent act and its impact. This situation aligns with Derrida's concept of language as fluid and context-dependent, where euphemisms soften the terrible reality of violence. As can be seen, the meaning of the words develops throughout the narrative; and this shows Alex's shifting views on power and interpersonal dynamics. Considering these points, Nadsat exemplifies Derrida's concept of language as inherently playful and multifaceted; what may seem like simple slang often reveals layers of ambiguity, particularly when analysed within the framework of narrative context and character development.

Another feature of postmodern language is ambiguity, which incorporates the polysemy of words and symbols. Similar to the attitudes presented above, according to the postmodern view, meaning in language is never fixed but develops on the possibility of different interpretations; that is, it is slippery. In general, the concept of ambiguity challenges the idea that language is a straightforward means of conveying clear and definite ideas; and it stresses the importance of subjectivity in the process of interpretation.

Additionally, one of the main principles of postmodern language is the destabilization of meaning. Postmodern theorists such as Jacques Derrida and Roland Barthes examine the ambiguity of meaning and reject the assumption that words possess fixed or intrinsic definitions. According to Derrida (1997), "[t]here is no outside-text; there is nothing outside the text. Everything is written there" (p. 158). This statement sums up the postmodern

concern with the loss of meaning. This suggests that meaning is not set or given but is made by how texts interact. Derrida also expresses how meaning is inherently unstable since it resists any final, set interpretation. Similarly, Roland Barthes (1977) claims: "The text is a tissue of quotations drawn from the innumerable centers of culture" (p. 146), which displays how meaning is shaped by many different cultural references and ideas and how it changes incessantly. Barthes's approach showcases how meaning is relevant to context and can vary over time. At this point, Derrida's concept of *différance* is significant for understanding the flexible and uncertain nature of language. It expresses that the meaning in a language is usually postponed or deferred within linguistic systems; and this means that words do not have fixed definitions; instead, they acquire their roles through their relationships with other words. This interplay of differences emphasises how meaning emerges not only from individual terms but also from the dynamic interactions among them, which creates a fluid and constantly evolving interpretation. Additionally, Derrida (1997) stated that *différance* acts through the interplay of differences, uncovering the traces of "otherness" that inform meaning. It is the indefinite postponement of meaning and the endless deferral that sustains the play of signifiers and thus prevents any final, fixed interpretation (p. 143). According to him, as it has just been described, "otherness within language" is likely mean that each word or concept is characterised not only by its inherent attributes but also by its connections to other words and concepts. He asserts, "there is nothing outside of the text" (Derrida, 1997, p. xiii), suggesting that meaning is derived from the interaction of signs within the text, rather than from a fixed reference to an external reality. From this perspective, language is like a system, in which each word is tied to one another, which makes the meaning changeable. Therefore, with the concept of *différance*, Derrida emphasizes the flux and otherness of language and challenges its ability to convey fixed meanings.

Conclusively, postmodern writing takes a critical look at language by breaking down its standard building blocks. It protests the idea of a single, set language system by attaching importance on division, uncertainty, and the loss of meaning. In a similar way, by using Nadsat in *A Clockwork Orange*, Anthony Burgess employs these postmodern issues and shows how language can be complicated and fluid in a postmodern setting.

Nadsat: Burgessian Argot

Anthony Burgess introduces a unique linguistic phenomenon called Nadsat in *A Clockwork Orange*, a fictional argot invented and utilised by the characters in the

book. Maher (2010) explains Nadsat as follows: "It is built upon English foundations, but includes some two hundred made-up words, most of which come from Russian; -nadsat is the Russian equivalent of the English -teen, as in *thirteen*, *fourteen*, etc." (p. 37). Similar to Maher's, Windle (1995) shares a related definition: "The specially-created language spoken by the narrator of *A Clockwork Orange*, Alex, is of interest to the Slavist since it relies to a large extent on Russian loan-words, and takes its name, 'Nadsat,' from the Russian suffix meaning 'teen'" (p. 164). Regarding the significance of Nadsat, Vincent and Clarke (2017) report that "this constructed antilanguage has achieved a cultural currency and become the subject of considerable academic attention over a 50-year period" (p. 247). As a philologist, Burgess invented Nadsat, which derives from various sources, including rhyming slang, gipsy talk, Elizabethan English, criminal slang, and the argots of Britain's public schools (Maher, 2010, p. 36; Evans, 1971, p. 406). In the novel, the utilisation of Nadsat functions primarily as a powerful mechanism to explore the postmodern aspect through the fragmentation of language and the formation of different ways of communication. With its Russian words, Cockney slang, and inspiration from different subcultures, Nadsat shows Burgess's skill with language and his ability to give the characters in *A Clockwork Orange* a unique and lively language.

Nadsat and Postmodernism

By analysing the language of the gang in the novel, including its vocabulary, structure and grammar, as well as how it reveals postmodern worries, it is possible to gain a deeper understanding of Burgess's novel. As an example, words like *droog* (friend), *horrorshow* (excellent), and *gulliver* (head) not only grab readers (most English readers are not acquainted with the content), but they also exemplify the linguistic creativity employed by Burgess to construct this hybrid language. According to Swaffar (1988), Nadsat appears differently from a formal language; consequently, the receivers of Nadsat can quickly identify it. Thus, these receivers—in other words, the readers—view Nadsat as a natural form of language rather than a simple means of communication. Consequently, Burgess attempts to question the conventional rules of language with his Nadsat and challenges the existing language; however, he paradoxically depends on the structure and phonetics of the same language, namely English, to ensure accessibility for readers. In this way, he both breaks and upholds language rules, establishing a hybrid form that works both the outside and the inside of linguistic systems.

Although the teenagers in the novel communicate fluently through Nadsat, the language itself becomes alienated to the reader and creates a sense of fragmentation and blurred meaning. This is a postmodern characteristic, where the stability of language is challenged not in its internal coherence but in its alienating effect on outsiders, revealing how meaning becomes less fixed and more subjective.

Moreover, Burgess's use of Nadsat in his work serves as an intentional tool for questioning conventional linguistic structures and communication norms. Even though Nadsat is grammatically similar to English, it includes foreign words and constructs that challenge the reader's comprehension; and this condition mirrors postmodern tendencies toward fragmentation and destabilization of meaning, as stated above. For instance:

So I was put into the bed and still felt *bolnoy* but could not sleep, but soon I started to feel that soon I might start to feel that I might soon start feeling just a *malenky* bit better, and then I was brought some nice hot *chai* with plenty of *moloko* and *sakar* and, *peeting* that, I knew that that like horrible nightmare was in the past and all over. (Burgess, 1972, p. 108)

While this quote shows grammatical coherence, it still puzzles the reader with words like *bolnoy* (sick), *malenky* (little), *chai* (tea), *moloko* (milk), *sakar* (sugar), and *peeting* (drinking). In a way, these terms challenge the stability of the language even though the sentences adhere to standard English grammar. Therefore, the inclusion of these unfamiliar words subverts the flow and comprehension, and they leave the reader within an unfamiliar linguistic terrain. Moreover, while the syntax also remains consistent with English, the presence of repetition—"I might start to feel that I might soon start feeling"—gives the sign of fragmentation and hesitation; thus, it makes the flow of thought seem less stable. This sample illustrates the postmodern aspect of language as an unstable construct in which meaning is continuously deferred and never fully fixed.

However, Nadsat functions cohesively among the teenagers in the novel, facilitating their communication without ambiguity or confusion. This situation indicates that the destabilization of language occurs not within the fictional society itself but in the relationship between the language and its external audience—the reader. Indeed, the fragmentation and instability stem from Nadsat's alienation of the reader from the narrative, which creates a barrier that symbolises the postmodern concept of language as a tool for both connection and separation. According to Joseph Feeney (1997), "[it

is] a sense of exhaustion, a loss of feeling and meaning, minimal expectations and hopes, and a desire to parody everything. Normal patterns and expectations collapse the bizarre becomes normal" (p. 14). Furthermore, the employment of Nadsat has a different function, that of linguistic rebellion. As Derrida (1976) declares, "in order to signify, it is always necessary to rebel against the language one uses" (p. 165). Nadsat is a true indicator of rebellion. It allows the characters, specifically Alex, to resist societal norms through language. It is clearly understood in another extract: "But, brothers, this biting of their toe-nails over what is the cause of badness is what turns me into a fine laughing malchick" (Burgess, 1972, p. 43). Alex's utterances in Nadsat words demonstrate his defiance against societal authority. The words "brothers," "biting," "toe-nails," and "malchick" are all loaded with defiance. They gave his speech a tone of mockery and refusal of the government's attempts to define and control "badness." Such usage of Nadsat not only sets Alex apart from conventional society but also represents a broader resistance to the homogenising forces of authority. Thus, it can be stated that Nadsat functions on two paths: First, it serves as a coherent language for the teenagers in the book, then it destabilizes meaning for the readers and forces them to engage with language as a fragmented and subjective construct (Sumner, 2012, p. 56). This double role supports Burgess's postmodern view of language, which asserts that language systems are adaptable, rely on the situation, and cannot be fixedly comprehended.

In conclusion, Burgess's construction of Nadsat in *A Clockwork Orange* reflects a postmodern understanding of language as an unstable and fragmented entity. While Nadsat functions as a cohesive argot for the characters in the novel, it reveals that language can blur meaning, subvert traditional structures, and question how communication occurs. By means of this linguistic attempt, Burgess not only plays with conventional discourse but also urges readers to review their relationship with language, meaning, and authority.

Instability and Ambiguity in Meaning Through Nadsat

Ambiguity and confusion in the book are created mainly through Nadsat, particularly through the use of figures of speech, including sarcasm, wordplay, and double entendre. While they are common in literature, their implementation in the novel is a kind of reflection of postmodern traits, which show the destabilisation of meaning and the subversion of linguistic conventions. For this reason, as stated before, Burgess's use of Nadsat vocabulary complicates traditional definitions and impairs straightforward

communication. By doing so, the employment of Nadsat reflects the postmodern manner to challenge the stability of language and meaning.

In *A Clockwork Orange*, the use of slang creates a sense of ambiguity and confusion. Literary devices like sarcasm, wordplay, and double entendre frequently challenge established structures in postmodernism. These figures of speech are usually employed to deconstruct meaning, which is compatible with postmodernism's rejection of truth and presentation of interpretative uncertainty. From this attitude, the novel's use of Nadsat fits into this postmodern framework by destabilising conventional language and meaning since it requires readers to engage actively with the text to interpret it. This linguistic play presents an example of a postmodern strategy—the disruption of linguistic certainty.

A clear instance of linguistic experimentation can be observed in the narrative voice of Alex, the protagonist, who speaks Nadsat. The following passage illustrates Burgess's creative use of vocabulary: "Then, brothers, it came. Oh, bliss, bliss and heaven. I lay all nagoy to the ceiling, my gulliver on my rookers on the pillow, glazzies closed, rot open in bliss, slooshying the sluice of lovely sounds" (Burgess, 1972, p. 36). Here, Burgess introduces invented words such as *nagoy* (naked), *gulliver* (head), and *rookers* (hands). Although the syntax of Alex's speech closely follows the traditional English sentence structure, the altered vocabulary creates an initial barrier for readers. While the Nadsat words themselves may initially be confusing, this confusion dissipates once readers become familiar with the lexicon. However, the novel's playful manipulation of vocabulary—though eventually understood—still reinforces the theme of linguistic control and manipulation, challenging the idea of stable meaning. Thus, rather than conveying unpredictability in terms of meaninglessness, Nadsat functions as a tool for Burgess to explore the malleability of language. In a postmodern context, the reader's journey from confusion to comprehension mirrors the deconstruction of linguistic certainty, reflecting a deeper commentary on how language shapes, restricts, or liberates understanding.

In addition, irony is crucial in questioning the established interpretations and undermining language norms. Throughout the novel, instances of verbal irony can be observed, where characters say one thing but mean another, or where their words contradict their actions: "I viddied that thinking was for the gloopy ones and that the oomny ones use, like, inspiration and what Bog sends. For now it was lovely music that

came to my aid" (Burgess, 1972, p. 54). In this excerpt, Alex asserts that *thinking was for the gloopy ones*, implying that inspiration and divine intervention are the only reliable sources of knowledge and direction. The irony is that Alex is the one who is recognised throughout the book for being cunning and manipulative. Alex's declaration that he no longer places significance on thinking and that he instead depends on outside influences reveals a dramatic difference between his words and his behaviours. To clarify this point, it is ironic that Alex, who holds the positions of both a quarterback and a gang leader, meticulously plans violent actions yet declares his intention to disregard the very reason and logic that have contributed to his success in these roles. One of the many ironies in the novel comes from the Minister of the Interior, who advises Alex: "When a man cannot choose, he ceases to be a man" (Burgess, 1972, p. 84). This statement is paradoxical since people like Alex are not free to choose in the dystopian society portrayed in the book. This element is related to the novel's broader exploration of control, language, and freedom. Alex, by employing Nadsat, symbolizes his linguistic rebellion and the preservation of his individuality. The Minister's comment, on the other hand, gives the signals of state's trying to take away people's preferences and freedom of choice. The irony increases with the contrast between the Minister's formal, rhetorical tone and Alex's subversive linguistic usage. Thus, the book puts forward a tension between the state's greed to control language and behaviour, which is presented by means of the Minister's words and Alex's use of Nadsat as a form of resistance against this attempt. Therefore, even though the Minister does not use Nadsat words in his speech, his utterances remain significant in the novel's interpretation of language, control, and autonomy, which makes it relevant to this discussion. Moreover, in the novel, Alex undergoes a specialised treatment that renders him incapable of entertaining wicked thoughts, much less engaging in malevolent actions. He is confronted with a tough situation as he struggles to reconnect with his true identity, as his ability to practice his agency is currently restricted. Therefore, the circumstance wherein the President states Alex concerning personal freedom can only be interpreted through irony. From a different perspective, it points to the supposed value of human freedom and agency as well as the oppressive society that denies those same rights.

At the same time, the presence of wordplay and double entendre contributes to the subject of linguistic instability and ambiguity. The characters depicted in the novel exhibit an inclination for playing with language, in which they employ puns and slang terms to manipulate language and generate an abundance of interpretive possibilities, as shown in Alex's words: "And, my brothers, it was real satisfaction to me to waltz —left

two three, right two three—and carve left cheeky and right cheeky, so that like two curtains of blood seemed to pour out at the same time, one on either side of his fat filthy oily snout in the winter starlight” (Burgess, 1972, p. 23). Alex here depicts a violent scene in which he attacks a character named Billyboy. The phrases used to describe the event make it clear that there is a play on words and a double meaning since he describes the event as if it is a dance show. The term *waltz*—*left two three, right two three* indicates the contrast between the beauty and grace of a dance and the violence of an attack. Using the phrase “*carve left cheeky and right cheeky*” also adds a layer of irony because he is making fun of the idea that hurting someone is the same as being an artist. As can be seen, the wordplay and double entendre are used to create images that show how upsetting the scene is and how complicated Alex is as a person. This intentional use of language contradicts the concept of linguistic stability within its traditional understanding and reveals the arbitrary nature of words and their meanings.

While ambiguity, irony, humour, and double meanings are universal literary techniques used in literature, their function in *A Clockwork Orange* mirrors the postmodern aspect. In the book, these elements specify stylistic purposes, such as questioning the established norms and challenging fixed meanings, which are the main concerns of postmodern literature. To put it differently, by employing these mentioned techniques with the use of Nadsat, *A Clockwork Orange* emphasises the fluidity and uncertainty of language, specifically, those of English, highlighting its subjective and context-dependent nature.

Nadsat Language as a Tool for Subversion and Control

In the novel, Nadsat words are utilized for various purposes, two of which are to set up a language of rebellion and to create an invented language to explore the deconstruction of the nature of language. Through terms like *slooshied* (heard), *tolchocking* (pushing), and *crasting* (robbing), standard English is disrupted by Nadsat, which makes Alex and his friends separate from the adult world and strengthens their defiance against social conventions. This unique lexicon reinforces the gang's identity, fosters a sense of group solidarity and while at the same time distinguishes them as outsiders who oppose prevailing values. More importantly, Nadsat shields them from the ethical consequences of their violent actions by creating a layer of linguistic detachment, which allows Alex to narrate acts of brutality without engaging with their moral weight. On the other hand, authoritative characters such as the Minister of Interior and other prison officials also use a manipulative language—even though not Nadsat—

to establish control over individuals; and this condition displays how language serves across power dynamics in the novel. The contrast between the languages used, which are Nadsat as a form of youthful rebellion and the institutional language of control, connects to the novel's exploration of language as a tool for both personal autonomy and societal dominance. Ultimately, Nadsat embodies deconstructive elements: it breaks down familiar linguistic structures, destabilizing meaning and illustrating the fluidity of language in its conveyance of power and identity. In this way, Nadsat serves as a linguistic resistance, a mechanism for Alex to assert individuality and resist assimilation, thus reinforcing the novel's central theme of deconstructing linguistic conventions to question control, identity, and societal conformity. Besides, the characters do more than just using Nadsat to play with words. They use irony, sarcasm, and wordplay, among other verbal tools, to challenge authority and make communication difficult for others. In particular, their use of irony is a robust tool against the inconsistencies in their society. In a simple way, this situation is observed in Alex's statement: "But what I do I do because I like to do" (Burgess, 1972, p. 43). Alex expresses his motivation for participating in violent actions. Repeated language and linguistic manipulation through the word *do* generate a visible irony. At the surface level, Alex asserts that his participation in those actions is motivated by personal enjoyment. On the other hand, the unseen meaning in the utterance has a deep and perceptive analysis of the cultural norms, beliefs, and goals that have significantly affected his conduct. Thus, the unseen message here is that Alex's violent actions are not completely self-directed; instead, they mirror a community that punishes him for embodying its darker aspects while failing to offer him essential choices or alternatives. By presenting him in this ironic light, readers are drawn to the inconsistencies between the words and acts of authoritative people. In this manner, this representation successfully highlights the system's innate defects and contradictions, thereby illuminating its intrinsic vulnerabilities and revealing the underlying inconsistencies that handle its structure. Finally, it can be concluded that this rebellious use of language is indicative of the postmodern deconstructionist approach, in which efforts are made to deconstruct and challenge dominant discourses and ideologies.

In the novel, powerful institutions and figures of authority also employ language as a control tool. The government, represented by characters like the Minister of the Interior, manipulates language to reinforce its power and enforce social conformity. This manipulation can be clearly seen in the Minister's statements to conceal violent intentions when he depicts the Ludovico Technique as a "reclamation" process instead

of the "good of society." By asserting a forceful, dehumanizing process in positive terms, he hides the violence of the state's actions, which makes it appear as if the government's primary concern is societal well-being rather than control. By means of this manipulative language, the government not only justifies but also normalises its pervasive power, therefore making the state's aggression look legitimate under the cover of public benefit. Regarding this technique, it is the name of the behaviour-development program in which Alex is put through. By means of the Ludovico Technique, in which a mix of verbal and visual cues are used, Alex's behaviours are expected to change. In this process, as Windle (1995) states:

Despite the author's protestations that his important message had to do with the dangers of tampering with human nature, demonstrated in the novel by the "therapy" applied to "cure" the youth of his malady, it was the images of extreme violence, and the unusual language in which these are presented, that probably made the most lasting impression. (p. 163)

This process aims to change Alex's behaviour in a big way by giving him a strong dislike of violence and reshaping his identity according to the desired societal norms through designed methods. In a way, it demonstrates how those in power can exploit language to create dominant narratives and ideologies. For instance, the scientists behind the technique describe the procedure as a simple treatment and refer to Alex's transformation as a cure for his violent behaviour. By framing the Ludovico Technique in this way, Brodsky the oppressive nature is obscured, and the government's intention is supported, while Alex is stripped of his autonomy. This simplification of language demonstrates how those in authority exploit terminology to normalize their control. In this sense, not only the control mechanism of the society but also the propaganda organ, the media, plays a significant role in disseminating and controlling public opinion. Through a carefully constructed language, the media influences public perception, shapes reality, and maintains the existing power structures. Burgess highlights the dangerous potential of language as a tool for manipulation, illustrating the ease with which words can be weaponised to shape public sentiment and control collective consciousness. Considering the problems of authority and ideology, it is important to incorporate Louis Althusser's article "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses" (2001) into the argument because of its extensive coverage. According to Althusser, the state serves not only as a means of force but also as a location for ideological conflict (p. 134). Althusser states that the state is not simply an instrument of coercion but also a site of ideological struggle.

According to him, the state has the power to define what is considered normal or natural in society, and this power is exercised through a variety of institutions and practices, including language. To him, language is an indispensable tool for maintaining the current ideologies. Althusser posits that ideology transcends the confines of being a mere collection of ideas or belief systems; rather, it emerges as a real force that operates at both the individual and societal levels (p. 167). It is not a mere construct that people think about but also a lived experience, an agent that takes a significant part in shaping their reality. Similar to Althusser's exclamation, Burgess points out the dangerous potential of language in shaping collective consciousness. Through the media's manipulation of language, public sentiment is easily affected, and ideological narratives are reinforced. Words turn into weapons employed by the power mechanism to control and direct the masses.

Consequently, *A Clockwork Orange* shows how language, authority, and defiance are all intertwined. The novel highlights the power of words to subvert authority, question cultural conventions, and express personal identity. At the same time, it reveals how language turns out to be a manipulative power that can both strengthen repressive regimes and limit people's freedom of choice.

Conclusion

In *A Clockwork Orange*, Anthony Burgess introduces an invented and distinctive language that is used among the characters: Nadsat. While Nadsat is mainly utilized for communication among the gang members in the novel, it also signals the nature of a language; for instance, it shows how a language can be versatile and complicated. In this way, Burgess, through Nadsat, remarks how language is influential in creating group identity and reinforcing boundaries between different classes. At the same time, it is also seen that Nadsat appears as a means of subversion and control in the novel. From these perspectives, Nadsat, which is characterised by irony and wordplay, exemplifies a postmodern aspect of language. This illustrates the dual nature of language, which can both unite and divide; at the same time, it may also disrupt meaning and reflect the fragmented identity of a dystopian society.

As stated above, Burgess's *A Clockwork Orange* is representative of postmodern deconstructive methodologies since it considers language not as a static frame, but as a flowing and flexible construct. The book analyses the language of Nadsat in diversified

forms, like wordplay and linguistic innovations, and scrutinizes the way language can generate and challenge meaning. This shift in the use of language suggests that it can be used to question the established ideas, challenge established structures, and see language as a way for individuals to act and rethink. In a way, Burgess points out how language can influence one's perception and behaviour in one's environment in *A Clockwork Orange*.

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Postdramatic Crisis of Narration and Infocracy in *Love and Information* by Caryl Churchill

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ABSTRACT

Caryl Churchill is Britain's most celebrated and influential playwright of the post-war period. Her name has become an exceptional phenomenon in contemporary British theater since her first professional production of *Owners* (1972). Churchill's plays have been praised for their bold and innovative style, tackling complex themes such as gender, politics, and power dynamics in a nuanced and challenging manner. Throughout her career, Churchill has observed the era in which she experiences and addresses social issues by creating characters living in harsh conditions. Despite her advancing age, she continues to convey the universal problems of the twenty-first century stemming from neoliberalism. *Love and Information*, first staged at the Royal Court Theatre in 2012, is undoubtedly one of the most significant works from her new millennium plays, confronting the spirit of the neoliberal agenda. It is a postdramatic text that invites the audience to engage with the themes and ideas rather than follow a linear plot, which reflects the complexity and ambiguity of the information-saturated world. In this regard, examining the impact of information and communication technologies on contemporary globalized society, the play demonstrates Byung-Chul Han's ideas on infocracy and the crisis of narration. Han argues that a society driven by neoliberalism fosters pathologies stemming from an obsession with maximizing digital culture. Considering Han's perspective, this study analyzes how Churchill portrays the human condition in the digital age and how she experiments with postdramatic narration and the information regime.

Keywords: Caryl Churchill, Byung-Chul Han, infocracy, crisis of narration, *Love and Information*



Introduction

Caryl Churchill is characterized as a dramatist by her consistent dedication to honoring social responsibility in her entire collection of works. Her writing is praised for its intellectual depth and conveys a harsh socialist critique of British society. Churchill's theatrical works usually center around individuals who suffer from oppression within dystopian societies shaped by neoliberalism, often incorporating elements of socialist and materialist feminism, which emphasize the impact of material circumstances on women's experiences concerning gender and class. Adiseshiah notes that Churchill's contributions to contemporary British theater are marked by innovation, diversity, and richness. Her pioneering approach to the theatrical form has consistently broken down barriers and unearthed new dramatic structures. Churchill's theater encompasses many themes, fully expressing the experiences of individuals and groups grappling with self-discovery and understanding their social contexts. Furthermore, Churchill's unapologetic commitment to anti-capitalist resistance and struggle is a significant component of her drama, as reflected in her body of work (Adiseshiah 2009, p. 219).

In the most general sense, Churchill is acknowledged for her focus on politically charged plays that feature female characters and her association with the left wing of the political spectrum. Presenting the apocalyptic settings related to neoliberalism or late capitalism, Churchill's plays have been lauded for their capacity to capture the prevailing socio-political climate and stimulate critical thinking about contemporary issues. Her ability to explore the complexities of gender, power, and identity has cemented her status as a leading playwright in contemporary theater. As Luckhurst puts it, Churchill is not only an artist but also an intellectual who has always questioned traditional cultural beliefs regarding theater as both a product and an art form. She is a radical innovator who has brought about significant changes in the theatrical world and a highly skilled formal craftsperson who has mastered the technical aspects of theater (2015, p. 3). When analyzing the dystopian realities molded by neoliberal politics, Churchill investigates different playwriting and staging techniques. She believes that the artistic structure is as important as the content of the theme when conveying political messages. For this reason, in her most notable plays, Churchill adopts different theatrical strategies, as she finds the conventional dramatic structure of traditional theater insufficient in effectively conveying social themes on stage. Thus, Churchill deftly employs postdramatic theatrical aesthetics to express her ideas in some of her 21st-century plays.

Love and Information, first staged at the Royal Court Theatre in 2012, is among those works that aim to deconstruct traditional dramatic elements. The play is entirely based on the aesthetics of postdramatic theatre that rejects traditional dramatic conventions and emphasizes the performative and non-linear aspects of the theatrical experience. It has no conventionally named characters or stage directions. The most apparent postdramatic aspect of *Love and Information* is its fragmented structure, with scenes ranging from fifty-one to seventy-six, including over one hundred distinct characters and more than one thousand speeches, each relatively short and self-contained. For this reason, the play is difficult to summarize. According to Gobert, describing *Love and Information* can be challenging, given its vast content. The text comprises over a thousand lines of speeches, many of them being concise one-liners. It is organized into seven sections, each with seven distinctive subtitles representing various scenes. The final section features a supplementary text titled "Last Scene: Facts". The play follows the meticulous dramatic formula of $7 \times 7 + 1$, resulting in a mathematically harmonious arrangement (2014, pp. 187–188).

Love and Information investigates the impact of technology on modern life, which raises critical questions about communication and connection in an age of information overload. Through its postdramatic structure and multiple scenes, the play critically examines how technology, information, communication, neoliberalism, and lack of narration affect human relationships. As the title indicates, the play explores the themes of love and information through different unnamed characters in separate scenes. The playwright intentionally refrains from exploring the characters' personal histories and focuses on a significant moment in each scene. The scenes are not sequential but are united by the central themes. Each section of the play contains several short scenes of varying lengths, which, according to Churchill, can be performed in any order within the section. These scenes are more like snapshots or vignettes, often disconnected from each other, highlighting the fragmentation and non-linearity of contemporary life and communication.

In postdramatic theatre, there is a departure from the traditional linear narrative structure. Throughout *Love and Information*, the characters undertake a detailed examination of numerous subjects, which comprises a deep analysis of their implications, including social media, technology, information, neoliberalism, politics, the war on terror, human existence, love, distress, depression, precariousness, betrayal, torture, fate, linguistics, math, sex, God, children, climate, free will, earthquake, and memory.

The play presents scenes as independent moments without a main story. This unconventional narrative lacks a central plot and features mainly non-gendered characters who encounter intricate and relatable circumstances. This provides an opportunity for the audience to empathize with the characters.

Postdramatic theatre places a strong emphasis on the performative aspect of theater. *Love and Information* demands its actors to switch between diverse characters and scenes quickly. The focus is less on character development and more on the physicality and versatility of the actors. This draws attention to the performative elements of the play. As Lehmann underlines, “[l]ost in the world of media, narration finds a new site in theatre. It is no coincidence that performers rediscover the telling of fairy tales in the process” (2006, p. 109). Postdramatic theatre often invites open interpretation and does not provide clear resolutions or answers. Similarly, *Love and Information* offers multiple scenes with variations that engage the audience. This open-endedness challenges the audience’s expectation of closure in traditional drama.

Postdramatic theatre often relies on non-verbal elements, such as visuals and sounds, to communicate meaning. In *Love and Information*, some scenes rely on non-verbal communication, silence, or visual elements to convey emotion and information. This multi-sensory approach adds depth to the performance. Moreover, the play experiments with language in several ways. Some scenes feature rapid, fragmented dialogues, while others use repetition and wordplay to challenge the traditional use of language in drama. This deconstruction of language contributes to the postdramatic nature of the play.

It is commonly agreed that *Love and Information* explores the impact of information technology on human communication and depicts the irrationality of the human condition. As Diamond underlines, the play “takes the emotional temperature of information overload and asks how we live and love among the sound bites” (2014, p. 463). Accordingly, in the play, Churchill’s experimental and experiential approach to narration also aligns with Hans-Thies Lehmann’s concept of postdramatic or post-epic narration. In postdramatic theatre, the narration is interspersed with dialogue to create a narrative experience for the audience. The actors’ memories and narratives are of utmost importance, and the emphasis lies on vivid descriptions. In a world where media reigns supreme, theater provides a fresh avenue for storytelling (Lehmann, 2006, p. 109). Lehmann believes that in today’s all-encompassing media world, shock and terror

appear to be outdated. Terror attacks, tragedies, murders, and revelations of evil plots in places where governments were believed to be reasonable and managed democratically have become a daily occurrence. Nevertheless, no cathartic effect can be observed. Repeated images teach us to bear painful depictions of distress and suffering beyond what the Baroque philosophers ever understood. The media has developed ways of presenting terror aesthetically. The presence of real-life photographs in the press denies the fear of the limits of language. However, it does not create an artistic or melancholic experience (2016, p. 54). In *Love and Information*, Churchill presents the tragedy of contemporary society in a simple yet compelling manner that aligns with Lehmann's postdramatic theater aesthetics and Han's thoughts on the distinctive features of information capitalism. This paper explores concerns about uncontrolled technological advancements driven by the neoliberal agenda by analyzing Churchill's play from Byung-Chul Han's perspective. This approach adds originality to the article's examination of the subject matter.

Crisis of Narration and Infocracy in *Love and Information*

Churchill's *Love and Information* and Byung-Chul Han's philosophy on narration and infocracy explore the adverse effects of the information age and information explosion on human relationships. There are clear connections between the themes of the play and Han's concepts. These connections are easily felt throughout the play from the beginning to the end. Han employs the term information regime to denote a type of domination in which social, economic, and political developments are decisively influenced by the processing of information using algorithms and artificial intelligence. In this regime, exploitation occurs through the utilization of information and data, as opposed to disciplinary powers, which exploit bodies and energies. Power is not determined by ownership of production means but rather by access to information used for psychopolitical surveillance, controlling, and predicting human behavior. Information regimes are interlinked with information capitalism, which has evolved into surveillance capitalism, reducing humans to consumers who provide data (Han, 2022, p. 1).

Han claims that information capitalism employs neoliberal power technologies. Unlike the disciplinary regime, which relied on coercion and prohibition, neoliberal methods use positive incentives. These techniques flourish in environments that promote freedom rather than suppress it. Instead of extinguishing individuality with

force, they intelligently affect it. Smart power replaces repressive disciplinary authority by implementing subtle techniques to influence behavior instead of issuing commands. The information regime of neoliberalism is disguised by promoting liberty, connectedness, and community while concealing hidden power dynamics (2022, p. 7). In the opening scene of *Love and Information*, titled "Secret," the words "we're not close anymore, we can't ever but nobody knows everything about" (Churchill, 2013, p. 4) evoke the feeling that in the age of technology and social media, honest communication and absolute freedom have been lost due to digitally manipulated realities.

Han further argues that the rapid digitalization of our daily lives is unstoppable, drastically changing our perspective on the world and social connections. The amount of communication and information available is both astonishing and overwhelming, with the potential to cause harm and disturb the balance of society. Democracy is gradually transforming into an infocracy (2022, p. 12). According to Han, infocracy might cause social alienation and fragmentation. Correspondingly, *Love and Information* presents a culture where relationships are typically superficial and fleeting. The fragmentary structure of the play represents the perplexing nature of communication under an information regime, where contacts are brief and discontinuous. Similar to the play's first scene, in the scene entitled "Remote," Churchill implies the changed perception of reality in the world. According to the text, the absence of television, laptops, internet, mobile phones, radio, or newspapers leads to unhappiness, regardless of whether it involves fake news (Churchill, 2013, p. 13). This absence exemplifies a crisis in the narrative logic, as Han confirms. Han expresses that social media is flooded with stories that are nothing but self-promotion. Unfortunately, such stories do not bring people closer or promote empathy as narratives do. They are just information presented with images that are quickly forgotten. These stories are not narrations; they are advertisements. Competing for attention in this way does not create a sense of community. In the present era, storytelling has become more about selling a product or service than telling a story (2024, p. 60). Han refers to this situation as the crisis of narration. He believes that truth takes the shape of information and data. When reality is transformed into information, the immediate feeling of presence fades away, and digitalization flattens reality by turning everything into information (2024, pp. 6–7).

Han's concept of infocracy is based on the idea that in the digital era, we are flooded with information to the point where it becomes overwhelming and impossible to absorb. He confirms that in the digital age, "the information regime, surveillance takes

place via data" (2022, p. 2). In the play, Churchill aims to feature this exact idea. As Angelaki posits, *Love and Information*, which explores communication and how much information we gather, access, and analyze, is inherently connected to self-expression (2017, p. 34). The depiction of infocracy in the play is evident through a series of fragmented scenes filled with rapid exchanges of information. Like individuals in an information regime, the characters in the play struggle with the unceasing flow of data: "Why do they need to know all this stuff? / They're doing research. It guides their policy. They use it to help people. / They use it to sell us things we don't want" (Churchill, 2013, p. 6). In harmony with the context of the play, Han contends that the dataist system of the infocracy displays totalitarian characteristics, aiming for absolute knowledge through algorithmic procedures that eschew ideological narratives. It also seeks to calculate every aspect of the present and the future. The influence of the regime isolates individuals, who, when they assemble, form a digital swarm that follows a variety of influencers rather than a unified mass with a single leader (2022, p. 9). Analogously, *Love and Information* presents a culture where relationships are typically superficial and fleeting. As Diamond underlines, "[i]ntrigued by vast data networks, Churchill reminds us that information percolates everywhere" (2014, p. 463). In accordance with these statements, the play portrays the confusing nature of communication in an infocracy where contacts are brief and discontinuous.

Han believes that infocracy might lead to a loss of historical memory and a focus on the present. As for the narrative side of the issue, Han is of the opinion that "[m]emory is a narrative practice that connects events in novel combinations and creates a network of relations. The tsunami of information destroys narrative inwardness" (Han, 2024, p. 39). In Churchill's play, memory and information are transitory, with scenes flashing from one to the next. *Love and Information* lucidly highlights the transience of information and memory in the contemporary information regime. The scene titled "Memory House" exemplifies this idea, underscoring the significance of statistics for dataists that Han confirms:

to improve my mind / no but you've got a good / my memory to improve
/ forget a lot? / not not / like names / like names like faces /we all / yes
but/not worth worrying / but I want to learn /ah / huge amount of
memorising / of course / vocabulary / yes / statistics / statistics / every
imaginable / I see your point / stacks of information which I have to.
(Churchill, 2013, p. 39)

As seen above, one character in the play helps another organize large amounts of information in memory by spatializing it through memorization. The individuals in *Love and Information* often suffer from isolation and desensitization in their interactions. This is consistent with Han's concern that the infocracy of the digital age contributes to alienation and a lack of genuine connection. He argues that information capitalism is based on communication and interconnectedness. This renders traditional disciplinary techniques such as spatial isolation, strict regulation of work, and physical training obsolete. Unlike the conventional notion of docility that implies compliance and obedience, the ideal of the information regime assumes that its subjects are free, authentic, and creative. The submissive subject of the information regime is neither docile nor obedient. Instead, this subject produces and performs itself (2022, p. 2).

Han believes that in the contemporary world, "love is being positivized into sexuality, and, by the same token, subjected to a commandment to perform. Sex means achievement and performance" (2017b, p. 12). Han's commentary on love in a digitalized society aligns with Churchill's play. Characters in *Love and Information* often struggle to form meaningful emotional bonds. As a result, they fall short in this act as well. The disability, as mentioned above, can be interpreted as a crisis of narration. This condition implies difficulty in creating coherent and meaningful narratives, which can profoundly affect an individual's personal and social life. Han claims that the narratives underpinning the neoliberal system hinder community formation. According to the neoliberal ideology, every individual is expected to be an entrepreneur of their self and to compete with others. This narrative of performance does not foster social cohesion or a sense of belonging. Instead, it undermines solidarity and empathy by dividing people and pitting them against each other. The focus on individual self-optimization, self-realization, and authenticity further destabilizes society by eroding the bonds that hold people together (Han, 2024, p. 62). Undoubtedly, the play serves as a reflection of Han's idea. Angelaki shares the same view and asserts that when individuals isolate themselves, including using social media as both a tool for virtual communication and a means of physical self-exclusion, love becomes an indistinct idea (2017, p. 34). In *Love and Information*, sexual activity is portrayed as a mechanical process devoid of emotional attachment:

What sex evolved to do is get information from two sets of genes so you get offspring that's not identical to you. Otherwise you just keep getting the same thing over and over again like hydra or starfish. So sex essentially

is information. / You don't think that while we're doing it do you? / It doesn't hurt to know it. Information and also love. (Churchill, 2013, p. 49)

Angelaki believes that the play brings attention to the current crisis in self-perception and communication that individuals are experiencing. This is primarily due to the difficulty in balancing their private and public lives. The play's title suggests a dedication to introspection but also exposes the delicate quality of love and other interconnected ideas, such as empathy and compassion. As people become more isolated in their own bubbles with social media serving as a platform for virtual communication and a means of avoiding physical interactions, the definition of love becomes less clear in today's world (2017, p. 34). In line with Angelaki's perspective, the current crisis can be seen as a crisis of storytelling, as Han also argues. For Han, the rapid influx of information and communication causes individuals to relinquish control and become subject to an accelerated data exchange. This phenomenon is both stupefying and disruptive. The surge in information has rendered individuals incapable of managing their communication, which leads to an overwhelming amount of data that escapes their control. As a result, people are left to navigate an environment of unprecedented complexity, where they are forced to contend with information overload and its attendant consequences (2024, p. 7). Han is of the opinion that communities can be created through narratives, but storytelling only creates a temporary and commodified community of consumers. The digital screen has replaced the fire around which humans gathered to share stories, which has isolated people as individual consumers. People are now lonely due to this consumerist culture, and the content shared on social media often lacks the depth and connection that genuine storytelling offers. Capitalism has appropriated storytelling and transformed it into a consumable form that charges products with emotion and promises unique experiences. In this way, storytelling has become a tool for selling products rather than building genuine connections between people (2024, pp. ix-x).

Han frequently stresses the importance of using technology and digital communication to influence modern society, which is a fundamental aspect of infocracy. *Love and Information* exhibits remnants of this concept. The characters in the play use smartphones, laptops, and social media, highlighting the importance of technology in interpersonal relationships. It clearly shows how technology can help and hinder communication and relationships. Moreover, the play explores how human relationships have become fragmented in the digital age and reflects the disjointed nature of modern communication.

Throughout the play, relationships are portrayed as fleeting and superficial, often reduced to a disconnected exchange of information. Han's infocracy also questions the nature of truth and reality in an information-saturated world. *Love and Information* involves scenes that similarly explore the subjectivity of truth and the flexibility of reality. Han thinks that "[i]n an infocracy, information is a weapon" (2022, p. 22). Churchill shares the same view. She exposes the manipulative nature of the overwhelming flow of information in a society that adheres to neoliberal principles within the play. The characters of the play struggle with the overwhelming amount of data and messages they encounter, mirroring the non-stop stream of news, social media updates, and notifications of the information age. This overload can easily manipulate the sense of reality. In this manner, the information regime "seizes the psyche by way of a psychopolitics" (Han, 2022, p. 3).

Love and Information proposes that information can be manipulated and distorted in an infocracy. This is what Han calls truthiness. He suggests that our collective perception of reality and its verifiable truths are eroding amidst the proliferation of false information, deliberate misinformation, and conspiracy theories in the contemporary era. The dissemination of information occurs in a hyperreal domain, removed from objective reality, and the concept of facticity has been discarded (2022, p. 44). Han also believes that "[t]ruthiness reflects the crisis of truth. It means a felt truth that lacks any objectivity or factual solidity. Its subjective wilfulness, which is its essence, eliminates the truth. This wilfulness expresses the nihilistic attitude towards reality. It is a pathological phenomenon of digitalization" (Han, 2022, p. 47). Aligned with this concept of truth and how it is perceived, in the scene called "Spies," Churchill draws parallels to the Iraq invasion and highlights the role of the media in influencing public opinion through manipulation:

So we went to war on a completely / yes but how were they to know / they did know, they knew, he'd already admitted it wasn't true/he said it to Germans / and the CIA knew / but Bush and Blair didn't know / they had to rely / they wanted it to be true / they thought it was true, everyone thought / not everyone no, plenty of people, I didn't, I always knew it wasn't true / you can't have known / I knew it was all made-up stuff / and how did you know? / because of what America's like, what it wanted to do / you didn't know it was made up, you wanted it to be made up, that's what you wanted to be true. (Churchill, 2013, p. 25)

Believing that “[t]ruth is a medium of power” (Han, 2019, p. 90), Han confirms that “[i]nformation is cumulative and additive, whereas truth is exclusive and selective. In contrast to information, it does not accumulate like snow. One does not encounter it in drifts. There is no such thing as a mass of truth” (2017c, p. 40). In accordance with this view, later, in the scene titled “God’s Voice,” Churchill depicts the world of post-truth politics by giving voice to the 43rd President of the United States, George W. Bush, who believed that his presidency and the invasion of Iraq were divine orders from God. As the commander of the coalition forces, President Bush uses religious reasons to justify the invasion of Iraq and frames it as a necessary measure in the global fight against terrorism:

God told you to do it? / He did, yes. / How? / How do you mean, how? / Did you hear words? / It was the word of God. / But something you could hear with your ears, actual words from outside you? / They came into me. / The words. / What God said. / So you didn’t exactly hear...? / In my heart. (Churchill, 2013, p. 29)

The invasion of Iraq, as depicted in the play, is congruous with Han’s notion concerning the predicament of the narration crisis. According to Han’s idea, we live in a post-narrative era. He confirms that religion is a typical narrative with profound truth, which helps explain the uncertainties of life. Christianity, in particular, is a story that permeates every aspect of life and provides a foundation for existence (2024, p. viii). But neoliberalism, today, utilizes religion as a means of manipulation to guarantee its power. The play aims to elucidate this precise point. Similarly, in the “Torture” scene, the statement of an interrogator that “[w]e’re not paid extra for it to be true” (Churchill, 2013, p. 9) serves as another concrete example of truthiness. It is also possible to interpret these phrases as referencing Han’s infodemic idea. Han believes that democracy is a gradual and laborious process that necessitates patience and time. The infodemic, the viral dissemination of information, primarily undermines the democratic process. Justifications and arguments cannot be condensed into a tweet and quickly go viral. Viral media lack the logical consistency that speech is known for. Beyond truth and falsity, information has dignity and follows its own logic and temporal constraints. First, fake news is information. It starts to have an impact even before the verification procedure has begun. The truth is consistently unable to keep up with the information flying over it. Thus, any effort to combat the infodemic with the truth will fail. An infodemic is not susceptible to the truth (Han, 2022, p. 24).

It is essential to keep in mind that in *Love and Information*, Churchill repeatedly emphasizes the impact of technology on human communication and collaboration. The play portrays characters using technological devices and highlights how they shape interactions and how people consume information. In this regard, technology is shown as a barrier to real emotional connection throughout the play. As Luckhurst puts it, *Love and Information* explores the notion of the increasing dissection of human existence and the erosion of empathy and interpersonal bonds resulting from excessive consumption and the acceptance of warfare and horrific acts of brutality as routine (2015, pp. 180–181). The play portrays a society consumed by social media and technology, neglecting genuine human connections. The scene titled “Remote” describes a situation with no internet or mobile phone coverage, and the main character cannot cope due to the dependence on electronic connectivity to feel alive: “You don’t seem to have a tv. / There used to be one but it stopped working. The reception’s no good anyhow. / I brought my laptop. You might have a reception problem there. / It’s not that I need it. There’s no phone signal is there?” (Churchill, 2013, p.13). These words picture a place without internet or cell service as unsettling and unbearable, as the person only feels alive when s/he has technological connectivity (Luckhurst, 2015, p. 181). In this regard, the play lucidly illustrates the logic of infocracy and depicts a world where narration is lost, as Han underlines. For Han, today, touchscreens have replaced telescreens and television screens, with the smartphone taking center stage as the new medium of domination. In this information age, people are no longer passive bystanders who consume entertainment. Instead, they actively transmit and consume information, making communication a form of addiction and compulsion. The constant frenzy of communication can keep people in a perpetual state of immaturity, as the information regime’s formula for domination seems to be: communicating ourselves to death. (2022, p. 17).

Conclusion

In summary, Caryl Churchill demonstrates her remarkable ability to innovatively express significant facts about humanity’s current state of existence in a highly digitalized world. *Love and Information* is an extraordinary postdramatic text that offers a detailed exploration of the contemporary landscape of infocracy and the crisis of narration proposed by Byung-Chul Han. In the play, Churchill uses postdramatic aesthetics to challenge and engage the audience. She breaks from classical dramaturgy by deconstructing time and creating recognizable characters. Furthermore, she challenges

the traditional unities of time, place, action, and cause-and-effect relationships by integrating media visuals on stage, adjusting symbols, advocating for equality, highlighting physicality, and disrupting reality. In the course of the play, she also explores how different facets of human life, including emotions, desires, and cognitive processes, are negotiated in a digital, information-driven social environment.

Churchill has structured her play with the understanding that humanity has shifted its focus from storytelling to gathering and disseminating information, as pointed out by Han in his examination of the post-narrative period. The play illustrates contemporary global issues through episodes and tries to show people their dependence on information that causes them to see reality one-dimensionally. Through various parts, *Love and Information* depicts the isolation and loneliness that can result from the superficiality of contemporary relationships. Despite the constant influx of information, the characters in the play often fail to connect on an emotional level again and again. Moreover, Churchill plays with language and communication throughout the text. Thus, like a tweet or text message, some scenes are fast-paced and filled with fragmented dialogue, while others use silence or non-verbal communication to convey meaning. This experiment reflects the diversity of communication styles in today's society, which Han refers to as infocracy.

Churchill's way of telling the story gives a unique perspective on human life. This viewpoint is different from what the characters think and also different from combining all their views, which Han sees as a crisis of narration. In today's dataist societies, individuals are deeply involved in a wide range of digital connectivity, different modes of communication, news distribution, advertising, and social media platforms. The play's exploration of the effects of technology and the challenges of forming deep connections echo Han's observations on infocracy and the crisis of narration in the digital age. *Love and Information* also examines the transient nature of memory and information in information-driven societies and draws attention to their complexities and challenges. The examination of *Love and Information* as a postdramatic text in the light of Han's thoughts on narration and infocracy also shows that in today's world, the constant influx of new data tends to override existing information, causing memories to lose their importance and become less permanent. Consequently, it can be quite challenging to maintain the significance of meaningful moments and relationships. In the end, *Love and Information* depicts the drawbacks of neoliberalism and presents moments of resilience and hope. Despite the overwhelming amount of information,

the various characters try to form genuine relationships and understand each other, emphasizing the enduring human capacity for love and empathy, which can be seen as a glimmer of hope for the future of humanity.

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“Everything Must Leave Some Kind of Mark”: An Agambenian Reading of Tom McCarthy’s *Remainder*

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ABSTRACT

The concept of “remnant” or “remainder” holds a special place in Giorgio Agamben’s philosophy. Across his discussions of language/law, bios/zoe, and potentiality/impotentiality, Agamben dismantles binary oppositions through the concept of ‘remainder,’ focusing on the zone of indistinction that exceeds division and dialectical thinking. The concept of remainder, which functions as a key in the thought of Agamben, is also the title of Tom McCarthy’s debut novel *Remainder* (2005). The novel unfolds the story of an unnamed thirty-year-old man whose life takes a dramatic turn after an accident involving “something falling from the sky.” Following his emergence from a coma, he finds himself in a threshold where he is a remnant of his former identity. For months, he endeavours to recover both his memory and motor control with the expectation that he will eventually return to a semblance of normalcy. But contrary to expectations, he develops a fixation on recreating, re-enacting, and simulating specific scenes and situations that linger in his memory as disjointed images. From Agamben’s standpoint, he might be approached as the ‘remainder’ of the human/inhuman binary, akin to a ‘remnant’ during the time of the end, a parody of the sovereign who suspends law to create his state of exception, or a ‘kink’ in the smoothly operating system of simulations. This paper offers a reading of Tom McCarthy’s *Remainder* from Giorgio Agamben’s perspective and provides an analysis of its eccentric character’s relationship with time, space, and reality by delving into the threshold he occupies.

Keywords: *Remainder*, kairotic time, *homo sacer*, Tom McCarthy, Giorgio Agamben



Introduction

The concept of "remnant" or "remainder" holds a special place in Giorgio Agamben's philosophy. It refers to a zone of indiscernibility that exceeds division and dialectical thinking. This zone emerges when the binary oppositions of human and animal collapse because "the animality of the human can never coincide with humanity without residue" (Agamben, 1999, p. 127). The meanings that Agamben attributes to "remainder" and its variations might be aligned with Lyotard's concept of "differend", Derrida's "différance", Deleuze's "zone of indistinction" and Adorno's "negative dialectics". Agamben employs this concept in diverse contexts as a constituent of his thought. For example, in language, the remainder appears as an unbridgeable gap between the sayable and unsayable, or in poetry as "the prolonged hesitation between sound and sense" (Watkin, 2011, p. 178). As a concept, "remnant" represents the potential to disrupt the 'anthropological machine,' which operates by differentiating humans from animals, and indicates the rise of a new, blessed life after this disruption (Mills, 2011, p. 89). Agamben uses this concept as a linchpin to render coherence to his diverse analyses ranging from concentration camps to comatose patients, from the prisoners of Guantanamo to George Bush's state of exception after 9/11, and from politics to aesthetics.

In Agamben's context, "Remainder becomes sensible when a *caesura*, a division or break occurs in moments that language fails to say when the thought is paused" (Agamben, 2005, p. 64, emphasis original). Caesura here refers to the action of kairotic time that intervenes between chronos and eschaton, creating a "zone of indiscernibility, in which the past is dislocated into the present and the present is extended into the past" (Agamben, 2005, p. 74). Caesura implies a break between linear time and the end of time where the remainder emerges as "the time of the end," i.e. the messianic time or *kairos*.

The concept of remainder, which functions as a key in the thought of Agamben, is also the title of Tom McCarthy's debut novel, *Remainder* (2005). The novel, with its stunningly strange story and character, has become a great success and made Tom McCarthy one of the most interesting writers in contemporary British fiction. Tom McCarthy is also, with the philosopher Simon Critchley, the co-founder of the International Necronautical Society (INS), and since 1999, he has been the general secretary of this semi-fictitious avant-garde network which operates through publications, manifestos, live events, media interventions, or art exhibitions that place "death," with a very affirmative attitude, as the central focus of scrutiny and display. In time, McCarthy's

popularity increased as a bright novelist, and *Remainder* is followed by *Men in Space*, *C*, *Satin Island*, and his latest novel *The Making of Incarnation* which came out in 2021.

Giorgio Agamben and Tom McCarthy, as two writers/thinkers, are not less philosophical and enigmatic, in degree and capacity, from one another. McCarthy's experimental novels can be interpreted within the frameworks of various philosophers such as Jean Baudrillard (simulations), Jean-Paul Sartre (existentialism), Gilles Deleuze (difference and repetitions), Alain Badiou (event), Quentin Meillassoux (materialism and contingency) and many others. Although we know, from his interviews and essays, that McCarthy read and admired Giorgio Agamben (Clarke, 2022; Huber, 2018; Rourke, 2010; Tuten, 2015), Agamben is seldom mentioned among the philosophers whose effect is explicit in McCarthy's fiction. The aim of this paper is not to assert that McCarthy wrote *Remainder* under the direct influence of Agamben; rather it seeks to demonstrate that Agamben's and McCarthy's thinking coincide, and to propose that McCarthy's *Remainder* can be read as the literary counterpart to Agamben's elaboration of "remainder" as a concept. *Homo sacer*, kairotic time, potentiality, and threshold are the four prominent concepts in Agamben's philosophy to each of which "remainder" is integral. Deliberately or not, McCarthy employs in his novel a strategy that can be associated with these concepts in constructing the character and his story.

***Remainder* (2005)**

Remainder is a remarkable, funny, yet deeply disturbing novel. It is a highly suggestive and intriguing work that invites interpretations from various theoretical perspectives. In terms of genre, the novel defies classifications: it encompasses elements of a psychological novel, a thriller, a modernist satire, a postmodern parody, a contemporary comedy, a realist novel, and a slipstream fantasy fiction all at once. However, it subverts our typical expectations associated with each of these generic categories and transcends them. McKenzie Wark aptly describes the novel in her preface as follows,

Remainder is not a Postmodern novel. Or not only. Nor does it claim to be doing anything new. It *imitates* the once new, now old methods of Modernism. It is about –and indeed maybe it is– the remainder, the reverb, the noise of communication, rather than the act of communication or even mimesis. It is about the leftover trash heap of aesthetic strategies. (2016, p. x, emphasis original)

"Remainder" is not merely the title or the theme of the novel; rather, the novel itself can be viewed as the remainder of the novel genre, representing what remains in the 21st century from realist, modernist, and postmodernist writing strategies "after everything novelistic has been subtracted from [them]" (Vermeulen, 2012, p. 549). In the novel, everything can be seen or treated as a remainder: the protagonist is a remainder (of an accident or his former identity), the settlement money is a remainder, the re-enactments serve as remainders of "event" or reality, memory is a remainder, "matter" is a remainder, the hero's trauma is a remainder, the narrative itself is the remainder of the narrator's experiences, and the novel is constructed as the remainder of fiction in a world where mimesis has become impossible.

Remainder is a first-person narrative following an unnamed 30-year-old man, a single Londoner who worked as a market researcher until he was severely injured in an accident involving "something falling from the sky" (McCarthy, 2016, p. 5). He remains in coma for several months, then regains consciousness and spends additional months in the hospital recovering his motor skills and relearning "all the activities we normally perform unthinkingly" (Attridge, 2016, "Tom McCarthy's Fiction"). After extensive treatment, he returns home as a mere remnant of his former self. Suffering from amnesia, he struggles to distinguish between genuine memories and fabricated images. As an extremely embarrassed figure, he feels estranged from his own body, considers himself "inauthentic, duplicate, unnatural, and second-rate" because he "cannot just be," and feels like an "interloper on the whole scene [of life], a voyeur" (McCarthy, 2016, p. 49). To him, "all life feels fake, filled with impostors, performers of second-hand actions, repetitive, camp; everything is formed of patterns, yet he remains on the outside, unable to blend in" (McCarthy, 2016, p. 50). He finds himself "bored by everything, everybody around him enormously" (p. 55). As compensation for his injuries, he receives a settlement of 8.5 million pounds from the company which was charged responsible for the accident. However, the vast sum fails to excite him at all. Instead, he is more intrigued by the numerical figure of eight than its monetary value. He muses, "The eight was perfect, neat: a curved figure infinitely turning back into itself. But then the half. Why had they added the half? It seemed to me so messy, this half: a leftover fragment, a shard of detritus... redundant, surplus to requirements..." (McCarthy, 2016, p. 9).

The settlement money and the word "settlement" worm its way to him into and out of coma. He describes his obsession with the word as follows:

The Settlement. That word: *Settlement*. *Set-l-ment*. As I lay abject, supine, tractioned and trussed up, all sorts of tubes and wires pumping one thing into my body..., running through my useless flesh and organs like sea water through a sponge-during the months I spent in hospital, this word planted itself in me and grew. (McCarthy, 2016, p. 6, emphasis original)

The terms of the settlement prohibit him from discussing the accident and expect him to move on with the compensation money granted to him. Consequently, he becomes fixated on re-settling, repeating what they did to him with the money. Just as the settlement money was an artificial and temporary solution to his trauma and losses, so would his re-settlements be a means to alleviate his feeling of dizziness caused by the things he did not understand (p. 7). Thus, motivated by an urge to do things, to “undo matter,” re-build places, and re-enact scenes to gain a glimpse of the meaning or essence of things, he holds the belief that there is “No Doing without Understanding: the accident bequeathed me that forever, an eternal detour” (p. 21).

His apathy and alienation take on a new form when an epiphanic moment, “a sudden sense of déjà vu, a revelation” (McCarthy, 2016, p. 58) creates a *caesura* and kindles a flame in his heart. During a house party, a crack in the wall of the bathroom triggers memories of a time he actually felt serene and intense, a time he had been “real without first understanding how to try to be: cut out the detour” (McCarthy, 2016, p. 60). To feel real again, he decides to recreate this image, the reconstruction of which turns into an all-or-none project, an obsession for which he does not hesitate to throw millions of pounds around. He buys blocks of buildings, hires property developers, and architects, employs interior designers, plumbers, carpenters, actors, and a facilitator Nazrul Ram Vyas who will henceforth act as “an extra set of limbs issuing his commands and instructions” (McCarthy, 2016, p. 69). Soon he employs many people to work for him as re-enactors. Every smell, color, taste, sound, and every other detail has to be recreated to generate the feeling of authenticity which he experiences in the form of “a tingling in the base of his spine” (McCarthy, 2016, p. 10). Exactitude matters to him in the same way as it mattered to the cartographers in Borges’ tale “On the Exactitude of Science”—the tale mentioned by Baudrillard in “Simulacra and Simulations” (1998, p. 166). All the re-enactors start to work on 24-hour calls in buildings or places that had “on” and “off” modes, repeating their tasks incessantly whenever he switches over to on mode. They are paid well to do as they are commanded: to re-enact insignificant roles such as frying the liver, playing the piano, emptying the dustbin, or arranging cats on the roof. “What

they lacked was comprehension" (McCarthy, 2016, p. 101), the same thing that we lack, as his readers, in following the logic of his purposeful purposelessness. He becomes a sovereign figure whose plans are unquestionable, no matter how absurd they sound. Like a God, he re-creates spaces and controls time, fills the spaces with things, humans, animals, food, rules, orders, and events. It is possible to observe these re-enactments as the simulations of our world which reduces us to puppets repeating insignificant tasks on a daily basis, or a parody of religions that forbid questioning God's will or designs no matter how illogical they may sound. McCarthy's hero overcomes boredom by activating his imagination to experience authenticity, and in that, he affirms Agamben who criticizes the modern times for depriving us of authentic experience. Agamben relates this deprivation to "the removal of imagination from the realm of experience, and to the individual's lack of active intellect which is the basis for real knowledge" (Agamben, 1993a, p. 33).

McCarthy's protagonist remains aloof, completely detached, except for moments when he includes himself in the simulated reality through exclusion. Following the crack-in-the-wall project, which costs him 3.5 million pounds, he embarks on a simulation of a tire repair shop, where he repeatedly examines the disappearance and reappearance of liquids in a hypnotic fashion. His subsequent projects increasingly draw inspiration from spontaneous, real-life events rather than his memories. His third project revolves around a street shooting that occurs in the neighbourhood. He procures a whole area on the street to experience "the tingling," meticulously recreating every detail to feel the reality of the murder and the materiality of the dead body lying on the asphalt. He is fascinated by the dead body and describes his fascination as follows:

The truth is that, for me, this man had become a symbol of perfection. It may have been clumsy to all from his bike, but in dying beside the bollards on the tarmac he'd done what I wanted to do: merge with the space around him, sunk and flowed into it until there was no distance between it and him –and merged too, with his actions, merged to the extent of having no more consciousness of them. He'd stopped being separate, removed, imperfect. Cut out the detour. Then both mind and actions had resolved themselves into pure stasis. (p. 178)

For days and nights, weeks and months, he re-rotates the patterns, repeats the re-enactments, and remains constantly ensnared in a loop. The novel progresses into a

thriller with his final project: a simulation of a bank heist, once again alluding to Baudrillard. However, this time the project ends in failure—a “fuck up” (McCarthy, 2016, p. 252)—because, after numerous rehearsals in a warehouse, he decides to execute it in the real bank, with real guns, in real-time. The unrepeatability of the event, the sense of emergency, and its challenge to any clear distinction between the “real” and the “fake” intensify his tingling. However, the replacement of the rehearsed simulations by real-time action is doomed to leave a remainder: contingency spoils everything. Ultimately, two people are killed simply because of a “kink” (wrinkle) in the carpet of the bank which was present in the simulation but absent in the real bank (Vermeulen, 2012, p. 560). The sheer actuality of the event happening here and now fascinates the protagonist, and although the project fails, he recalls it “as a very happy day” (McCarthy, 2016, p. 252) and as his biggest achievement. He escapes from the crime scene by a private jet. The pilot, unknowingly carrying away a murderer, is commanded by the tower to turn back. The protagonist wielding a real shotgun, hijacks the plane and orders the pilot to continuously turn away and keep circling, drawing eights in the sky for an indefinite period of time. The figure, when viewed vertically as eight, tilts to the side, horizontally becoming the sign for infinity. It is as if the half that spoiled the evenness of “8” in the settlement money is erased, and the protagonist, who once felt like a “leftover fragment, shard of detritus” is no longer surplus to reality. Finally, he merges with it.

The novel concludes with the protagonist seeking neither justification nor empathy, totally irresponsible for his decisions or actions, beyond, elevated, enlightened, unpunishable, suspended, and content to be in an infinite circuit of existence. What Tom McCarthy said of Serge Carrefax, a character in his novel *C*, can be repeated for the protagonist of *Remainder*:

This is it, you see: what we find in technology and networks is desire. Which doesn't mean the desiring individual; it means desiring consciousness itself. That's why I wanted Serge Carrefax to be more than an individual; if he was a circuit, he'd be over-charged. The surge is too much, it blows. It's about the desire for impossibility. Giorgio Agamben, when describing melancholia (which Serge has in spades), says that the condition isn't at all a detachment from the world, even though it may seem like it; in fact, it's an investment in the world so much that the desire for the world exceeds its own limit. The melancholic wants what is impossible; he wants impossibility itself – to experience it and to merge with it. To surge towards

it. That's why the melancholic is the ultimate rebel. (McCarthy, [Interview with Lee Rourke], 2010)

Similarly, the hero of *Remainder* embodies that circuit overcharged with a surge that compels him to invest his melancholy in the world. He creates a short-circuit, a rupture in life as a melancholic who seeks to push his state of being into extremes to merge with life, and overcome the inauthenticity caused by the caesura that divides *bios* and *zoe*. In this regard, he may be seen as a rebel imbued with more life than the people around him.

The reactions to the novel and its anti-hero have been various: For some, it is disturbing because, contrary to the novelistic tradition, its "protagonist offers no emotional traction for the reader, and McCarthy scrupulously avoids relatability" (Duncan, 2010, p. 6). Others view it as the preposterous transformation of a vulnerable man to a monster who kills just because he wants to and does not sacralise life (Sarıkaya Şen, 2017, p. 61). Some approach it as a novel that "adopts the grammar but not the psychology of post-trauma" (Vermeulen, 2012, p. 551).

In line with Agamben's comic paradigm, it is possible to interpret it as a story of a man who, by forging an authentic life, attains happiness. This form of life, which Agamben sees as the precondition of happy life, can only be attained by a remnant figure who must renounce his *homo sacer* identity and embrace his potentiality as a threshold figure existing in kairotic time. For Agamben, the remnant is the only real political subject (Agamben, 2005, p. 57) because it signifies the liberation of the subject from boundaries. From this perspective, we may cease to view the hero as an inhuman or mentally disturbed figure, and instead perceive him as a melancholic individual who, by pursuing the impossible, becomes the ultimate rebel.

Homo Sacer/Sovereign

In a recent interview with Rebecca Clarke, Tom McCarthy referred to Giorgio Agamben as a philosopher he admires because "he elevates the pause, the interval, the in-between and the unresolved to ontological conditions" (2022). *Homo sacer* is the metaphorical figure, the embodiment of the in-betweenness that Agamben employs to illustrate the ontological meaning of threshold.

Agamben defines *homo sacer* or bare life as what the sovereign power produces by suspending the law. This form of life arises when *bios* (social life) and *zoe* (pure life common to all beings) are treated as binaries. In other words, whenever there is a division between *bios* and *zoe*, humanity and animality, bare life emerges and whenever there is a zone of indistinction, bare life leaves a remainder. *Homo sacer* represents the abandoned life that can be killed without committing homicide, and without it being considered a sacrifice (Agamben, 1998, p. 83, 88). For Agamben, life can only become "sacred" (as in *homo sacer*, and hence, pejoratively) when life-as-zoe has been distinguished from life-as-bios. Accordingly, he conceives the ideal life as free from the processes of sacralisation that entail this split and inflect the polity.

Homo sacer is a limit figure who exists in the ban, excluded by way of inclusion, and signifies a subject who has no personal "form-of-life", and no potential for happiness, because his life and its form are separated from each other. Agamben traces this way of being through his analyses of concentration camps, comatose patients, prison inmates, or refugees, but also notes that it is the default status of anyone whatsoever because the state of exception has become the norm, the matrix of politics now, and transformed every human being into bare life.

In McCarthy's *Remainder*, the unnamed hero, allegorically representing everyman, used to be a *homo sacer*, an abandoned figure, until the accident. He was an ordinary precariat, a vulnerable white-collar who lived under the sword of Damocles in the capitalist world order, symbolised by the technological parts and pieces that fell on him, causing the accident. The value of his life was equated monetarily; the cost of his injuries could easily be quantified and settled. If he died, nobody would care for him or simply consider him a victim; his death wouldn't be notable or sanctified. Like us, he was merely a statistical figure, a nobody within the system.

For Agamben, the only way out of this status is to render the system inoperative by way of suspending the law, deactivating it, and dissolving the relation between law and life, norm and fact. Similarly, McCarthy's hero refuses to compromise and seeks refuge in his simulations, where he unleashes his potential to construct a form-of-life and renders the state apparatuses inoperative. His re-constructed spaces become his states of exception, operating under his rule and freeing him from ethical and political boundaries. These spaces are integrated into the real economy of life, in actual streets or locations in the heart of London, yet they remain excluded from the public domain. Within these spaces,

he is non-relational, "no longer bound by the rules, everyone else is but not [him]" (McCarthy, 2016, p. 201). As a sovereign figure, he unintentionally produces bare lives not because he wills, but because his employees voluntarily submit themselves to his will in exchange for handsome payment. From the sovereign's perspective, life (whether human or animal) is neutral, and death is not perceived as tragic. This neutrality is perceived by some readers as monstrous when the hero refuses to aid African people, poor or starving people using the huge sum of money for donations. Similarly, the hero sees nothing abnormal in pushing real cats from the roof of the building, disregarding their lives; instead, he regards them as "pure matter" or mere accessories to satisfy his desire for authenticity. He refuses to compromise on any of the elements of his memory, even if it means becoming indifferent to death (such as pushing the cats or killing the actors without hesitation). He does not sacralise life—not even his own life—in order to transcend or merge with the sheer materiality of being and feel authentic, real. However, he also understands that authenticity can only be achieved by approaching materiality inauthentically.

In the eleventh doctrine of "The New York Declaration: INS Statement on Inauthenticity", Tom McCarthy and Simon Critchley perceive inauthenticity as the core of the self, rooted solely in an experience of division or of splitting (2007, p. 9). Therefore, they reject all cults of authenticity on the grounds of being melodramatic and tragic in approaching this split of the self, or life and death. Thereby, they prefer a comic acknowledgement that undermines uniqueness instead of the tragic affirmation which tries to reconcile the freedom of the subject with the causal necessity of the material world. In their sixteenth thesis, they adhere to comedy, which is the mechanical splitting of the self, the dividualisation or disintegration of the self into insubstantiality (2007, p. 12). This comic vision explains the indifference of *Remainder's* hero toward death and his refusal to treat it as something melodramatic or tragic, as nothing about death or life is inherently authentic. In this regard, the INS Declaration affirms Agamben's philosophy of (in) authenticity which is similarly built on a comic paradigm.

Agamben, following Heidegger, discusses authentic and inauthentic life in *The Time That Remains*. Inauthentic life, for Heidegger, defines everyday being-in-the-world: when we are absorbed in ongoing activities, defined by prevailing norms, and inattentive to our contingent, finite, temporal existence. Authentic life, by contrast, acknowledges and appropriates its existential and temporal finitude (as cited in Sinnerbrink, 2011, p. 102). However, Agamben chooses to treat authentic and inauthentic life as mutually inclusive and offers an anti-dialectical approach to them.

Authentic life can be attained by overcoming the state of expropriation. In *The Coming Community*, Agamben introduces the concept of “expropriation” and states that “Existence within spectacular societies is such that there is no longer any space of authentic or proper being since everything has been expropriated and commodified under conditions of global capitalism” (1993b, pp. 78–79). Agamben proposes another form of being instead of “proper” or inauthentic being and introduces the concept of “whatever being” as a new ontology. For Sinnerbrink “an ethics and politics of the improper would therefore mean finding new uses for the inauthentic that defines our empty modern experience. Lacking any determinate identity, existing essentially as singularity or ‘whatever being’ making use of this impropriety for new ends” (2011, p. 102).

Expropriation is the gradual erosion of human control over the products of their work, and the diminishment of the abilities and attributes that define their humanity. Agamben identifies this process as the entire history of Western politics and social organisation which is crystallised in the history of sovereignty, the process by which life is expropriated by the sovereign ban, through the removal of the voice, and the separation of *zoe* and *bios* (Molad, 2011, p. 66). Agamben thinks that to overcome this split, a new ethical experience is necessary. And for him, “the only ethical experience is the experience of being one’s own potentiality, one’s own inactuality” (Colebrook & Maxwell, 2016, p. 33) in forming an (in)authentic life. For this, one has to be indifferent, non-relational to time as *chronos*, which is the temporality of *potestas* or politics. McCarthy’s hero does exactly what Agamben proposes for (in)authentic life by depriving the system of its privileges of relations, to embrace his inactuality or potentiality to “not do” in the way Melville’s *Bartleby* did. It is not the money that gives McCarthy’s hero the opportunity of liberation but simply his will, like *Bartleby*, to “not do” what most of us would do. The hero describes the goal of his re-enactments as follows:

Their goal was to allow me to be fluent, natural, to merge with actions and with objects until there was nothing separating us- and nothing separating me from the experience that I was having: no understanding, no learning first and emulating second-hand, no self-reflection, nothing: no detour. I’d gone to these extraordinary lengths in order to be real. (McCarthy, 2016, p. 214)

If we approach him from Agamben’s perspective, there is nothing abnormal about McCarthy’s hero insofar as we remember Agamben’s statement that, “human beings

neither are nor have to be any essence, any nature, or any specific destiny, and their condition is the emptiest and the most insubstantial of all" (Agamben, 2000, pp. 94–95). Ontologically, there is no such thing as a pre-determined historical or universal task assigned to humanity, or there is nothing sacred about human life or death. However, this fact has been veiled for centuries by religions and political systems. In other words, man is essentially workless, without any tasks to achieve (Prozorov, 2014, p. 33). The hero's futile re-enactments, repetitive actions, and choices expose our inherent worklessness and the essential inoperativity that is embedded in the core of our being. When we read the novel from the traditional humanist perspective, we may be disturbed by the hero's approach to money, people, cats, time, and space, perceiving him as alien or inhuman. What we typically consider as "normal" life is filled with tasks and duties that reduce us to zealots like Naz, the hero's facilitator, or monthly paid workers like the re-enactors who waste their lives for jobs they cannot comprehend. Theirs is what Agamben calls expropriated and inauthentic life. Instead, enormously bored by the boundaries of such a life, the hero chooses to suspend and re-expropriate them to be able to own his life as a "whatever singularity."

Kairotic Time and Potentiality

This encounter of the human with their radical being-without-work can only occur through the suspension of *chronos* in *kairotic* time, which leads us to the next aspect integral to Agamben's concept of remainder. Agamben's thought on time is best understood through his discussions of *homo sacer* and "whatever being." He describes his concept of "whatever being" or "whatever singularity" in *The Coming Community* as a status that rejects any notion of belonging and identity, as a pure singularity that severs any obligation to belonging in order to recover identity from expropriation (1993b, p. 11). He maintains that "Having no identity and no belonging, the whatever singularities cannot possibly build a *societas*, and as such they disavow the logic and workings of sovereignty; therefore, the "whatever singularity [. . .] is the principal enemy of the state" (p. 87). Agamben introduces "whatever being" as a threshold figure of (im)potentiality that affirms the essential worklessness of man, and invites us to take and love it with all its predicates (1993b, p. 2). This form of being is inoperative and indifferent to redemption because it is irredeemable. It exists in limbo, in-between and the only time that functions in this threshold is the *kairotic* time, which refers to "the time of the end" (i.e. the Messianic time) where *chronos* is rendered inoperative. Agamben categorises performative ethics that is shaped by will and necessity as

moralistic, because they entail “operativity and command.” Instead, he proposes an ethics liberated entirely from the concepts of duty and will or imagines an ontology, a theology of being where life does not have a proper end, i.e. beyond operativity and command (Antakyalıoğlu, 2022, p. 90).

As the enemy of the state, this singularity’s activity embodies a form of profanation. Profanation is a process of re-expropriation that facilitates the emergence of an authentic form of life. Profanation involves the desacralization of the sacred (such as life and death) in *homo sacer* (sacred human) and aims to liberate it. Playfulness is essential for deactivating the ritualistic aspect of the sacred. The time of the play is suspended because the play is the pathway to and practice of a messianic (kairotic) or redeemed time. Thus, profanation entails the temporal disruption that deactivates the logic of the capital (sovereignty) and the temporality (chronos) governing it.

In *Infancy and History*, Agamben defines *kairos* as the time that enables man’s liberation from the *chronos* to own his freedom in the moment. It is “the abrupt and sudden conjunction where decision grasps opportunity, and life is fulfilled in the moment” (Agamben, 1993a, pp.101–104). Kairotic time, by creating a rupture in chronos, carries an emancipatory possibility.

After the accident, the hero abandons what has abandoned him, namely the imposed politics of life, and suspends the tragic paradigm. He seeks refuge in his simulations, where he can control time and space. While planning the process of simulations, both before and after the re-enactments, chronological time operates; he meticulously forms timetables and organizes the time flow only to suspend and abolish it at the opportune moments. He recreates space as a zone of indiscernibility, where fact and fiction, real and simulation, living and acting become indistinguishable. The “tingling” signifies his potential for forming a life that cannot be regulated by the existing symbolic order. However, in his inoperative, playful, ritualistic and repetitive simulations, he is never inactive. He “plays with the law just as children play with disused objects, not in order to restore them to their canonical use but to free them from it for good” (Agamben, 2005b, p. 64). He controls time, feels authentic in the suspended time and the replicated spaces, staging his own scenes by deactivating the programmable time, the eschaton (chronological time or telos) which is the time of organization especially for the legal authority. In the kairotic time, he finds the potential for change and transformation which is signified by the tingling in his spine that enables him to eliminate the primacy

of actuality on which the ontology of *homo sacer* and the sovereign power is founded. In McCarthy's *Remainder*, the hero can be taken as a perfect illustration of Agamben's idea of whatever singularity since he suspends the economy of life (polity) through his simulations to abolish time and profane the *homo sacer* identity that is imposed on him. His bank heist project is an attempt to make a bit of space, within time where "time becomes a topographic surface in which he can find cracks and partitions, enclaves and defiles" (Hart et al., "Interview with Tom McCarthy," 2013, p. 667).

Agamben defines "potentiality as that through which Being founds itself *sovereignly*, which is to say, without anything preceding or determining it other than its own ability not to be" (Agamben, 1998, p. 46). McCarthy's hero happily embraces his own ability "not to be" when he identifies with the unrepeatable, emergent and contingent reality that reminds itself with the kink. The novel ends with the hero in a threshold, "weightless –or at least differently weighted: light but dense at the same time" (McCarthy, p. 129), "not coming from, nor going to anywhere, beyond telos and redemption" (Agamben, 1999, p. 182). He represents the possibility of negative biopolitics, one that deprives life of any relation to the law by establishing life as non-relational, and suspending the sovereign ban to recover his substance as potentiality and "to accede to a kind of authenticity through his strange, pointless residual" (McCarthy, p. 231).

Conclusion

Agamben is contested by many "for seeking to theorise life as enigmatically silent and possessing a capacity for inactivation or impotentiality" (Colebrook & Maxwell, 2016, p. 26). However, once we comprehend Agamben's concept of inoperativity, we can find a way out of our inauthentic forms of life. In that respect, McCarthy's hero becomes the literary configuration of Agamben's ideal subject capable of upsetting the system by creating a rupture (*caesura*) in the biopolitical order. Like Bartleby, he reminds us that by preferring not to comply with such life, we can render the whole system inoperative. We would simply prefer not to be consumers, modern slaves in the social caste systems or participate in the dehumanising world order. With the power of what remains, we can collapse the system that produces nothing but bare lives. The story of *Remainder's* hero is a provocative and extraordinary configuration of such a life pushed to extremes to estrange the readers from their way of being.

To collapse the system, we must first reckon with the remnant, the remainder: “the concept through which we can view how a totality conceives of itself and of its component parts. Then we can become real political subjects as not parts of a totalizing whole” (de la Durantaye, 2009, p. 299). Only then we may see McCarthy’s hero as a figure that embodies a potential for change or a different life. Ethnically, historically, biologically, sexually and politically there will always be remainders that expose the monstrosity of the totalising systems which treat us as masses, statistical figures without authentic forms of life.

The novel ends in a way that confirms the first doctrine of the INS Declaration as an “experience of failed transcendence”: “a failure that is at the core of the General Secretary’s (Tom McCarthy’s) novels and the Chief Philosopher’s (Simon Critchley’s) tomes. Being is not full transcendence, the plenitude of the One or cosmic abundance, but rather an ellipsis, an absence, an incomprehensibly vast lack scattered with debris and detritus”. (“The New York Declaration: INS Statement on Inauthenticity”, 2007).

At the end of the novel, nothing is resolved, and the future of the hero remains unknown. With him, we remain entrapped in an ever-rotating Möbius strip. Or perhaps, his plane will fall from the sky and its debris or “technological bits and parts” will hit another’s head triggering another trauma, rotating to where it begins and starting over another story “turning back, then turning out. Then turning back again.” (p. 275) As Wark remarks, “*Remainder* is the trace, the residue, of McCarthy’s virtuoso telling of the story. It is the story of what it means to make anything –a novel, a life- when all the real Gods are dead, and yet there’s nothing for it but to read –and write- on” (2016, p. xii). The novel itself is “a leftover fragment, a shard of detritus” or a “kink” with which we have to figure out what we have to do. Until then, we will share the weightlessness and density of its hero as what remains because the novel leaves a mark on us, a remainder that we, as disturbed readers, feel in the form of a tingling in our spines.

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Speaking of Extinction: A Comparative Corpus-assisted Analysis of Metaphorical Framing in Climate Change Fiction and British Newspapers

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ABSTRACT

The present study brings a new perspective to climate fiction (cli-fi) studies, addressing two previously unexplored aspects. First, by focusing on how cli-fi writers frame climate change in their works, it extends the findings in earlier studies through corpus analysis of 20 works of cli-fi written after 1990. Second, by comparing the frames of climate change in the works of cli-fi and newspapers, it seeks to validate whether fiction writers frame climate change differently. To achieve this double objective, the study draws on Lakoff's views on metaphors as linguistic manifestations of cognitive frames. Lakoff's conceptual model investigates assumptions about the impact of reading cli-fi, emphasising language's role. The analysis of the cli-fi and newspaper corpora offers key findings about how climate change is portrayed in cli-fi works and newspapers. The findings reveal that cli-fi writers frequently use personification and negative language in metaphorical framing. Additionally, the study highlights cli-fi writers' reliance on figurative language compared to nonfiction writers. Despite the genre's creative nature, the number of identified metaphors in cli-fi works appears relatively limited.

Keywords: Climate Change, Climate Change Fiction (cli-fi), Cognitive Linguistics, Metaphorical Framing, Climate News



If you use language, you have to use metaphors all the time.
Jorge Luis Borges

1. Introduction

The late twentieth century saw the emergence and popularisation of a new genre of fiction that explicitly focuses on climate change, namely “climate change fiction,” or “cli-fi.” Although the exact origins of the term “cli-fi” remain obscure, Dan Bloom, an American environmentalist blogger, is usually credited with coining the term on his website *The Cli-Fi Report* in 2007 (Leyda, 2016, p. 12; Irr, 2017, p. 2). Broadly speaking, climate fiction can be defined as a literary response to the climate crisis in the Anthropocene. Many scholars and writers hold the view that cli-fi is an influential instrument to raise awareness about climate crisis through engaging stories that make environmental issues relatable to large groups of people (Gaard, 2014; Goodbody, 2014; Trexler, 2015; Mehnert, 2016; Milkoreit, 2016; Johns-Putra, 2016). For instance, in his *Anthropocene Fictions*, Adam Trexler (2015) considers the novel to be “a privileged form to explore what it means to live in the Anthropocene moment” (p. 27). The privileged status of fiction mainly stems from its ability to activate our imaginative powers to comprehend environmental issues regardless of spatial and temporal limits. This is particularly true in the case of climate change. As Markley (2012) puts it, “[c]limatological time, measured in millennia exists beyond daily experiences of the weather, beyond the duration of individual lifetimes, beyond the accumulated memories of generations [...] the time-scales of climatic change cannot be experienced viscerally but only imagined” (pp. 56–57). In the same vein, Corbett and Clark (2017) emphasise the crucial role of climate fiction in rendering the threat of climate change-related extinction comprehensible for readers, leading them to consider how they frame their relationship with the biosphere in a novel and productive way:

Climate stories, especially those based on lived experiences, offer distinct ways to engage a variety of senses. They allow the “invisibility” of climate change to be seen, felt, and imagined in the past, present, and future. They connect global issues to conditions close to home and create space to grieve and experience loss. They encourage critical reflection of existing social structures and cultural and moral norms, thus facilitating engagement beyond the individual level. (p. 1)

The increasing popularity of environmental narratives and critical speculation about their positive transformative influence on readers paved the way for a subfield of research in the field of ecocriticism, namely empirical ecocriticism. Combining empirical methods (i.e., surveys, interviews, and controlled experiments) with environmental literary theories, the studies within this line of research generally explore the function of environmentally engaged narratives in stimulating a wider and deeper climate consciousness.

In four recent studies, some researchers of empirical ecocriticism, mainly Schneider-Mayerson, investigated the shared assumptions about the positive ecopolitical influence of climate fiction (Schneider-Mayerson, 2018, 2020; Schneider-Mayerson et al., 2020; Lindgren Leavenworth & Manni, 2020). In the first empirical study on cli-fi, Schneider-Mayerson (2018) surveyed 161 American cli-fi readers' perception of climate change through their responses to open-ended questions. The findings showed that "climate fiction readers are younger, more liberal, and more concerned about climate change than non-readers of climate fiction" (p. 473). In 2020, Schneider-Mayerson conducted a similar survey, this time investigating the effects of a single work of climate fiction, Paolo Bacigalupi's *The Water Knife* (2015), on 86 American readers' awareness of climate injustice and their perception of climate migrants. The participants' responses to the detailed questionnaire revealed that reading Bacigalupi's novel led them to develop a greater awareness of climate injustice and empathy for climate migrants. Having thus established that reading climate fiction has some measurable positive influence on readers, Schneider-Mayerson et al. (2020) furthered the research in this field with a study aimed to assess the longevity of the effects of reading a work of climate fiction. Their study reported that "reading climate fiction had small but significant positive effects on several important beliefs and attitudes about global warming, as observed immediately after participants read the stories. However, these effects diminished to statistical nonsignificance after a one-month interval" (Schneider-Mayerson, 2020, p. 1). With their 2021 study, Maria Lindgren Leavenworth and Annika Manni, on the other hand, probed into the educational value of climate fiction in teaching sustainable development in Swedish primary schools. Utilising thematic content analysis in tandem with empirical methods, the researchers investigated how the selected works of cli-fi that students previously read for the research resonate with their own representations of nature, climate change and environmental responsibility. The researchers concluded their study with the suggestion that cli-fi is a useful educational tool that can help broaden discussions about environmental and sustainability issues at schools by providing students with possible environmental scenarios for critical reflection.

In the light of the foregoing, it ought to be clear that the four studies offer useful insights into cli-fi's impact on pro-environmental behaviours with varying degrees. However, they also share two significant limitations with corresponding opportunities for new directions for further research. First, in their exploration of the influence of climate fiction, these studies focus only on the reader, completely disregarding the role of the author in creating the message within the works of fiction. The language, or more specifically, the literary devices (i.e., metaphors, symbols, personifications) that a writer employs to create an engaging story is as important as the readers' interpretation of the story. As Keen (2006), a scholar of narrative empathy, succinctly puts it, "[b]y using their powers of empathetic projection, authors may attempt to persuade readers to feel with them on politically charged subjects. Readers, in turn, may experience narrative empathy in ways not anticipated or intended by authors" (p. 223). The pioneering ecocritic Cheryll Glotfelty's views on the use of metaphors in environmental literature align with the concept of narrative empathy. She recognises that metaphors have the potential to evoke empathetic responses in readers, enabling them to emotionally connect with the environmental and climate-related issues depicted in the narratives. Hence, in her introduction to the seminal *Ecocriticism Reader*, Glotfelty (1996) formulates one of the typical questions that should be posed by ecocritics as "[h]ow do our metaphors of the land influence the way we treat it?" (p. xix). It is, therefore, essential to investigate the use of figurative language in cli-fi novels if we want to understand how they affect readers' intellectual, emotional, and behavioural responses. Additionally, although the previous studies on cli-fi essentially rest on the assumption that fiction writing has the capacity to provide an alternative, if not a better one, to works of nonfiction (i.e., the news and scientific reports) in environmental communication, none of the aforementioned studies tested this assumption in a comparative analysis of fictional and nonfictional accounts of climate change.

Straddling contemporary literary theories, corpus and cognitive linguistics, the present study is motivated by an ambition to fill this twofold gap in the current scholarship on cli-fi. On the one hand, by focusing specifically on how cli-fi writers frame climate change in their works, it aims to complement and extend the findings in earlier reader-centred studies through corpus analysis of 20 works of cli-fi written after 1990. On the other hand, by comparing the frames of climate change in works of cli-fi and newspapers, it seeks to validate whether fiction writers frame climate change in a different way from nonfiction writers. To achieve this double objective, the study draws on George Lakoff's theory of framing and his views on metaphors as linguistic

manifestations of cognitive frames. Lakoff's conceptual model investigates assumptions about the impact of reading cli-fi, emphasising language's role in shaping perception. This provides valuable insights into how cli-fi narratives influence readers' perspectives on climate change. The first part of the article introduces the key concepts of the cognitive frame and conceptual metaphor and briefly discusses their significance in environmental writing. The second part provides the details of the metaphor identification procedure used in the study and categorises the linguistic patterns of the metaphor identified in the corpus. The article concludes with a discussion on the research findings and suggestions for future studies.

2. Framing Climate Change: Cognitive Frames and Conceptual Metaphors

George Lakoff laid out his theory of metaphorical framing in his individual research works as well as in a book that he co-authored with Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By*. Lakoff and Johnson consider metaphors to be key conceptual devices in shaping public discourse about important societal issues. "Primarily on the basis of linguistic evidence," they write, "we have found that most of our ordinary conceptual system is metaphorical in nature. And we have found a way to begin to identify in detail just what the metaphors are that structure how we perceive, how we think, and what we do" (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980, p. 4). In other words, metaphors function as crystallised frames that enable a smoother and more effective transfer of meaning by turning complex abstract concepts into familiar concrete images. Lakoff and Johnson define metaphor as a cross-mapping between two semantic *domains*, namely the source domain and the target domain. While the former denotes the conceptual domain from which the metaphorical expression is drawn, the latter is the domain that people try to understand. For instance, when nature is described as a mother, it means that all the features of the source domain, "mother," are metaphorically mapped onto the target domain "nature," which generates the meaning that nature should be treasured and protected, for it is the life-giving and nurturing biological source of existence.

Lakoff and Johnson investigate conceptual metaphors in three main categories: structural, ontological and orientational. Structural metaphors help conceptualise a complicated and abstract concept in terms of a simple and concrete concept. To illustrate how structural metaphors affect our everyday activities and the way we perceive reality, Lakoff and Johnson give an example from modern Western culture, where 'time' is

metaphorically conceptualised as 'money.' Therefore, it is not a coincidence that expressions from the vocabulary of time clearly indicate the limited and valuable nature of time as a commodity: waste, save, worth, invest, borrow, lose, have, budget, cost, use profitably, etc. This specific metaphor structures how several daily practices in Western culture are quantified: "telephone message units, hourly wages, hotel room rates, yearly budgets, interest on loans, paying our debt to society (serving time) (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980, p. 8). Ontological metaphors, on the other hand, identify abstract concepts as entities or personify them so that we can easily refer to, categorise and quantify them. This group of conceptual metaphors includes figures of speech, such as personification and metonymy. According to Lakoff and Johnson, Shakespeare's sonnets provide pertinent examples of ontological metaphors since the poet personifies 'time' as 'an enemy,' 'an adversary,' 'a reaper' and 'a besieger' in different poems. Lakoff and Johnson called the last group of conceptual metaphors as orientational metaphors, for they are directly related to our physical movements and how we use these movements to conceptualise abstract concepts in our own culture. For instance, Lakoff and Johnson (1980) show that in the English language, foreseeable future events are conceptualised as "up" and "ahead": "All upcoming events are listed in the paper. What's coming up this week? I'm afraid of what's up ahead of us. What's up?" (p. 16). Lakoff and Johnsons explain the physical basis for these conceptualisations: "Normally our eyes look in the direction in which we typically move (ahead, forward). As an object approaches a person (or the person approaches the object), the object appears larger. Since the ground is perceived as being fixed, the top of the object appears to be moving upward in the person's field of vision" (p. 16).

It is precisely conceptual metaphors, or more broadly speaking figurative language use, that brings literature and literary studies in connection with cognitive framing since Lakoff and Johnson (1980) argue that creative or imaginative metaphors are more functional in changing the existing cognitive frames than conventional metaphors. According to Lakoff and Johnson, "conventional metaphors are metaphors that structure the ordinary conceptual system of our culture, which is reflected in our everyday language" (p. 139). Members of the same linguistic community can effortlessly understand and use conventional metaphors to talk about everyday reality. Creative or imaginative metaphors, on the other hand, are beyond social conventions and "are capable of giving us a new understanding of our experience. Thus, they can give new meaning to our pasts, to our daily activity and to what we know and believe" (Lakoff & Johnson 1980, p. 139). Unlike conventional metaphors characterised by commonality and used to

conceptualise reality, imaginative metaphors are products of linguistic inventiveness and novelty, and they are generally used to encourage people to think about reality from a new perspective. That is what makes creative metaphors more effective in forming new cognitive frames in environmental communication.

For Lakoff, the distinction between conventional and creative metaphors is crucial in understanding the impact of cli-fi on readers. While conventional metaphors may reinforce existing frames, creative metaphors have the potential to challenge and reshape our understanding of climate change. In his 2010 article, "Why it Matters How We Frame the Environment," Lakoff discusses how the medium and content affect people's perception of environmental problems. He contends that the mainstream media fails to generate cognitive frames necessary for making climate change meaningful and relatable since it mainly depends on popular slogans, figures and factual language. "Many people engaged in environmentalism," he writes, "believe that if you just tell people the facts, they will reason to the right conclusion" (pp. 72–73). Lakoff (2010) suggests that this ineffective method of communication should be replaced with a new language. According to Lakoff, "the new language must make sense in terms of the existing system of frames. It must work emotionally. And it must be introduced in a communication system that allows for sufficient spread over the population, sufficient repetition, and sufficient trust in the messengers" (p. 72). This implies that cli-fi writers can actively contribute to this process by utilising creative conceptual metaphors. In other words, it is possible to gain a deeper understanding of how cli-fi literature influences and transforms our environmental behaviours through a comprehensive analysis of the metaphorical patterns used by cli-fi writers.

Lakoff's emphasis on metaphor aligns with the broader linguistic inquiry into how figurative language shapes perception, a focus shared by other scholars in the field such as Deignan (1999) and Caracciolo et al. (2019). Deignan (1999) underscores that metaphorical framing transfers attributes from a source domain to a target domain, influencing how we perceive and understand the latter. In the context of cli-fi, metaphorical mappings can draw from diverse source domains, such as human emotions, natural disasters, or technological systems, to frame climate change in distinct and impactful ways. For instance, the use of figurative language, especially metaphors, plays a crucial role in conveying the complex and abstract nature of climate change. In her 2017 study, Deignan further explores this idea by analysing metaphors in both scientific and popular texts about climate change, particularly those aimed at young

people. She finds that metaphors in educational materials tend to “open up” complex scientific concepts, often by creatively extending expert metaphors to make them more accessible to non-specialist audiences. However, this simplification can sometimes lead to misunderstandings, especially when students incorporate their own everyday experiences into their interpretation of metaphors, resulting in scientifically inaccurate views. Deignan’s study underscores the importance of carefully constructing metaphors in climate change communication to balance accessibility with accuracy, highlighting the powerful role of figurative language in shaping public perception of environmental issues.

Caracciolo et al.’s (2019) study on metaphorical patterns in Anthropocene fiction explores how metaphor functions as a bridge between human experience and the broader nonhuman world in novels that tackle climate change. By analysing three novels—Margaret Atwood’s *Oryx and Crake*, Jeanette Winterson’s *The Stone Gods* and Ian McEwan’s *Solar*—the study reveals how metaphors in these works destabilise the binary distinction between humans and the environment. Key findings show that metaphorical clusters in these novels challenge the entrenched anthropocentric views. For instance, Atwood uses ironic metaphors that diminish human centrality by comparing human characters to objects or animals, while Winterson employs cyclical metaphors that anthropomorphise natural phenomena, suggesting a circular relationship between humans and the environment. McEwan’s *Solar* employs bodily metaphors to satirise the scientific community’s failure to address climate change but also uses these metaphors to highlight the embodied connection between humans and environmental decay. This study demonstrates that literary metaphors can provide a more nuanced and emotionally resonant way of understanding human entanglement with ecological crises, potentially offering alternative perspectives to conventional climate discourse.

Based on the reviewed literature, we hypothesised that climate change fiction (cli-fi) should contain a significant number of environmental metaphors, as indicated by specific linguistic patterns. This hypothesis stems from the belief that cli-fi writers, who aim to foster emotional engagement and promote pro-environmental behaviours, would employ creative metaphors to influence readers’ perceptions of climate change. We expect these metaphors, along with other figures of speech like metonymy and personification, to differ from those found in nonfiction writing and everyday language. This distinction arises from the inherently creative nature of cli-fi, which offers an alternative framing of climate change compared to the factual, objective reporting

style of newspapers. To test our hypothesis, we use a newspaper corpus as a reference framework to demonstrate how and to what extent cli-fi's use of language and metaphors diverges from nonfiction, particularly in its creative representation of environmental issues. Accordingly, in the following sections, we first present the lexical items within specific semantic domains and an extensive list of the metaphorical patterns extracted from our specialised corpus, consisting of 20 works of cli-fi literature. We then compare these targeted lexical items and metaphorical patterns with those identified in newspapers to validate whether fiction writers employ a distinct framing approach compared to nonfiction writers.

3. Method

3.1. Cli-fi Corpus

Based on Lakoff's theory of cognitive framing and metaphor, we hypothesised that climate change fiction should include a significant number of environmental metaphors as evidenced by certain linguistic patterns and that these metaphors, including other figures of speech such as metonym and personification, should be different from those used in news articles focusing on environmental issues. To test these two hypotheses, we employed a combination of quantitative corpus-based methods and qualitative manual analysis based on the suggestions by the following studies and considering their pioneering methodological approaches (Demmen et al., 2015; Koller et al., 2008; Neuman et al., 2013; Semino et al., 2018). Initially, we used LancsBox (Brezina et al., 2020) and compiled a corpus of 20 cli-fi novels written after 1990, consisting of 2,435,431 tokens, 71,520 types, and 64,183 lemmas (see Table 1 for further details). Although the precursors of modern climate change fiction can be traced back to the 1960s, we included 20 works of climate change fiction written after the 1990s in our specialised corpus. The deliberate emphasis on this specific period can be justified for three main reasons. First, the genre of cli-fi gained significant popularity and recognition in the late 20th century and continued to flourish in the 21st century. Focusing on works specifically written after 1990 allows for a study of cli-fi during its period of development and establishment as a distinct literary genre. Second, cli-fi novels written after 1990 exhibit distinct narrative structures, themes, and representations of climate change compared to earlier works.¹ The deliberate emphasis on this specific period is also

1 The novels in the corpus are either classified under the generic category of cli-fi in different sources or have been the subject of literary studies on climate change fiction.

justified by the fact that climate news in newspapers was relatively scarce before the 1990s, a period when the recognition of climate change as a global threat began to gain significant traction.

Table 1. A descriptive overview of the cli-fi corpus

Writer	Novel	Words	Types	Words per sentence
David Brin	<i>Earth</i> (1990)	232.686	19.852	13.0
Norman Spinrad	<i>Greenhouse Summer</i> (1990)	98.730	10.618	14.9
Larry Niven, Jerry Pournelle, and Michael Flynn	<i>Fallen Angels</i> (1991)	121.942	11.052	8.7
Octavia E. Butler	<i>Parable of the Sower</i> (1993)	84.984	6.020	10.7
Bruce Sterling	<i>Heavy Weather</i> (1994)	104.736	11.077	11.5
John Bames	<i>Mother of Storms</i> (1994)	206.364	13.255	22.1
Robert Silverberg	<i>Hot Sky at Midnight</i> (1994)	121.790	10.567	12.2
Maggie Gee	<i>The Ice People</i> (1998)	97.615	9.410	13.7
T. Coraghessan Boyle	<i>A Friend of the Earth</i> (2000)	122.967	13.601	19.8
Robinson Kim Stanley	<i>Forty Signs of Rain</i> (2004)	103.274	10.153	13.5
Jeanette Winterson	<i>The Stone Gods</i> (2007)	65.917	7.373	12.2
Liz Jensen	<i>The Rapture</i> (2009)	114.673	12.123	11.1
Paolo Bacigalupi	<i>The Windup Girl</i> (2009)	145.428	11.099	9.4
Marcel Theroux	<i>Far North</i> (2009)	84.496	7.399	16.1
Matthew Glass	<i>Ultimatum</i> (2009)	144,142	8.164	10.3
Ben Bova	<i>Empire Builders</i> (2011)	113.297	10.044	11.3
Kim Stanley Robinson	<i>2312</i> (2012)	166.827	13.430	14.8
Nathaniel Rich	<i>Odds against Tomorrow</i> (2013)	76.100	6.329	11.0
Richard Powers	<i>The Overstory</i> (2018)	174.174	16.156	10.9
John Lanchester	<i>The Wall</i> (2019)	73.096	5.597	15.8

The method of analysis comprises two stages. First, we investigate the key semantic domains and analyse the words in context and collocational patterns to detect figurative use in the cli-fi corpus using metaphorical pattern analysis (Stefanowitsch, 2007). To computationally identify the structuring presence and implications of climate change framing through figurative language use in climate change fictions, we initially used the USAS semantic annotation tool in Wmatrix (Rayson, 2009), which enabled us to extract the key semantic domains in our corpus. Wmatrix is software with a web interface that helps users investigate lexical patterns, their frequencies, and the semantic representations.

It extends the keywords analysis feature of the corpus tools and provides users with key semantic domains. Using the tool, researchers can build their own corpora and compare them with the built-in corpora to explore keywords, key semantic collocations and key semantic domains. In our case, key semantic domain extraction helped us focus on the lexical patterns that are particularly related to climate change and ecological issues. The tool provided us with more than 200 key semantic domains, but we decided to scrutinise the domains with the potential to reveal writers' framing of environmental issues. The domains under investigation were *universe*, *weather*, *damaging and destroying*, *geographical terms*, *temperature: cold*, *temperature: hot*, *science and technology*, *green issues*, and *living creatures*. In the following step, we unpacked the semantic domains and decided to investigate the lexical items with at least 100 instances in an attempt to identify elaborate patterns with potential figurative use. We furthered our investigation with more detailed searches exploiting the target lexis under scrutiny. Using the KWIC (key word in context) feature of LancsBox, we set some search criteria to analyse how certain themes are framed through lexical choices and their associations (i.e., metaphorical pattern analysis). In doing so, we aimed to identify the modifiers of the search terms (as suggested by Wendy & Semino, 2020) to detect figurative uses and gain insight into how environmental issues in the corpus are framed metaphorically. We adopted a similar approach summarised in Neuman et al. (2013) for the identification of metaphorical patterns and related figures of speech, which focuses on identifying linguistic deviations from literal norms. This approach, while potentially overlooking some nuances of metaphorical meaning, allows for more efficient and reliable automatic detection of potential metaphorical expressions. The lexical extraction criteria are as follows:

- If the search term is a noun, we search for the adjective before and the verbs before some items.
- If the search term is a noun, we search for the copula following the noun (as in *time is money*).
- If the search term is an adjective, we search for adverbs before and nouns following.
- If the search term is a verb, we search for nouns following and adverbs preceding and following.

Using these criteria, we explored some search terms. The following CQL samples show an advanced search option investigating search terms on our target list:²

2 See the SketchEngine website <https://www.sketchengine.eu/documentation/corpus-querying/> for further details regarding the Computer Query Language.

1. [tag="JJ.*"] OR [tag="VV.*"] [lemma="search term"] [tag="JJ.*"]
2. [tag="RB.*"] [lemma="search term"] [tag="N.*"]
3. [lemma="search term"] [lemma="be"]

After filtering the patterns with the CQLs, we went through all the related concordance lines to determine whether the search term in question signifies a metaphorical pattern and thus indicates a conceptual metaphor or not. Then, we manually highlighted the salient figurative uses around our search terms. To present the figurative uses clearly, we extracted the related word pairs from the concordance lines and presented the striking instances of "adjective+noun" and "adverb+adjective" combinations.

3.2. Newspaper Corpus

In the second phase of our study, we repeated the same analysis on the British newspapers with the same search terms and criteria to detect the metaphorical patterns and compare the metaphorical framing in the newspapers and cli-fi novels. To this aim, we developed a specialised corpus consisting of news articles printed on British newspapers (between 1990 and 2019) and particularly discussing issues regarding climate and the environment. We intentionally wanted to build our own news corpus because there is no available corpus addressing texts, particularly about environmental issues. The only environment corpus (*Climate Change* by Carmen Dayrell) is available online through LancsBox (Brezina et al., 2020), which covers a specific year (2011) and is not representative of the period in which we are interested.

For corpus development, we used the web interface of Lexis Library News³. Lexis Library News (now known as Lexis+ UK) is a vast online database that provides access to a wide range of news sources, including newspapers, magazines, transcripts of TV broadcasts, and summaries of public records. It is a powerful tool used by researchers, journalists, legal professionals, and businesses to gather information and conduct analysis. Lexis+ UK offers an extensive collection of UK national and regional newspapers, including: *The Times*, *The Guardian*, *The Independent*, *The Daily Telegraph*, *The Financial Times*, *Daily Mail*, *Daily Mirror*, *The Sun*. The inclusion of both national and regional newspapers provides a diverse range of perspectives on climate change, allowing us to explore the phenomenon under investigation thoroughly. We set certain criteria to filter the articles of our interest. As search words, we used "climate change", "nature", and "environment" and the interface refined the

3 See the website lexisnexis.com.

related headlines on the broadsheet media accordingly. To make it as comparable as possible with the cli-fi corpus, we focused on the news articles and stories between the years 1990 and 2019. The selected pieces consisted of around 200 words at least and were set in the various countries around the world, such as the USA, the UK, Japan, Australia, and Europe. To tentatively match with the size of the cli-fi corpus, we had around 85.000 words for each year except for the years 1990 and 2000 simply because the number of the articles with environmental concerns is considerably lower than the years to follow. We intentionally excluded the letters and personal memos from the corpus to avoid the contexts with the potential to distort the register of our newspaper corpus. After applying these filters and the text selection criteria, our newspaper corpus consisted of 3,404.276 tokens, 57.493 types and 51.755 types. Despite the potential difference between the two corpora due to their register features, we think they are comparable in terms of their similar size and their potential to include the target lexical patterns under scrutiny in this study. We should also note that newspapers can have varying political leanings, which could influence their framing of climate change. Future research could explore the potential impact of partisan bias on the metaphorical framing of climate change in newspapers.

4. Results

Table 2 illustrates the numerical output of the selected key semantic domains. O1 indicates the observed frequency in our (cli-fi) corpus, and O2 shows the observed frequency in the BNC (The British National Corpus) Sampler, readily available on Wmatrix as the reference corpus. The notations “1%” and “2%” signify the relative frequencies in the texts. The domains are sorted on the basis of their log likelihood (LL) value.

Table 2. Key semantic domains							
Item	O1	%1	O2	%2	LL	LogRatio	Domain
W1	4003	0.25	912	0.09	866.97	1.42	Universe
W4	3508	0.22	770	0.08	802.36	1.47	Weather
A1.1.2	2927	0.18	815	0.08	447.15	1.13	Damaging and destroying
W3	7770	0.49	3466	0.36	243.18	0.45	Geographical terms
O4.6-	1143	0.07	303	0.03	192.09	1.20	Temperature: cold
O4.6+	2579	0.16	988	0.10	164.37	0.67	Temperature: hot
Y1	2024	0.13	778	0.08	127.37	0.67	Science and technology
W5	493	0.03	225	0.02	13.42	0.42	Green issues
L2	5629	0.35	3225	0.33	8.05	0.09	Living creatures

LL is a probability statistic simply comparing the frequency of occurrence of words (or semantic domains in our case) in the two corpora. LL foregrounds the more frequently used domains in the cli-fi corpus and helps us pinpoint the linguistic phenomenon under examination. The numbers show that the domains *universe* and *weather* have comparatively higher LLs (866.97 and 802.36, respectively) than the rest of the domains, which is an expected outcome, given the intended theme of the novels. Table 3 illustrates the target lexical items represented under the selected semantic domains.

Table 3. Key semantic domains and target lexical items in the cli-fi corpus		
Domain	(Word (lemma	(Frequency (raw and normalised
Universe (Semantic Tag-W1)	world	2054 (8.434)
	planet	617 (2.553)
	sky	689 (1.414)
	moon	344 (1.412)
	star	432 (1.408)
	solar	213 (0.875)
	universe	147 (0.604)
Weather (Semantic Tag-W4)	wind	880 (3.092)
	rain	557 (2.113)
	cloud	453 (1.860)
	weather	445 (1.476)
	storm	311 (1.277)
	snow	284 (1.163)
Damaging and destroying (Semantic Tag-A1.1.2)	break	701 (2.878)
	damage	217 (0.891)
	destroy	196 (0.806)
Geographical terms (Semantic Tag-W3)	earth	1228 (5.042)
	sea	810 (3.326)
	land	598 (2.455)
	wave	578 (2.373)
	forest	510 (2.094)
	river	436 (1.791)
	island	351 (1.442)
	mountain	336 (1.379)
	global	294 (1.207)
	lake	245 (1.006)
	coast	232 (0.953)
	atmosphere	225 (0.924)
	horizon	208 (0.854)
	landscape	151 (0.613)

Temperature: cold (Semantic Tag-O4.6-)	cold	734 (3.014)
	cool	211 (0.866)
	frozen	160 (0.657)
	freeze	118 (0.484)
Temperature: hot (Semantic Tag-O4.6+)	fire	608 (2.496)
	burn	598 (2.456)
	hot	480 (1.971)
	heat	459 (1.885)
	warm	421 (1.729)
Science and technology (Semantic Tag-Y1)	science	338 (1.388)
Green issues (Semantic Tag-W5)	nature	265 (1.088)
	environment	156 (0.641)
Living creatures: animals, birds, etc. (Semantic Tag-L2)	animal	494 (2.029)
	bird	202 (0.811)
	horse	151 (0.590)
	fish	119 (0.485)

When the lexical items with at least 100 instances in the investigated semantic domains are analysed, it can be seen that nouns appear to dominate the list. Given the discursual features of novels, this could partly be predicted. One striking finding in this initial analysis is the scarcity of words related to certain semantic domains, such as *damaging and destroying*, *science and technology*, *living creatures* and *green issues*. Since cli-fi novels specifically focus on climate change and its catastrophic effects, we postulated that there would be more words denoting environmental destruction and its effects on living creatures.

The detected lexical items were the main focus for further analysis. After filtering the output with our pre-determined search criteria (CQL 1-2), we went through all the related concordance lines (16.362) to determine whether the search term in question reveals a metaphorical pattern that could indicate a conceptual metaphor. Then, we manually highlighted the salient figurative uses around our search terms (160 instances in total), which corresponds to a little over 1% of the corpus. To present the figurative uses clearly, we extracted the related word pairs from the concordance lines and presented the striking instances of “adjective+noun” and “adverb+adjective” combinations in a table. The examples in Table 4 represent all the semantic themes under examination and show all the metaphorical patterns, including the figurative uses noted by Lakoff, detected in the concordance lines.

Table 4. Word pairs indicating figurative use in the cli-fi corpus

Collocate	Node	Collocate	Node
Crazy Drowned Friendly Virgin Malevolent Pollution-choked Lovely	WORLD	Worn-out Woebegone Useless Hell-bound Tired Sad Fragile Moribund	PLANET
Angry Sweet Concrete Remorseless Ferocious Uncompromising	SKY	Stinging Insane Bitter Fierce Ill Mighty Whipping Lonely Sweeping	WIND
Merciless Stinging Wild Purposeful Violent Ear-battering	RAIN	Treacherous Poor Busy Filthy Loathsome Sad	EARTH
Angry Blood-warm Calm Hungry	SEA	Drowned Pestilent Penurious Hostile Lucky Richest	LAND
Horribly Dangerously Frighteningly Uncomfortably Painfully Screamingly Bitterly Fiercely	COLD	Wild Mind-numbing Murderous Hungry Angry Fiercest Oppressively Fiercely	HEAT FIRE HOT
Virgin	NATURE	Resourceful	ANIMAL

When viewed through the lens of cognitive linguistics, a clear pattern emerges in the tables. Ontological metaphors with “adjective+noun” combinations dominate the way environmental matters are depicted in our corpus. As almost all the examples from the semantic domains in the corpus indicate, when target domains (environment-related lexis) are used in conceptual metaphors, the source domain (human traits) are mapped on the target domain. In other words, the underlying conceptualisation of the environment in cli-fi novels largely depends on personifications, generating the conceptual frame that “the environment is a human being.” Thus, the earth is framed as “poor,” “treacherous,” “filthy,” or “loathsome,” while the sea is depicted as “angry,” or “hungry” and land as “hostile,” “lucky,” or “penurious.” Expectedly, the adjectives used in the conceptual metaphors are predominantly negative with very few instances of positive framing, such as “beautiful earth,” “calm sea,” and “lucky land.” One might expect to see a depiction of the environment (i.e., plants, animals and human life) as being damaged and destroyed given the main aim of the cli-fi genre; however, the corpus output does not meet the expectations as the semantic domain *damaging and destroying* is not represented in the corpus through figurative language use.

In an attempt to do a more in-depth analysis and in the hope of revealing more figurative uses based on the suggestions by the same study (Neuman et al., 2013), we conducted another search with a specific search criterion (CQL 3). Table 5 shows the concordance lines highlighting metaphorical patterns and indicating the potential figurative use.

Table 5. KWIC indicating figurative use in the cli-fi corpus	
CQL 3	
UNIVERSE - World is <i>choked to death</i>. - World is <i>constantly hungry</i>. - World is <i>drowned in ten years</i>. - World is <i>a lonely place</i>. - World is <i>finally growing up</i>. - World is <i>abundant and extravagant</i>. - World was <i>short-sighted</i>. - World is <i>a scaly old snake</i>. - World is <i>sentimental, but pitiless</i>. - World was <i>holding its breath</i>. - World is <i>on the mend</i>. - Planet is <i>immune from this</i>. - Universe is <i>performing a drama</i>. - Universe is <i>an imprint</i>. - Universe is <i>a memory of our mistakes</i>. - Universe is <i>going to be lonelier</i>. - Universe is <i>Godseed</i>. - Universe is <i>God’s self-portrait</i>. - Universe is <i>a banyan, its roots and branches below</i>.	WEATHER - Wind is <i>raging</i>. - Wind was <i>blowing, gently making music</i>. - Wind was <i>so loud</i>. - Wind is <i>whipping fiercely</i>. - Wind was <i>bitter</i>. - Rain is <i>still hammering down</i>. - Storm is <i>raging</i>. - Storm is <i>brewing</i>. - Weather is <i>crazy</i>. - Weather was <i>lovely</i>. - Clouds were <i>boiling away</i>. - Clouds were <i>eating up the daylight</i>.

GEOGRAPHICAL TERMS	SCIENCE AND GREEN ISSUES
• Earth was <i>healing</i>. • Earth was <i>home, the oasis</i>. • Earth was <i>the prime real estate</i>. • Earth was <i>fucked</i>. • Earth was <i>a park now, a work of art</i>. • Earth is <i>bathed in a flood of sunlight</i>. • Earth is <i>healing itself</i>. • Earth was <i>shrouded</i>. • Earth is <i>trying to speak</i>. • Earth is <i>so terribly fucked up</i>. • Earth was <i>a massive involuted purple box</i>. • Sea was <i>dream or delirium</i>. • Land was <i>sacrificed</i>. • Waves <i>were fierce</i>. • Island is <i>a prison</i>. • Atmosphere was <i>wrecked</i>. • Forest was <i>silent</i>. (x3) • Forest was <i>scarred</i>. • Living mountains be <i>able to sue humans</i>.	• The environment is <i>alive</i>. • Science was <i>the gene trying to pass</i>. • Western science is <i>crazy</i>. • Science was <i>a conspiracy to pollute</i>.

Although the metaphorical patterns consisting of “lemma+be” combinations are more varied than those of “adjective+noun” and “adverb+adjective” combinations, personifications are also predominant in this group. The shift from the source domain to the target domain is mostly mediated through human traits and actions. The world, as a planet or human population, is depicted as “hungry,” “growing” or “holding its breath.” Likewise, atmospheric phenomena are portrayed as anthropomorphic forces, “raging,” “making music” or “whipping.” Universe, science, land, planet, and earth, on the other hand, are featured with nouns, using impersonal formulas, such as “an imprint” or “a gene.” We furthered our discussion by comparing the cli-fi corpus and the British newspaper corpus to detect possible diverging or parallel trends in the way environmental issues are addressed. For an initial comparative lexical analysis, we provide the frequency and dispersion values of the two corpora in Table 6.

Table 6. Comparison of normalised frequency and dispersion in cli-fi and newspaper corpus				
Word (lemma)	Cli-fi Corpus Frequency & Dispersion		Climate Change in the British Newspapers Corpus Frequency & Dispersion	
	Freq.	Disp.	Freq.	Disp.
world	8.434	0.17	22.56	0.03
planet	2.553	0.43	5.046	0.06
sky	1.414	0.20	0.334	0.12
moon	1.412	0.42	0.190	0.18
star	1.408	0.37	0.331	0.22
solar	0.875	0.49	2.746	0.08
universe	0.604	0.40	0.102	0.29
wind	3.092	0.27	4.121	0.08
rain	2.113	0.30	2.311	0.08
cloud	1.860	0.33	0.487	0.20
weather	1.476	0.34	9.070	0.09
storm	1.277	0.43	1.365	0.11
snow	1.163	0.48	1.527	0.09
break	2.878	0.20	1.920	0.08
damage	0.891	0.21	4.252	0.07
destroy	0.806	0.37	1.473	0.61
earth	5.042	0.31	5.369	0.06
sea	3.326	0.32	9.593	0.05
land	2.455	0.29	4.870	0.06
wave	2.373	0.24	0.660	0.09
forest	2.094	0.46	2.270	0.12
river	1.791	0.28	1.662	0.09
island	1.442	0.40	2.009	0.12
mountain	1.379	0.32	0.763	0.18
global	1.207	0.50	27.35	0.03
lake	1.006	0.38	0.549	0.20
coast	0.953	0.38	1.797	0.07
atmosphere	0.924	0.33	4.582	0.06
horizon	0.854	0.37	0.255	0.27
landscape	0.613	0.48	0.825	0.13
cold	3.014	0.35	1.965	0.10
cool	0.866	0.25	0.608	0.12
frozen	0.657	0.35	0.446	0.20
freeze	0.484	0.46	0.164	0.21

fire	2.496	0.32	1.404	0.22
burn	2.456	0.34	2.003	0.16
hot	1.971	0.20	1.715	0.10
heat	1.885	0.22	3.348	0.09
warm	1.729	0.33	1.862	0.10
science	1.388	0.51	6.908	0.11
nature	1.088	0.27	4.271	0.09
environment	0.641	0.49	13.17	0.08
animal	2.029	0.32	0.757	0.08
bird	0.811	0.38	0.693	0.16
horse	0.590	0.52	0.185	0.21
fish	0.485	0.41	2.067	0.13

When we take a broad overview of the numbers indicating frequency and dispersion in Tables 6 and 7, we see that the mean frequency values are moderately higher in the newspaper corpus (1.74 and 3.52, respectively). Likewise, as far as dispersion is concerned, we can say that the target items with the potential to address environmental issues in the texts are more evenly distributed in the newspaper corpus (0.13 – closer to 0) than in the cli-fi corpus (0.35 – closer to 1).

Table 7. Descriptives

	N	Mean	SD	Minimum	Maximum
Cli_Fi_Freq	46	1.746	1.3667	0.4840	8.434
News_Freq	46	3.521	5.3927	0.1020	27.350
Cli_Fi_Dispersion	46	0.356	0.0930	0.1720	0.523
News_Dispersion	46	0.132	0.0952	0.0300	0.610

Additionally, we computed an independent samples t-test to see if the detected difference in the descriptive values is statistically significant or not. Table 8 suggests that there is a statistical difference between the dispersion and frequency values of the cli-fi and newspaper corpus ($p < .001$; $p < .03$, respectively). The numbers also indicate that the difference between the normalised dispersion values outperforms the frequency profiles.

Table 8. Independent samples t-test				
		Statistic	df	p
Frequency	Student's t	-2.16 ^a	90.0	0.033
	Welch's t	-2.16	50.8	0.035
Dispersion	Student's t	11.39	90.0	001.>
	Welch's t	11.39	90.0	001.>
Note. H _a $\mu_{\text{cli_fi}} \neq \mu_{\text{news}}$				
^a Levene's test is significant (p < .05), suggesting a violation of the assumption of equal variances				

To further unpack the frequency difference and elaborate on the semantic domains that could affect the difference, we compared the descriptive output of the lexical items represented under each semantic domain. When the frequency values of the items representing the semantic domains are analysed, we detected a pattern that signals certain domains, possibly causing the significant difference in the t-test. The domains regarding *the world* and *the environment* (W) represented by the items, such as nature, environment, and nouns referring to geographical terms stand out with considerably higher frequency values and are more evenly dispersed across the texts. The possible reason for this difference could stem from our filtering criteria as we prioritised texts including these search terms in their headings.

We further our investigation with the CQL search as we did in the first corpus search. There are few instances of figurative use when all the semantic domains are taken into account. Table 9 comparatively exemplifies the very few figurative uses in the newspaper corpus.

Table 9. Figurative use in different semantic domains (with all CQLs)	
UNIVERSE	GEOGRAPHICAL TERMS
• The planet can survive the age of humans. • The planet is in ever greater pain • In a world desperate for power • Crazy <i>world</i> of a genetic hysteria • <i>The world's</i> weather to go mad • Sweltering <i>world</i> unable to feed • The world is <i>gambling</i> with its future. • The world is <i>waking up</i> to the enormity... • The world is <i>creating industry buzz</i>. • The world is going to <i>come and flock to vote</i>. • The world is <i>cooking</i>.	• <i>Sea</i> is boiling. • Killing off <i>river</i> habitats • The <i>earth</i> machine • Deadly <i>earth</i> machine • Mother earth <i>gives up the ghost</i> • Consumers of virgin <i>forest</i> • <i>Land</i> gets sick and die • Forest is <i>your sister/brother/home</i>

SCIENCE • Make <i>science</i> sexy • Climate science is <i>witchcraft</i>	GREEN ISSUES • <i>Environment</i> to be the new <i>global</i> religion • <i>Global</i> warming hysteria • Nature is <i>trying to skip winter</i> • Nature can be <i>cruel</i> • Nature is <i>dying</i>
WEATHER • Rain was <i>killing trees</i>. • Weather is <i>literally destroying the homes</i>.	

Having analysed around 55.000 concordance lines including our target lexical items, we detected 221 potential candidates of figurative use, mainly around the words earth, environment, global, nature, science and world (primarily, [W] green issues) and almost evenly distributed across the years (approximately 7 instances each) under scrutiny.

5. Discussion

The picture of metaphorical framing in the cli-fi corpus presented in the first part of the study and the following comparative analysis with the newspapers yield significant results concerning the purported positive impact of climate change fiction on readers. The most obvious finding to emerge from this study is the prevalence of ontological metaphors of personification in the cli-fi corpus, which aligns with earlier research (e.g., Caracciolo et al., 2019; Deignan, 2017). As presented in the previous section, cli-fi writers tend to attribute human traits to nature and describe natural phenomena as anthropomorphic forces that populate and govern the earth. Despite cli-fi writers' heavy reliance on personification, the use of personification as an ecological argument in environmental writing has been a controversial topic. While in traditional ecocritical approaches "personification" is often seen as a valuable tool for fostering ecological awareness and empathy, the general tendency in contemporary ecocritical and posthumanist theories is moving in a direction towards an anti-anthropocentric language in nature writing. As a representative of the former approach, Bryan L. Moore (2008), for instance, developed the concept of "ecocentric personification" as part of his research and analysis of the intersection between rhetoric, ecology, and the representation of nature in literature. In his *Ecocentric Personification*, Moore (2008) contends that personification can be employed as a rhetorical and literary device to undermine anthropocentrism rather than perpetuate it. What Moore refers to as ecocentric personification is a type of personification that "directly addresses ecocritical and ecological concerns on at least three major fronts: representation, relationship, and

morality" (p. 10). It seeks to persuade an audience that all living things are connected by intersecting the two essential points of rhetoric and ecology.

Within the context of posthumanism, however, the perception of personification as a literary device is more nuanced. Posthumanism challenges the traditional human-centric perspective and seeks to decentre the human in favour of a more inclusive understanding of agency and subjectivity. Personification, in this context, can be seen as reinforcing anthropocentric hierarchies by projecting human attributes onto non-human entities. Some posthumanist scholars argue that personification perpetuates a human exceptionalist worldview, limiting our understanding of non-human experiences and alternative ways of being in the world. For instance, Barad (2007), a pioneering posthumanist theoretician, points out that "meaning is not a human-based notion; rather, meaning is an ongoing performance of the world in its differential intelligibility" (p. 335). With its emphasis on human consciousness as a constructive agency, personification is, therefore, deemed rhetorically counterproductive since it tends to reify the very categories (i.e., humans' separateness from and superiority to nature) that it aspires to challenge. The key objective of emerging paradigms in posthumanist ecocritical theory, as Serenella Iovino and Serpil Oppermann (2012) succinctly put it, is to formulate a new discourse "against the visions that associate agency with intentionality and therefore with human intelligence" and to demonstrate that "the true dimension of matter is not that of a static and passive substance or being, but of a generative becoming" (p. 76). From this critical perspective, it is clear that the frequent use of personifications of nature in cli-fi novels can be interpreted as an indication of an anthropocentric tendency among writers. Almost non-existent metaphors related to plants and animals in the cli-fi corpus serve to strengthen the argument that the metaphors commonly utilised in this genre primarily centre on anthropocentric themes.

The second key finding of the study is the extensive utilisation of negative adjectives and verbs in the cli-fi corpus. This finding led us to conclude that cli-fi writers deliberately employ these linguistic choices to evoke fear and panic in their depiction of climate change. Like the anthropocentric language, the evocation of negative emotions is considered to be a factor that may diminish the purported positive effect of reading cli-fi. A previous study conducted by Schneider-Mayerson (2020) explored the persuasiveness of cli-fi and highlighted the potential detrimental effect of negative emotions on ecopolitical persuasion and mobilisation. Negative emotions, such as fear and worry, can overwhelm individuals, making them feel helpless or hopeless, and

ultimately leading to disengagement from the issue of climate change rather than inspiring action. Furthermore, Schneider-Mayerson (2018) reported a similar finding in an earlier study, indicating that while climate fiction can effectively reinforce the severity and urgency of anthropogenic climate change for concerned liberals and leftists, it may not significantly influence sceptics and deniers to reconsider their positions. Consequently, it becomes evident that the prevalent use of negative metaphorical framing in cli-fi novels is unlikely to prompt a shift in readers' environmental behaviours, particularly among those who harbour reservations about climate change. In other words, cli-fi writers are not likely to effectively engage climate sceptics and motivate them to prioritise environmental concerns in their daily lives.

Finally, based on the comparison between metaphorical framing in the cli-fi and newspaper corpora, it becomes evident that cli-fi writers rely more heavily on figurative language compared to nonfiction writers. However, the number of identified metaphors in cli-fi works is relatively fewer than expected, considering the genre's creative nature. Cli-fi writers employ a potent language, characterised by a darker and emotionally disturbing tone, which contrasts sharply with the neutral and disinterested tone found in the newspaper corpus. News writers tend to use a language leaning more towards business-oriented discourse, often containing words with strong political and economic connotations. Cli-fi works incorporate a higher number of environment-related conceptual metaphors. However, upon closer examination from the cognitive linguistic and ecocritical perspectives, these metaphors are unlikely to generate new cognitive frames about climate change. This is mainly due to their anthropocentric nature and their negative emotional impact on readers. Consequently, the findings of the present study align with previous research suggesting that cli-fi novels may not be potent instruments of social change capable of prompting immediate environmental action. Instead, the prevalence of personification and the recurrent use of negative language in metaphorical framing by cli-fi writers may indicate potentially counterproductive discourse, raising pertinent questions about the efficacy of cli-fi as a means of environmental persuasion.

6. Conclusion

The present study by no means provides an exhaustive account of metaphorical framing in climate change fiction. However, we hope that this study is complete enough to have shed light on some of the overlooked aspects of metaphorical framing in cli-fi

novels, and that the findings of our study have potential implications for further research in the growing field of ecocriticism and environmental humanities. First, with its specific focus on the metaphorical framing in climate change fiction, it calls attention to the significance of authorial strategies used in environmental communication—an often-neglected aspect in environmental literary studies. In future studies, authors' role in environmental communication can be investigated from diverse perspectives with particular emphasis on lexical choices and metaphorical framing. Additionally, our comparative analysis of metaphorical frames used in cli-fi and newspapers opens up new avenues for research, inviting similar comparative investigations between fictional and non-fictional accounts of environmental issues. This approach can provide valuable insights into how different genres and modes of communication shape public understanding and discourse surrounding climate change. Furthermore, future studies could adopt a diachronic approach to examine the evolution of metaphorical framing in cli-fi novels and newspapers over time. Such investigations can shed light on how our conceptual frames regarding climate change have transformed and adapted over the years. Finally, the impact of metaphorical frames on readers' emotional responses warrants further exploration through empirical studies. By measuring the extent to which metaphorical frames influence readers' perspectives on climate change, we can gain a better understanding of the emotional and cognitive effects of metaphorical framing. In conclusion, while there is still much more to explore in the relationship between metaphorical framing and climate change fiction, we believe that our study serves as a stepping-stone, offering directions for future research that can enrich the field of ecolinguistics, ecocriticism and environmental humanities.

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“I can’t tell you *exactly* who I am”: A Deleuzian Reading of F. Scott Fitzgerald’s “The Curious Case of Benjamin Button”

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ABSTRACT

“The Curious Case of Benjamin Button” is a neglected short story by F. Scott Fitzgerald. It seems to have attracted more scholarly attention following the 2008 adaptation of the story by David Fincher. A review of the available literature on the short story evinces that instead of looking at how Benjamin experiments with new forms of thought and life, mostly the grotesque aspects of his reversed aging, as well as the moral evaluations of his actions are emphasized. In this regard, through the vitalistic philosophy of Gilles Deleuze, this article aims to argue that Benjamin’s reversed aging, as well as his against-the-grain actions, exemplifies nomadic life, which runs contrary to segmented or prefabricated modes of life and entails forgetfulness. In this regard, it is argued that Benjamin defies memory and history and assumes various identities to escape any signifying system. This article tries to illustrate how the philanthropic narrator of the story directs his readers’ attention toward reading the rhizomatic actions of Benjamin as deviant and pervert. In addition, this mode of narration, which endorses rationality and stability, operates in collusion with the paternalistic and normalizing father figures, including Benjamin’s father and son, in their suppression of fluidity, becoming, and childishness.

Keywords: “The Curious Case of Benjamin Button”, rationalizing narrator, forgetfulness, becoming, Gilles Deleuze



Where are you going? Where are you coming from?
What are you heading for? These are totally useless questions.
Making a clean slate, starting or beginning again from ground zero,
seeking a beginning or a foundation—all
simply a false conception of voyage and movement.
—Deleuze and Guattari (1987)

In his introduction to one of the short stories included in *Tales of the Jazz Age* (1922), F. Scott Fitzgerald indicated that he had written a story "inspired by a remark of Mark Twain's to the effect that it was a pity that the best part of life came at the beginning and the worst part at the end" (p. ix). This provoked Fitzgerald to create a character who would remain silent for nearly a century and would rise to prominence in an amazingly rebellious way. "The Curious Case of Benjamin Button" was the realization of Twain's dream, which was ultimately realized by Fitzgerald. The case was curious, novel, and challenging to the extent, as Mangum puts it, that it was rejected by the *Metropolitan*, which had already published three of Fitzgerald's stories under a contract, and also by the *Post*, which found fault with the story's excessive unconventionality (as cited in Mangum, 2009, p. 16). Yet, apart from the financial motives behind Fitzgerald's craft of writing, it seemed that he was still not content with the havoc he had created: "By trying the experiment upon only one man in a perfectly normal world I have scarcely given his [Twain's] idea a fair trial" (Introduction to *Benjamin*, 1922, p. ix). Fitzgerald's experimentation with the 'new' and the 'abnormal' in 1922, which in Curnutt's view is "the end result of a positive, vitalist outlook on life" (2002, p. 44), was about to gain prominence a century later, with all its hotly-debated discussions of transformation and novelty.

In the context of literary theory and analysis, Fitzgerald's short story, the plot of which is questionable in terms of originality (West III, 2009, p. 20), has brought about a number of reviews and analyses that have tried to shed light on the significance of Benjamin's reversed life and its consequences. The plot itself, be it in Fitzgerald's story or in David Fincher's notable film, is unparalleled in the sense that it has propounded a new possibility or conception of life. It could simply be said that it is about a character who is born a septuagenarian and who dies an unexpected death as a baby. However, such a simplification cannot satisfactorily settle the vital tension that informs every line of this curious narrative. It is time for us to scrutinize *how* Benjamin's life develops rather than to inspect *what* happens at its beginning or end. Instead of focusing on *what* happens in the story, it is time to analyze *how* Benjamin develops his life and how

he experiments with new possibilities and opportunities. Accordingly, the dominant critical view that considers Benjamin's life a failure, i.e., his anticlimactic itinerary from a mature beginning to an immature ending, needs to be set aside in favor of a better understanding of the journey itself.

Nevertheless, the authors believe that this view of Benjamin's life can be better explicated and delineated through Gilles Deleuze's philosophy of life and, hopefully, will lead to a new appreciation of Benjamin Button's life. Deleuze praises several writers, including Fitzgerald, and postulates that "[i]n them everything is departure, becoming, passage, leap, daemon, relationship with the outside" (Deleuze & Parnet, 1987, p. 36). Furthermore, to conceptualize his concepts, including becoming and lines of flight, Deleuze (1990), Deleuze and Guattari (1987), and Deleuze and Parnet (1987) consider Fitzgerald's novella *The Crack-Up* (1945) as a fruitful locale to discuss the feasibility of transformation in one's life. Therefore, we may come up with new interpretations of Benjamin's life through the 'immanent' philosophy of Deleuze. For this purpose, we may first object to the philanthropic narrator of the story as the one who works in collusion with the forces of rationality and normalcy, hence providing his readers with an image of Benjamin as deviant and pervert. Second, putting aside the teleological readings of Benjamin's life, we may trace his experimentations with new forms of life in a patriarchal culture predominated by paternalistic attitudes and pervaded by thirst for distinction, social status, and capital. Finally, we may see how Benjamin's actions part with the segmented and prescribed bourgeois life and how they lead to the invention of new modes of life.

Literature Review

"The Curious Case of Benjamin Button" can be regarded as one of Fitzgerald's most neglected short stories. In one of the articles devoted to an analysis of the short story published by *The F. Scott Fitzgerald Review*, Ruth Prigozy complains that "only Alice Hall Petry, John H. Higgins, and Lawrence Buell have analyzed the story in some detail and there have been only two scholarly articles published on it by Andrew Crosland in 1979 and by John Gery in 1980" (2009, p. 11). Bryant Mangum also follows the footsteps of Prigozy by asserting that the story has remained one of the most unnoticed of Fitzgerald's stories in the twentieth century (2009, p. 19). Meanwhile, he has praised Kirk Curnutt, Edward Gillin, and Fredrick Wegener as the forerunners of the thematic studies of the short story since 2003.

The successful adaptation of Fitzgerald's story by David Fincher on December 25, 2008, could be the reason that this once neglected short story finally received such acclaim from readers and critics. Acknowledging this issue, Mangum asserts that the cinematic adaptation has attracted the attention of more readers and has led to a great flourish of its text which is "now available in editions more numerous than Fitzgerald in his wildest fantasy would ever have imagined" (2009, p. 19). Apart from the vast body of criticism directed at it, Fincher's film has led to the instigation of more scholarly reviews on Fitzgerald's story, and this promises a bright future with fresher outlooks for the apparently curious story of Benjamin Button.

Considered as one of the prominent influences on reviews of Benjamin Button, Henry Alexander has notably classified the life of Benjamin Button as consisting of three distinct lines, including "chronological age" which starts in 1860 and ends in the 1920s, "bodily age" which is related to Benjamin's physical changes, and finally the "psychological stage" which refers generally to his status of mind throughout his life. Alexander avers that "[e]xcept for his middle years between thirty-five and forty, there was little congruence between his chronological age, on the one hand, and his physical appearance or his psychological life, on the other" (p. 2). Accordingly, Alexander concludes that while Benjamin does observe the grotesque aspect of his life, it is "forgetfulness [which] closed him off from changes he could have made," leaving its readers with a feeling of decline and desperation (2009, p. 8). Drawing on Alexander's classification of Benjamin's life and Martin Kohli's sociological theories of "life course," Michael Basseler argues that Benjamin's life course is a critique of modern chronopolitics, hence bringing up the cultural contractedness of life course in modern America (2015, p. 112). Alice Hall Petry's reading of the story seems to be to some extent critical of Roger Button's "primitive" disillusionment, which is a denial of reality. However, despite the disappointments faced in his life, Petry argues, Benjamin does not yield to these disillusionments (1989, pp. 7879). Focusing more on the adaptation of the story by Fincher, Kathryn Lee Seidel remarks that Fincher's Benjamin is an example of a homeless individual who forms their identity through exploring the world, while in Fitzgerald's story, Benjamin is "an embarrassment to his parents, his wife, and his child" (2009, p. 26). Finally, in an examination of both Fitzgerald's story and Fincher's film through Henry Bergson's philosophy of time and Deleuze's application of Bergson's ideas to cinema, Nathan Wagner argues that Benjamin experiences a few "moments of timeless beauty" (2010, p. 52). He locates the story within the framework of American modernism and considers it as a reaction to the linear movement of life.

The Curious Case of the Story's Narrator

Gilles Deleuze's reading of Herman Melville's short story "Bartleby the Scrivener" in his essay "Bartleby; or the Formula" offers an extraordinary contribution to the criticism of Melville's short story as well as a clinical treatment of American fiction. Here, Deleuze puts an end to the question of the reliability of the attorney narrator who attempts to talk his readers into his own righteousness. Deleuze's objection is significant: It is in the attorney that "the madness is growing" (1998, p. 70), not in Bartleby. This, along with Widmer's contention that the narrating attorney "provides an image of a descent, well-meaning, prudent, rationalizing enforcer of humanity" (1969, p. 449), brings an end to the dominance of the narrator and opens the door toward thinking about Bartleby and how he has been mortified and petrified. Following the same logic, we could question the credibility and truthfulness assumed by the narrator in Fitzgerald's "The Curious Case of Benjamin Button."

Among the reviewers of the story, few have taken issue with the fact that throughout the story, it is the narrator who fairly endeavors to grasp the control of the reader's judgment about Benjamin. His interventions and descriptions presuppose that the readers are already subjects who are about to deem the story an exemplification of an anomaly and curiosity. Thus, a careful reading of the narrative necessitates a critical detachment from the intentions and preferences of the narrator who actually strives to assume an objective and disinterested stance while imposing his own desired standpoint regarding Benjamin's case.

From the very first paragraph of the story, the narrator assumes an objective view in order to convince the reader of the verity of his narrative: "Whether this anachronism had any bearing upon the astonishing history I am to set down will never be known. I shall tell you what occurred, and let you judge for yourself" (Fitzgerald, 1922, p. 192). It seems that the narrator aims to detach himself from the readers through his recurrent use of the "I" pronoun while proving his own credibility and convincing the reader that his story will be of truthfulness and authenticity. This disposition is in line with Kim Kasser's discussion of Benjamin when he asserts that after providing the reader with an aura of reliability, quite ironically, "[t]he narrator never calls Benjamin's character into question or furnishes a rational explanation for something that appears supernatural" (2010, p. 184). Thus, it can be argued that the narrator directs the attention of the readers to a prefabricated reading of the story that induces in them a kind of sympathy—

and, at the same time, a feeling that Benjamin's case is definitely a strange one. This feeling is created from the very beginning through the title of the story which includes the word "case". With this regard, Stefan Willer postulates that the word "case" pertains to "the genre of case history" and "medical rejuvenation" (2012, p. 349), bringing to mind a rationalized and evidential account the accuracy of which is unquestionable. For instance, his satirical attribution of the decree of "the high gods of medicine" (Fitzgerald, 1922, p. 192) that children be born to a hospital as "fashionable" could convince the reader that the narrator is maintaining a position endowed with reliability and truthfulness, even exceeding that of medical discourses.

Following Roger Button's arrival at the hospital, his running after the doctor who "stood waiting, a curious expression settling on his harsh, medical face" (p. 193), and his being denigrated by the doctor, the narrator directs a biased question at the readers: "What horrible mishap had happened?" Also, it is necessary to ask why Roger might be "[s]wallowing his shame" (Fitzgerald, 1922, p. 194), as the narrator puts it, when he has not yet been informed of the apparent anomaly of his son. One possible answer could be that Roger was a well-known owner of a Hardware company in nineteenth century Baltimore, and even a tint of indecency and incongruency would probably damage his reputation. Nonetheless, the anonymous narrator seems to be going beyond this fact, hence trying to convince readers that what is going to come next about the appearance of Benjamin is extremely eccentric and strange. Numerous examples can be found in the text indicating that it is the narrator who is involved in making Benjamin's case curious, and this arouses our suspicion while providing us with a chance to look at Benjamin's case from another perspective. For instance, the narrator's description of Mr. Button's first impression of his son's "smoke-colored beard" waving "absurdly back and forth" and also his "dim, faded eyes in which lurked a puzzled question" (Fitzgerald, 1922, p. 195) all illuminate that the narrator overstates the apparent curiosity of Benjamin's case.

The narrator's moral intrusions into the narrative attempt to conceal the fact that *the existence of Benjamin is an example of a new form of life*. Of course, Benjamin is born into a social sphere owned by upper-middle-class money holders whose key to success lies in normalcy and constancy, and it is these codes that are endorsed by the narrator of the story as well. Therefore, a proper estimation of Benjamin's 'true' status can only be achieved once we free ourselves from the grips of these authorial prejudices in order to appreciate the significance of Benjamin's 'different' life and the possibilities that are created for him by his seemingly anomalous character.

Benjamin as a Forgetful Creature

One of Benjamin's characteristics that make him significant is his assuming forgetfulness when he faces the apparent incongruities of his body. Benjamin soon attempts to compensate for his wife's lack of attraction and increasing misery at home by following new pursuits (Fitzgerald, 1922, p. 215). This standpoint has been exhaustively explored by Alexander, whose argument that forgetfulness becomes a part and parcel of Benjamin's daily concerns is tenable (2009, p. 7). Alexander's reading of Benjamin's behavior, however, is highly informed by the Aristotelian moralistic view which puts emphasis on the ability of literature to shed light on and compensate for the deficiencies of human existence. For example, Alexander's contention that "forgetfulness is a character defect" (2009, p. 10), which needs to be corrected if one is to achieve happiness and well-being, could well describe the coordinates of this moralistic viewpoint. Nevertheless, the question that makes itself heard is as follows: Is it really necessary to focus exclusively on moral issues and totally ignore the significance of individual and cultural peculiarities? In other words, could it not be justified to focus more on the plethora of opportunities and possibilities which 'difference' brings to the social sphere, rather than struggling to hold to the limited choices offered by rules of normalcy? Deleuze is a supporter of this view which "rejects the search for moral consensus and the construction of transcendent values and ... conceives of society as experiment rather than contact" (2005, p. 85). Therefore, following a Deleuzian perspective, we may see that it is also possible to examine—and not judge—Benjamin's motives and conclude that Benjamin's case is a curious one in the sense that it is quite against the grain, and this is what makes it noticeable and challenging.

To begin with, it can be argued that Benjamin's actions constitute a means to discover new possibilities and progressions. In fact, he is a creature of 'becoming' in the sense that he merely looks ahead, rather than abiding by the incidents of the past. Deleuze and Guattari (1987) comprehensively elaborated on the notion of short-term and long-term memory, which can be related to the positivity of one's forgetfulness. As for these two terms, they remark that "short-term memory includes forgetting as a process," while long-term memory "(family, race, society, or civilization) traces and translates" (p. 16). Elsewhere, they assert that rhizome is "a short-term memory, or anti-memory" (p. 21), which means that one's rhizomatic movement does not follow the rules of memory or any commitment to the past. Benjamin tends to forget, and this is by no means strange since what he neglects is, in fact, the norms and conventions set by society. Along with

experimenting with a new form of aging, he justifiably assumes forgetfulness to continue his rhizomatic life. Upon his entrance to Yale College, which is presumably a new place for a man of eighteen (chronologically fifty-two), and after receiving a notification from the college registrar, Benjamin finds himself in urgent need of brown dye for his hair. However, he soon finds out that he has dispensed with it and dumped it the day before (Fitzgerald, 1922, p. 205). Doing away with something to which he was so much attached is exactly the case with a person who experiments with newness and novelty, and Benjamin has come up with a new opportunity at Yale to deal with new actions. Hence, we may say he is not a person who involves himself with memories of the past, to the extent that, upon his entrance, he has forgotten the fact that he has been dying his hair before. This is more highlighted when, upon being denigrated by the registrar, Benjamin protests repetitively: "I'm a freshman" (p. 205), a declaration that is conceived as a joke by the man.

Through his reading of Benjamin's life, Willer examines the recurrent presence of the mirror, as well as its significance, in the story, which appears to be in direct relationship with the forgetfulness on Benjamin's part. The first mirror scene in the story appears when Benjamin is twelve years old: "looking in the mirror, Benjamin made, or thought he made, an astonishing discovery" (Fitzgerald, 1922, p. 203). The second time, before meeting Mr. Hale at Yale College: "glancing in the mirror, [Benjamin] decided that his hair needed a new application of its brown dye" (p. 205). The third time, after returning home from war, "he saw his reflection in the familiar mirror" (pp. 213–214). The fourth time, after returning home from St. Midas (prep) school in 1914, he "stared at himself in the mirror" (p. 218). Willer's reading of these mirror scenes is remarkable when he writes: "What Benjamin—and with him the reader— discovers, checks and confirms in the mirror are the traces of his life that has always been mirrored" (2012, p. 355). That is to say, we see, nearly in all these scenes, that Benjamin's actions are against the mirroring of the looking glass. In other words, what Benjamin does throughout his life is, in fact, a flight from what the mirror reflects. The mirror itself might bring to mind representation and identification from which Benjamin gradually distances himself, and it is in this sense that the mirror's function can be related to memory. Thus, it can be argued that Benjamin assumes forgetfulness to eschew any given identity. He sees himself in the mirror and then ironically adopts forgetfulness to shatter the mirror function, get away from identification, and ultimately create lines of flight that are anathema to the signifying, organizing, and territorializing molar lines.

Wagner's reading, which more regards Benjamin's life as tragic, is noteworthy here: "Benjamin's inability to view himself in a self-consciousness manner expresses his plight: he moves through life without any memory, living in a perpetual present" (2010, p. 27). Although this reading can be countered in that one is not supposed to be stable and coherent, it is partly in relation to the way Benjamin defies memory, history, and being. On this account, Benjamin's living in the present reminds Deleuze's words: "Future and past don't have much meaning, what counts is the present-becoming: geography and not history, the middle and not the beginning or the end" (Deleuze & Parnet, 1987, p. 23). Wagner's contention can be credited in that it describes how Benjamin rejects memory and assumes various identities in the present, but we may also note that while constantly constructing themselves, creatures of becoming also attempt to get away from any sort of self-consciousness. Here, Petry's remark seems sensible: "And without memory, there is no sense of disillusionment" (1989, p. 79).

The Shocking Father Figures

Throughout the short story, we find Roger Button as a father figure who dedicates himself to the establishment of stability and permanence in his family. This fact is highlighted as Mrs. Button's name, as a mother figure, is merely mentioned two times in the story. Of course, this lack of maternal presence proves the dominance of male figures in the story, a point that stresses the desire of the narrator as well. Regarding this fact, Willer argues: "The mother, on the other hand, appears except in word *parents*, only under the name of husband: 'Mr. and Mrs. Roger Button,' 'the Roger Buttons.' Only the paternal-masculine genealogy guaranteed by the passing on of the name is thus discussed" (2012, p. 351). Furthermore, it is curious that Mr. Button expects his septuagenarian son to act like a newborn: "Benjamin was a baby and a baby he should remain" (Fitzgerald, 1922, p. 201). Apart from creating some eating plans for Benjamin, Roger brings home a rattle and obliges his son to play with it. What follows is that he expects Benjamin to play with it dutifully at specified times during the day (Fitzgerald, 1922, p. 201). To speak in Deleuzian terms, it can be said that Mr. Button is, in fact, playing the role of a father figure whose actions impede any progress of becoming. Benjamin's bodily features, and the fact that he is an old man in the early days of his life, show that he is experimenting with a new form of existence. In *Essays Critical and Clinical*, Deleuze urges his readers to resist the dicta of father figures. Based on his arguments, following the civil war in America, "the only real danger is the return of the father" (1998, p. 88). What Deleuze is diagnosing in

this context is the way "the society of brothers" has turned into a society that impedes becoming and transformation. Accordingly, Mr. Button is satisfied with Benjamin's behaviors as long as he finds them in line with the norms of society: "[Benjamin] even managed, quite accidentally, to break a kitchen window . . . which secretly delighted his father" (Fitzgerald, 1922, p. 202). Roger delights in disciplining his son to grow from a state of innocence toward experience, as if he is a force of normalization. Now we may see how the possibilities of becoming are blocked in this society and, more importantly, how Fitzgerald is warning us against actions that open up a door to pretension, duplicity, and reterritorialization. The horizons of possibilities available to Benjamin are doubly blocked by Roger since he seems to discipline his elderly child, i.e., born an old man with a given identity of old age, as Benjamin is expected not to act according to his age.

In the Deleuzian sense of the word, even if Benjamin is experimenting with age reversal, his father, as an agent of rationality, aims to restore his identity. In the same way, Roger does everything he can to convince his old son that he belongs to a given territory and that a bright future awaits him provided that he behaves himself, and, against his physical incongruity, that he has to behave like a newborn. It may be in this sense that Petry's reading of Roger's "strategies of denial" (1989, p. 78) seems to have become more comprehensible and tangible.

Likewise, Benjamin's experience of registering at Yale College and the way he is treated by the academia of the time exemplify the immaturity of society for changes and possibilities. This account is given by the narrator in Chapter IV which reads as follows: "Of the life of Benjamin Button between his twelfth and twenty-first year I intend to say little" (Fitzgerald, 1922, p. 204). This is also another maneuver on the part of the God-like narrator who labels these years as "years of normal ungrowth" (p. 204), refusing to give us the accounts of how Mr. Button might have disciplined his son, an example of which can be found at the end of Chapter III:

Finally a compromise was reached. Benjamin was to continue to dye his hair. He was to make a better attempt to play with boys of his own age. He was not to wear his spectacles or carry a cane in the street. In return for these concessions he was allowed his first suit of long trousers. (Fitzgerald, 1922, p. 204)

Accordingly, we should become suspicious of the narrator's concealing Benjamin's possibilities and discoveries, as well as instances of his defiance of the established norms. As soon as Mr. Button finds his son a seemingly normal man "whose step was firm" (Fitzgerald, 1922, p. 204), he sends him to Yale College. There, we are familiarized with another father figure whose demeanor and actions are presumably in line with that of the society of fathers. Mr. Hart, the college registrar at Yale College, soon mistakes Benjamin for his father, labels him a "dangerous lunatic" (p. 205) for not having maintained the identity of an 18-year-old, and warns the freshman to leave the town in eighteen minutes (p. 206). While being expelled from the college, Benjamin finds himself followed by a mob of undergraduates and professors' wives shouting after him and calling him a "wandering Jew" (p. 207). While he is a man of fifty (in terms of bodily age), Benjamin's experience at Yale can be regarded as an act of deterritorialization or acting against the norms set by the society of fathers. However, this betrayal of the norms is soon impeded by the reterritorialization on the part of the father figures. As Deleuze puts it, "[t]here is always a way of reterritorializing oneself in the voyage: it is always one's father or mother (or worse) that one finds again on the voyage" (Deleuze & Parnet, 1987, p. 38). While Benjamin intends to experiment with a new form of experience at this stage of his life, the molar lines seem to overpower him and end up in reterritorialization. Benjamin, to some extent, pities people when he sees their being merged in molar lines: "You'll regret this!" (Fitzgerald, 1922, p. 207) Accordingly, we can say that it is Benjamin who comprehends to what extent becoming is being blocked in this atmosphere and to what extent people have conformed to normative ideologies. The block of becoming is so deep-rooted that even the narrator comments: "It was the biggest mistake that Yale College had ever made" (p. 207).

Amidst the flourishing of the father figures, Benjamin opens up a new form of fatherhood that runs contrary to those common in his society. His experience of manhood entails his getting to know Hildegrade and the fact that he creates a picture of "health and vitality" (Fitzgerald, 1922, p. 212) in his society. More importantly, upon his marriage, a number of rumors begin to circulate in the city about his originality. This is followed by New York papers showing "sketches which showed the head of Benjamin Button attached to a fish, to a snake, and, finally, to a body of solid brass" (p. 211). In Deleuzian terms, all these show that the very existence of Benjamin has led to a new experimentation with the idea of manhood and fatherhood. Since Deleuzian philosophy praises becoming over being, it takes a becoming body as always on the move to produce new possibilities. To be more precise, this is related to the notion of

desire, which has its own exclusive meaning in Deleuzian philosophy. One can experiment with anything by becoming them in the way that an individual who seeks new horizons can become everything. It is in this sense that Benjamin's presence in this society and his very actions lead to his loss of face, which is equal to loss of identity. With regard to this, Deleuze and Guattari (1987) argue that "the face is produced in humanity" (p. 170), and elsewhere they remark:

[. . .] if human beings have a destiny, it is rather to escape the face, to dismantle the face and facializations, to become imperceptible . . . by strange true becomings that get past the wall and get out of the black holes, that make *faciality traits* themselves finally elude the organization of the face. (p. 171)

Benjamin's actions in these years of vitality create in society a new image of humanity and manhood. His bodily transformations from childhood and the related widespread rumors reveal that Benjamin has done his best to escape any given identity and faciality.

This is quite contrary to the conditions of Hildegrade, who becomes "too settled in her ways, too placid, too content, too anemic in her excitements, and too sober in her taste" (Fitzgerald, 1922, p. 213), whereas Benjamin creates a new image of manhood that resists being labeled and lends itself to new experimentations. For instance, when Benjamin returns from the Spanish-American War, Hildegrade highlights her difference from her husband in the following way: "You think you don't want to be like anyone else. You always have been that way, and you always will be" (p. 214). This, of course, is quite contrary to her image of manhood and the mellowness she had expected from Benjamin when he was a man of fifty. In fact, through the dicta of the fathers' society, she internalized the patriarchal ideas of conformity and stability: "Just think how it would be if every one else looked at things as you do—what would the world be like?" (pp. 214–215).

Unlike his father, Roscoe is another figure who follows in his grandfather's footsteps and adopts his views of manhood and fatherhood. Upon his graduation, the narrator informs us that Benjamin and his son were confused with one another, and this resemblance delighted Benjamin (Fitzgerald, 1922, pp. 215–216), because he cannot be distinguished from his son, and, as a result, he does not assimilate into a given identity. This explains why Benjamin has reached a "zone of indiscernibility" in Deleuzian terms. Deleuze and Guattari's (1987) discussion of the indiscernibility of nomads and

barbarians perhaps makes Benjamin's indiscernibility more palpable: While the nomads "venture a fluid and active escape" and "sow deterritorialization everywhere", the migrate barbarians "cross and recross frontiers, pillage and ransom, but also integrate themselves and reterritorialize . . . At other times, they will go over the nomads, allying with them, becoming indiscernible" (pp. 222–223). It is in this sense that we may deem Benjamin on the path of becoming. However, Roscoe later returns to the habit of labeling and making things discernible: "he wanted no scandal to creep out in connection with his family" (Fitzgerald, 1922, p. 217). Following the prominence that he gains in Baltimore, Roscoe's demeanor shifts to that of his grandfather's and the way he objects to Benjamin's seemingly anomalous growth: "you better turn right around and start back the other way. . . you behave yourself" (p. 218). Roscoe seems to be more concerned with his own face and even urges the now-teenager Benjamin not to call his son by his first name. The very actions of Roscoe fill us with the foreboding that the paternal disciplines will be restored in Benjamin's life once again.

As discussed previously, Alexander's moralistic reading of Benjamin's life is more consistent with the capitalist view of norms and regulations. The narrator of the story, as well as Alexander, lauds Benjamin as long as his motives are in line with those of the norms of patriarchal society. In Deleuzian terms, with the flourishing of his vitality and his new experimentations, Benjamin attempts to set himself as an example of a member of a "society without fathers" (Deleuze, 1998, p. 88). As Deleuze writes, "[i]f humanity can be saved, . . . it will be only through the dissolution or decomposition of the paternal function" (p. 84). With the restoration of the father figure, a reterritorialization of the previous regime takes place. In the same way that the newborn Benjamin had been in the habit of sneaking away from his father to read his *Encyclopedia Britannica*, now the nearly ten-year-old Benjamin has to leave the house one night, saying nothing to Roscoe, to join the United States army at Camp Mosby as a General. However, this proves fruitless, and the paternal society completely bans Benjamin's vitality and experimentation when Roscoe escorts him back to his home. This demonstrates the critical role discharged by the father figures who, instead of leaving subjects in indeterminate and obscure zones, tend to rationalize life and restore logic to the community.

To Become in the Middle

It has already been mentioned that Benjamin's actions exemplify new possibilities and new forms of life. That a person experiments with reversed aging is itself a novelty,

which is in direct opposition to the rationalist mind. From the outset, when Roger Button sets eyes on his son, he attempts to trace the origin of his son: "Where in God's name did you come from?" (Fitzgerald, 1922, p. 196). It is quite natural on the part of Mr. Button to resort to denial, as Petry has noted, since the rationalist mind looks for an origin or, in Deleuzian terms, "a point of departure" (Deleuze & Parnet, 1987, p. 27). Therefore, the very existence of Benjamin can be taken as an experiment that runs contrary to the established form of life, in that he rejects any dedication to the already-understood patterns of living. Upon his father's inquiry about his origin, Benjamin, quite comically, situates himself within a child-adult continuum that confuses Roger: "I can't tell you *exactly* who I am . . . because I've only been born a few hours" (Fitzgerald, 1922, p. 196). Benjamin's response makes the rationalist Roger resort to an outburst of anger and denial, "You lie! You're an impostor!", since he cannot rationally deal with his new-born son occupying a liminal space. This brings to the fore Deleuze's affinity with the idea of in-betweenness or being in the middle, "to grow from the middle, to be always-in-between" (Deleuze & Parnet, 1987, p. 93), which he recurrently uses throughout his *oeuvre* and can be understood in the light of his preoccupation with the idea of rhizome:

Rhizome has no beginning or end; it is always in the middle, between things, interbeing, *intermezzo*. . . The tree imposes the verb "to be," but the fabric of the rhizome is the conjunction, 'and . . . and . . . and . . .' (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 25)

Accordingly, we can see how Benjamin is experimenting with in-betweenness in that he plunges his father into a state where he may find his son an old man, a newborn child, and at the same time both of them. This is evident through Benjamin's pronouncement: "this baby's not going to wear anything in about two minutes." This is, however, followed by the baby's whining: "And a cane father. I want to have a cane" (Fitzgerald, 1922, p. 198). These are but a few examples that bear witness to the fact that Benjamin's very existence itself is an instance of becoming and indiscernibility amid a society that attempts to reinforce itself by seeking trees, images, histories, beginnings, and ends.

Of course, Benjamin's aging is not a mere reversal of aging, i.e., one's behaving like a child in adulthood followed gradually by behaving like an adult in childhood. Benjamin is a character who transforms our conception of adulthood and childhood. In contrast to the adaptation of the story by David Fincher, Fitzgerald's story illustrates a newborn

Benjamin as a child who possesses the physical features of a senior: “a *baby* of threescore and ten, a baby whose feet hung over the sides of the crib in which it was reposing” (Fitzgerald, 1922, p. 196). Contrary to Fincher’s adaptation, which, in Curnutt’s view, relates “the alienation of the outsider, who by virtue of his oddity, must observe rather than experience life” (2009, p. 7), Fitzgerald’s story illustrates a Benjamin who experiences a new form of childhood as well as a new form of adulthood in his childhood. In this sense, he experiments with what Deleuze terms as “becoming-child” and also, as argued here, “becoming adult.” In their discussions of becoming, Deleuze and Guattari (1987) assert that:

. . . girls and children draw their strength neither from the molar status that subdues them nor from the organism and subjectivity they receive; they draw their strength from the becoming-molecular they cause to pass between sexes and ages, the becoming-child of the adult as well as of the child. (p. 277)

Regarding Benjamin, we may see how, as a child, he interpenetrates through the experiences of childhood, and later experiences what it means to be an adult while he is a boy: “Benjamin opened a book of boy’s stories . . . But he found himself thinking persistently about war . . . Benjamin wanted to enlist, but, alas, sixteen was the minimum age, and he did not look that old” (Fitzgerald, 1922, p. 219). Benjamin experiments with adulthood and childhood in ages other than that of their physical and psychological attributes, and this shows that in each period, he selectively adopts the “particles, the speeds and slowness, the flows” (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987, p. 277) of that particular age to become new and produce new conceptions of aging. It is worth mentioning how Fitzgerald depicts a society that totally banishes childhood, in order to show how Benjamin has been entrapped by father figures whose domineering position is shaken by the animality of childishness: one contending that he must perform childishness and the other warning him against childishness, one trying to impose his disciplined version of childishness and the other banishing childishness altogether. It is in this sense that we may take Benjamin’s story as a story of the suppression of childish nomadism at the cost of the stability of identity.

Even though he is born into an upper-class American family and at times he takes pleasure in being merged into its amenities, Benjamin might be seen as a character who easily turns away from these comfort zones. Ortolano’s reading of Benjamin situates

him more within the opportunistic realm of capitalism, as he argues that Benjamin's goals are exceedingly obvious and related to upper-class America (2012, p. 135). This can seemingly be creditable as long as we identify Benjamin as a person who attaches himself to a system. Nevertheless, it can be said that one may remain within the realm of capitalistic mores and at the same time constantly lose face, and this is evidently seen in Benjamin's actions. In 1898, when "his home had for him so little charm" (Fitzgerald, 1922, p. 213), Benjamin sets off to serve in the army in the Spanish-American War, "dancing with the prettiest of the young married women" (p. 215), handing over his sparkling business to Roscoe, attending Harvard university, attending the (prep) school later, and enlisting in the army as a General in his final years. All these bear evidence of Benjamin's dealing with new opportunities while escaping them, thus experimenting with both physical and mental nomadism. Deleuze's affinity with the term nomadism justifiably explains Benjamin's conditions: "To make thought a nomadic power is not to necessarily move, but is to shake the model of the state apparatus" (Deleuze and Parnet, 1987, p. 32). Thus, it can be said that Benjamin remains within popular culture and at the same time deals with what Deleuze calls "escaping the codes" (2004, p. 260) to become new and not take root. Benjamin's very existence and his defying of the system of aging, which deems him as a person without history, is actually an experimentation with escaping the codes defined by society. Therefore, it could be claimed that Fitzgerald's neglected short story has been tremendously successful at creating what Deleuze (1998) calls "inventing the people who are missing" (p. 4).

Conclusion

This article has attempted to offer a new reading of F. Scott Fitzgerald's neglected short story "The Curious Case of Benjamin Button". Considering the available literature on Benjamin's case as valuable, and at the same time, insufficient, this article offers some new directions in the life of Benjamin through the lens of Gilles Deleuze's philosophy. Hence, firstly, it has been argued that, similar to the narrator in Melville's *Bartleby, the Scrivener*, the narrator of Fitzgerald's short story seems to direct the attention of his readers to the marginal aspects of Benjamin's life. Instead of focusing on the vitalistic aspects of Benjamin's life, through making use of a number of strategies, the narrator seems to have devoted himself wholeheartedly to bring to the fore the anomalous and abnormal aspects of Benjamin's backward aging. Secondly, as opposed to part of the existing literature which conceives Benjamin's motives as fruitless or in line with capitalism, it has been argued that Benjamin's adopting forgetfulness can be taken as a positive measure to

experiment with new possibilities, new inventions, and new forms of life. In this manner, we may read the significance of Benjamin's life and its contribution to the creation of new forms of life rather than merely seeking starting points, endpoints, and origins. Finally, it has been argued that the very presence of Benjamin in postbellum American society can itself initiate the formation of a society of brothers. However, Benjamin is entrapped within a society in which father figures (his father earlier and his son later) act as normalizing figures blocking lines of becoming, resulting in reterritorialization.

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Not “the British Empire in Space”: Symbiosis as Subversion in Octavia Butler’s “Bloodchild”

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ABSTRACT

Despite Octavia Butler’s own claims, “Bloodchild” has been predominantly interpreted as a direct allegory of slavery for over three decades. This article challenges such readings by moving beyond racial interpretations to critique humanist approaches, offering a fresh perspective grounded in the neglected exploration of the story’s genre. It posits that “Bloodchild” is a postcolonial and ecofeminist reimagining of the space fiction narratives prevalent in the 1970s and 1980s. The first section of the article contrasts the colonial ideologies embedded in traditional space fiction’s future histories with Butler’s postcolonialist approach to history-writing within her storyworld. The second section examines the motifs of the Alien body, longevity, and interspecies love through the lens of the genre to reveal their contribution to the story’s symbiotic logic. The final section explores the narrative progression from parasitism to symbiosis, a shift that disrupts and transcends the binary conventions of space fiction. By integrating stylistic, thematic, and narratological layers, the article demonstrates how Butler constructs a storyworld that is deeply rooted in a postcolonialist and ecofeminist framework. This symbiotic reconfiguration not only critiques the colonial underpinnings of the genre but also subverts its traditional narrative structures, offering a compelling revision of space fiction conventions. This analysis establishes “Bloodchild” as a transformative work that redefines genre conventions while resisting reductive allegorical interpretations.

Keywords: Octavia Butler, Bloodchild, symbiosis, space opera, ecofeminism



Introduction

Interpretations of Octavia Butler's "Bloodchild" frequently center on its association with the author's racial identity. Many critics have read the interspecies relationship between humans and the insect-like alien Tlics as an allegory of slavery in the United States. As early as 1997, Jane Donawerth famously identified the closing scene, which depicts an interspecies sexual encounter between the protagonist Gan and T'Gatoi, as *punishment by rape and incest*, representing slave women forced to carry the offspring of their masters. This assumption has largely persisted into the 21st century. Thelma Shinn Richard treats Butler's oeuvre as a melting pot of a single agenda, claiming that in "Bloodchild" "the need of even a young human male to submit to impregnation by the alien Tlic [...] addresses the African diasporic perspective on the cost of survival" (Richard, 2005). Drawing on Donawerth's reading, Kristen Lillvis argues that Gan's compassionate development symbolizes Black women's experiences during slavery, which generated "nonphallic maternal authority" due to the absence of a father figure and proper entrance into the Symbolic (Lillvis, 2014). It has even been stated that the success of "Bloodchild" lies in introducing the genre of the neo-slave narrative to science fiction (Humann, 2017).

Such persistent identification of the writer's race with her text indicates a deeper historical problem faced by African American writers. Gene Andrew Jarrett observes that since the postbellum period, there has been a market demand for African American literature to feature African American protagonists alongside certain historical themes or subjectivities defined by race. According to Jarrett, when African American writers produce works that defy racial realism, their texts are often confined to racial terms, implying that African American writers cannot participate in global discourses without being reduced to identity politics (2006). For Jarrett, the most influential factor in the formation of the canon for African American literature has been, and continues to be, the extent to which such works remain confined within the boundaries of racial realism. If an acclaimed African American writer—such as Butler—produces a remarkable work that defies this identification, there is a prevailing tendency to interpret and *promote* the text strictly in racial terms, as if African American writers cannot engage in global discourses without being reduced to identity politics or unfairly criticized for adopting a post-racialist mindset (2006).

Following Jarrett's call for alternative readings beyond race and Butler's own comments on "Bloodchild," this article explores the complexities of the story's genre

from postcolonial and ecofeminist perspectives. A genre-focused reading of “Bloodchild” reveals its foundation in space fiction, interpreting the Terran-Tlic relationship as an *interspecies*, rather than an interracial, dynamic. This is no easy task because, as Zakiyyah Iman Jackson argues, the category of species has always functioned as a homologue to race within anti-black, colonialist, and heteropatriarchal culture—one that “mistakes accommodation for parasitism, symbiosis for slavery, and symbiogenesis with extinction,” thereby explaining the dominant interpretation of “Bloodchild” (Jackson, 2020). It is urgent to construct an ontology that revises species differentiation as a product of symbiosis and relationality, moving beyond the racialized concept of hybridity, which has historically positioned the “animal problem” within the category of the subhuman (Jackson, 2020). Butler constructs such an ontology in “Bloodchild,” and this article proposes a perspective that moves beyond racial allegories to examine the story’s subversion of space fiction conventions, particularly the colonial ideologies that dominated the genre in the 1970s and 1980s.

It should be noted that most of these conventions specifically originate from *space operas*, which typically feature story arcs set in “vast settings of interstellar conflicts between clearly defined ‘good’ and ‘bad’ sides,” often incorporating romance elements and melodramatic effects (Sawyer, 2009). “Bloodchild” largely subverts these conventions, but due to the lack of consensus on which works qualify as part of this subgenre, I use the broader term *space fiction* to include all narratives set in extraterrestrial storyworlds. “Bloodchild” is a groundbreaking work of space fiction, serving as a precursor to 21st-century science fiction that actively engages with ecocritical discourses. To substantiate this claim, it is essential to interpret the story primarily as space fiction, viewing the Terran-Tlic relationship not as interracial but as *interspecies*, between humans and aliens.

Focusing on the genre is particularly significant because, even in studies attempting to move beyond race, interpretations often revert to framing the Terran-Tlic relationship as one of servitude. In these readings, the allegory shifts from racial dynamics to representing other systems of control, such as Foucauldian biopower, the strategies and technologies used to regulate populations. These readings position the Tlic species as counterparts to state machinery, which governs “the availability of their Terran bodies as breeding resources” by inscribing and marking “the human body and consciousness” (San Miguel, 2018). Similarly, Shiladitya Sen interprets *Bloodchild* as an allegory of power dynamics within micropolitics, specifically concerning abusive relationships (Sen, 2022).

Meanwhile, Simon John Ryle views the story as an anti-humanist critique of the meat industry, symbolized through the Tlic-Terran relationship (Ryle, 2023).

Since the COVID-19 pandemic, several studies have challenged the fundamental assumption of interspecies opposition in “Bloodchild.” Beth A. McCoy argues that the persistent neglect of Butler’s claim—that the story is not about slavery—leads to an inverted interpretation of the narrative, stemming from “this readerly tendency to functionally declare that Butler’s non-human persons have no right to life” (McCoy, 2020). Similarly, Sodam Choi observes that the story disrupts “the binary scope of humanist ontology” and presents a posthuman perspective that is particularly relevant in the post-pandemic era (Choi, 2021). Alisa Dahal interprets the story as a cautionary tale against future crises and an invitation to adopt an ecocritical ontology grounded in Deleuzian *becoming* (Dahal, 2024).

Thus, we can trace two seemingly incompatible interpretations of the story: first, the historically dominant reading as an allegory of slavery; and second, the more recent view of it as an interspecies interaction. According to Marquita R. Smith, these approaches can only cease to be mutually exclusive if we revise the former in light of the latter. In other words, while the story can be analyzed through the lens of racial politics, it is more appropriately understood within the broader framework of “how to live ethically with difference.” This interpretation encompasses both human/non-human interactions and human-to-human relationships, moving beyond a simplistic master–slave dynamic (Smith, 2024). According to Jackson, the story curiously erases the presence of Euro-anthropocentrism by bringing together formerly enslaved *immigrants* and insectoid *aliens*, two communities of alterity that eventually learn to disown their Self or realize that they had no autonomous Self to begin with, a category she deems essential to the logic of slavery itself (Jackson, 2020). “Bloodchild” is not an allegory of slavery, but rather a depiction of problematic and asymmetrical relationality, one that may appear nightmarish when viewed from the privileged position of colonialist heteronormativity, which Butler sees as ultimately self-destructive (Jackson, 2020).

One reason for the historical conflict in the interpretations of the story, as mentioned above, is the tendency to identify the text with the author’s race. The second stems from the ambiguity of the text itself. The analysis I present in this article aligns with the emerging but still underexamined perspective that explores the story’s potential for ecological interconnectedness. However, a justified question arises: Why does the story

combine the stylistics of interconnectedness and love with horror and power imbalances? The answer lies in Butler's humbling and disruptive repositioning of her human characters within the alien environment, which demands a radical reconsideration of ecocritical ethics—one that entirely strips away human privilege. This aligns with Val Plumwood's non-dualist ecofeminist philosophy, which seeks to confront

the Western-based [...] human mastery [...] with our inclusion in the animal order as food, as flesh, our kinship with those we eat, with being part of the feast and not just some sort of spectator of it, like a disembodied eye filming somebody else's feast. (Plumwood, 2012)

This suggests that the idealization of nature may itself be a product of European anthropocentrism—a self-assured positioning of the human as the apex predator and sole dominator of the environment, as well as of other so-called inferior cultures, which the colonial imagination portrays as passively waiting to be explored and exploited rather than as active agents of mutual reception. Interestingly, traditional space operas, upon which “Bloodchild” draws, notoriously reproduce this ideology—founded on the logic of expansion, assimilation, the de-realization of the subaltern, and the spatial stylistics of the science romances of the Romantic period—while most other science fiction subgenres have shifted toward an aesthetic of temporality to confront the dynamics of 20th-century capitalism (Suvin, 1977). Subverting the conventions of the genre requires placing the human body in a vulnerable position (one fully aligned with non-human bodies) where symbiosis entails troublesome compensation beyond any utilitarian logic or humanist formulations of utopia, all while preventing the genre from becoming escapist. This creates a disturbing effect on the reader, which, combined with the author's race, helps explain the traditional interpretation of “Bloodchild” as a dystopian allegory.

My approach examines “Bloodchild” through the lens of its genre, an area often overlooked in Butler studies. In the first section, I explore how the story engages with and subverts the conventions of space operas prevalent in the 1980s. The neglect of the genre's influence on “Bloodchild” appears to have contributed significantly to the tendency to reduce the narrative to racial dynamics, particularly within academic circles. Second, I investigate the roles of the Alien trope, the theme of longevity, and interspecies love within the broader context of space fiction. Finally, I analyze the story's progression from its climax to its conclusion in relation to Butler's writing process. This exploration

reveals how the narrative transitions from the logic of abjection and parasitism to one of symbiosis. Ultimately, it becomes evident that the story’s stylistic, thematic, and narratological layers work in unison to construct a storyworld grounded in a postcolonialist and ecofeminist vision of symbiosis.

“Bloodchild” and the stylistics of postcolonial space fiction

“Bloodchild” is a science fiction novelette that narrates a pivotal day in Gan’s life as he steps into maturity by allowing T’Gatoi, a female member of an insect-like alien species called the Tlic, to implant her eggs into his body. The story is set on an unspecified extrasolar planet where a human population (the Terrans) settled a few generations ago after escaping genocide on Earth. The planet’s natives, the Tlic, are parasitic species that require hosts for their eggs. Following an unsuccessful armed rebellion by the Terrans to subjugate the Tlic, the aliens have disarmed the humans and sought to “pen” them as livestock for reproduction, as the Terrans have proven to be ideal hosts.

In response, a political faction within the Tlic established the Preserve, where the Terrans are protected from other Tlic in exchange for compliance: Each Terran family must offer a child, preferably male, to serve as a host for Tlic eggs. On the day of Gan’s anticipated impregnation, the last day of his childhood, he unexpectedly witnesses the traumatic sight of Bram Lomas, a Terran, being cut open by T’Gatoi during an emergency operation to save him from the larvae inside, which are poisoning and consuming him alive.

The story provides a detailed, visceral account of the bloody procedure and Gan’s attempts to process the trauma. However, his sympathy for Lomas takes a backseat to his evolving relationship with T’Gatoi. Gan, who has shared an intimate bond with T’Gatoi since birth, finds himself conflicted. The cold efficiency with which T’Gatoi performs the operation and her unsettling act of licking the man’s blood leads Gan to abject her and forces him to reassess his previously unchallenged decision to host her offspring. On a broader scale, this moment compels him to reevaluate the power dynamics between the Tlic and the Terrans, further complicating his feelings about his role in their relationship.

In the closing remarks of her 2005 afterword to the story, Butler acknowledges that many renowned classics of space fiction, such as *Star Trek*, are “the British Empire in

space." These narratives presume that humans are the rightful owners of the universe, portraying it as familiar, easily conquerable, and unproblematically traversable. However, Butler's own narrative does not reproduce the stereotypical patterns ingrained in science fiction, despite her familiarity with them as a passionate reader of the genre. Instead, "Bloodchild" profoundly challenges patriarchal, colonial, and anthropocentric ideas about the human and the non-human (Butler, 2005).

Charles Stross' commentary on politically and ecocritically engaged space fiction further highlights Butler's significant contributions to rethinking humanity's relationship with the environment, as well as her discussion of postcolonialist and feminist representations of the self and the Other. Stross critiques traditional space fiction, arguing that it often replicates the patriarchal practices of history, ranging from the medieval codes of "absolute monarchies" to their modern counterparts, "hereditary military dictatorships." He points out that even contemporary portrayals of the posthuman condition, enhanced by technological assistance, often overlook the physical limitations of the human body and the complexities of alien spaces (Stross, 2013).

According to Stross, a prominent writer of contemporary English space fiction, this tendency is highly problematic. It manipulates the guise of scientific realism to perpetuate a humanist fantasy, ascribing to men the role of autonomous individuals who not only survive against all odds but also extend their material subjectivity by assimilating the environment to perpetuate operative colonization (Stross, 2013). Similarly, Simoneti observes that the colonial frameworks underpinning space fiction, particularly in invasion and first-contact stories, have historically helped reproduce the concept of the modern subject through themes of disembodiment, progress, and anthropocentrism. However, Simoneti argues that these frameworks are increasingly displaced in the 21st century to "problematize the category of the modern subject" (Simoneti, 2022).

Viewed within this context, Butler's story makes a significant contribution to science fiction because, while it highlights the relationship between humans and the Other/alien under harsh conditions, it also subverts preconceived assumptions about the colonizer/oppressed divide and humanity's relationship with the environment. To start, the historical background that Butler envisions situates the Tlic not as colonizers but as the indigenous inhabitants of the planet, while the Terrans are portrayed as colonizers *and* refugees. This positioning diverges not only from the historical accounts that Butler is often claimed to draw upon but also from the conventions of traditional space fiction.

In “Bloodchild”, unlike in typical space fiction, space travel occurs only once. It is neither narrated nor romanticized, and there is no possibility of returning. The story lacks futuristic weapons; Terrans are not even allowed to use basic, old-fashioned guns. Far from depicting a triumphant or advanced civilization, the Terrans remain permanently isolated from Earth. They are unable to dominate the Tlic and instead must negotiate and form a symbiotic relationship, one that comes at a cost.

If anything, rather than aligning with the slave narrative genre, this structure bears greater similarity to the captivity narratives of the Puritan settlers. These narratives often focused less on stereotyping Native Americans and more on reflecting the writers’ anxieties when confronted with the fluidity of colonizer-colonized positions, the destabilization of cultural identity, the fragility of the colonial project, and the emergence of a third space characterized by cultural hybridity and ambiguity (Pierson, 2018). Viewed in this context, Gan’s narrative can be interpreted as a reflection of the anxiety surrounding hylomorphism—the conception of the non-human environment as a passive entity to be mastered by the active/masculine subject—a shift from an organic cosmology to a mechanistic worldview that forms the foundation of modern subjectivity (Merchant, 1980).

However, the notable differences between “Bloodchild” and traditional captivity narratives underscore Butler’s nuanced approach. She does not merely subvert binary oppositions by reproducing the history of the United States. The story is neither narrated by a first-generation settler nor framed as a victorious narrative, as one might expect from such a replication. Instead, Gan’s last night of childhood portrays an era in which both species have already taken meaningful steps toward forming a symbiotic community. Remarkably, no scholar has considered this situation as a futuristic metaphor for an alternative history, one in which an indigenous culture retains its power despite an armed occupation. This omission is likely because the story defies the typical search for innocent victims or ideal revolutionaries, making such simplistic interpretations futile.

This is not to suggest, of course, that “Bloodchild” functions as a metaphor of any kind. Drawing parallels between colonial history and the text introduces additional challenges, particularly in the context of racial conflict. Notably, the only aspect of race in “Bloodchild” that might catch the reader’s attention is the absence of conventional white signifiers: Gan and his family bear Chinese names that hold no societal significance, Lomas—the central Terran figure in the story—has brown skin, and the Tlic species

does not recognize the concept of race. It is as if the notion of race becomes effortlessly irrelevant in the absence of *whiteness*, despite it not being a focal concern of the narrative. In this way, the story permits a discourse on the history of African American people through absence and contrast, without directly mimicking historical atrocities. This approach might ultimately allow for a deeper confrontation with contemporary mechanisms of domination than a straightforward allegory could provide. Naomi Morgenstern acknowledges this absence of race but, in her comparison of “Bloodchild” with Toni Morrison’s “Recitatif,” argues that such an effacement might signify wish-fulfillment. She contends that the story should undergo psychoanalytic scrutiny to uncover potential replacements for the racialized maternal subject (Morgenstern, 2022).

However, imposing tenuous parallels on the text risks trivializing both the story and the lived African American experience, reducing them to caricatures. In contrast, Butler offers significant divergences that not only enrich the narrative on multiple levels but also enable a profound reexamination of both historical and contemporary realities through the speculative lens of a fictional future. It is important to note that Butler’s fiction is far from escapist; she is a politically and philosophically engaged science fiction writer and a pivotal figure in Afrofuturism (Womack, 2013). While her works, such as the neo-slave narrative *Kindred*, explicitly address race and slavery, she is deliberate in doing so. This is why her assertion that “Bloodchild” aims, in part, to subvert the anthropocentric and colonial logic of space fiction dominating the 1980s should be taken seriously.

This aspect of “Bloodchild” has often been overlooked, but Butler’s subsequent major work, the *Xenogenesis* series (later published as *Lilith’s Brood*), has received recognition in this regard. Lisa Dowdall observes that “in contrast to much of the white liberal sf of the 1970s and 1980s, which is often preoccupied with superseding limits to growth through, for example, space odyssey, artificial intelligence, or extropianism,” *Lilith’s Brood* “intervenes into futurological discourse by revealing how a radical reinvention of humanity’s relationship with other species is necessary to survive within the planet’s material limits” (Dowdall, 2017).

Moreover, the interspecies relationship in “Bloodchild,” which Butler herself describes as fundamentally *symbiotic*, critically challenges preconceived notions about the utilitarian function of non-human entities and processes that are often passively subject to human domination. The nuanced dynamic between T’Gatoi and Gan moves beyond

unilateral commodification, narcissistic desires for domination, paternal infantilization, and appropriation. Instead, it proposes an alternative form of symbiosis, one that is simultaneously shaped by *and* despite profound differences. This relationship remains deliberately problematic and asymmetrical, as the story carefully resists idealizing nature or granting undue privilege to humanity.

Such symbiosis becomes possible, first and foremost, through the historical background Butler envisions for her storyworld, which radically reimagines the histories of space fiction. A closer examination of the consequences of this historical background reveals how it moves the characters toward symbiosis and demonstrates the hybridization of the cultures and behaviors of the two species. This hybridity becomes evident in the opening scene of the story. "Bloodchild" begins with a striking image of T'Gatoi, a massive alien being with insect, serpent, and mammal-like characteristics, not a parasitic organism, but a source of comfort and a provider of her species' sterile eggs, which both soothe and prolong human life.

Gan, contrary to what one might expect from a human subject in contact with such a creature, complements this image by reclining "against T'Gatoi's long velvet underside, sipping from (his) egg now and then," feeling a deeper affinity for T'Gatoi than for his own mother (Butler, 2005). Similarly, T'Gatoi, using "six or seven limbs" to probe him, notices that the scrawny Gan is gaining weight and begins to caress him with a maternal tenderness. This interaction disrupts not only traditional host-parasite dynamics but also those of human-pet relationships. Gan's sense of self is deeply intertwined with T'Gatoi's worldview, even though his mother has instilled in him a sense of respect and distance toward T'Gatoi, who is the Tlic government official overseeing the Preserve. "It was impossible to be formal with her," Gan reflects, "while lying against her and hearing her complain as usual that I was too skinny," further noting that T'Gatoi, his mother's childhood friend, had never been "interested in being honored in the house she considered her second home".

Later, it is revealed that Gan possesses the "ability to imitate (T'Gatoi's) expressions" highlighting the depth of their bond. Furthermore, the two species communicate in the same language, although it remains unclear whether this language corresponds to English in the storyworld. It is also uncertain whether the Tlic had already developed speech before encountering humans or if the Terrans adapted to the Tlics' language, which the reader perceives as English. Regardless of these ambiguities, the two

species share the same sociolinguistic order, further emphasizing their interconnectedness.

The cognitive and behavioral proximity of the species is highlighted by two additional details in the opening scene. The first is Gan's matter-of-fact account of the life cycle of the Terrans and his indifference toward the death of his father, who holds no symbolic power over his psychosexual development. This suggests that pre-established human categories are not easily applicable to Gan, and his emotional struggles lie elsewhere. Gan's hybrid psyche, shaped by these circumstances, is more immersed in the direct experiences of the present than in the retroactive tendencies of a typical human mind.

The second detail reflects Gan's fascination with T'Gatoi during his experiences "outside," where he once "lived with her" as a potential prey to the desperate Tlic. Through his engagement with T'Gatoi, Gan was able to observe the Tlic from a safe distance (Butler, 2005). This recollection reveals two remarkable factors in the storyworld that contrast with humanity's problematic relationship with the environment. On the one hand, Gan is consistently aware of the human body's significance as a nutritious host for Tlic eggs. In contrast, the modern human subject, entrenched in an exceptionalist obsession with bodily integrity, operates under the illusion of autonomy and separation from the ecological processes of decomposition during life and after death (Plumwood 2000). On the other hand, T'Gatoi, brimming with life and confidence, symbolizes the embodiment of ecological processes. She represents the inevitability of violation—albeit horrific within the limits of anthropocentric thought—while also serving as a protective border between the inside and the outside. T'Gatoi actively resists her species' predatory instincts, subverting hunter-prey dynamics to the extent that Gan's mother instructs her feeble son to "take care of her" when they venture outside the Preserve, rather than the other way around (Butler, 2005).

For the family, and especially for Gan, T'Gatoi is the source of life and meaning. It is through her political efforts that they perceive the intrinsic value of being human beyond merely serving as livestock. This life-affirming stance, paradoxically, draws its power from humanity's potential to relinquish the pursuit of privilege and autonomy. The symbiotic logic Butler emphasizes in "Bloodchild" aligns with a specific position in ecofeminist thought: An understanding of life as "an interrelated web in which each individual is a small node that exists thanks to the others' presence," forming "a multiplicity

of elements in a free-range order, with each element different from the next, yet all recognizably part of the whole” (Anderlini-D’Onofrio, 2004). This “interaction of the human and the non-human world” in Butler’s fiction creates “a storyworld in which distinct characters operate not only according to the logic of the narrative in their local places and (semi)private/communal spaces but also as distinct configurations of the Anthropocene, that is, as agents of a larger story of humans” (Federmayer, 2017).

Politics of the Alien motif, longevity, and interspecies love

The storyworld constructed in “Bloodchild” is not only shaped by its postcolonial history and the cultural hybridity it fosters but is also deeply rooted in *biological difference*. This foundation provides a naturalistic basis for an embodied experience that transcends the simplistic binaries of good and evil. The narrative is fundamentally grounded in the concept of biological determinism, which Butler employs as a realistic device to retrospectively construct the historical backdrop of her characters. This approach allows her to imagine the evolutionary development of humanity and other species while simultaneously embracing change and uncertainty through the unpredictable mechanisms of mutation, an element intricately embedded within deterministic processes (Papke, 2013).

Mary E. Papke highlights that Butler’s focus is not on determinism itself but rather on “what people make of it” when they frame it as the foundation for ideological constructs and teleological worldviews. Butler rejects “the compulsion toward imagining one’s self as always already subjugated and thus powerless to effect new structures of feeling out of which a new sense of collective and community might arise” (Papke, 2013). In “Bloodchild,” the possibility of such a community emerges through the intricate relationship between the Tlic and the Terrans, showcasing their potential to move beyond fixed essences and reductive stereotypes.

On another level, this dimension positions “Bloodchild” as an alien story, compelling us to interpret deterministic differences as manifestations of pure Otherness within the realm of space fiction, rather than reducing them to mere social constructs. In this context, it is essential to acknowledge that since Olaf Stapledon, with the exception of mainstream right-wing interpretations that render the concept as a “spectrum” (Welch-Larson, 2021)—potentially construing it as an essentialist symbol of threat and oppression—the alien motif in space fiction has consistently represented a utopian

impulse. This impulse exists in stark contrast to the challenges of its realization and actualization (Jameson, 2006).

Under the constraints of post-industrial capitalism and humanist traditions, which limit aesthetic production to anthropocentric frameworks, alien bodies have emerged as non-human fields of perception. These signify alternative forms of community, emphasizing “the peculiarities of new life forms rather than the ultimate destiny of our own” (Jameson, 2006). This notion aligns closely with Butler’s stated intent in “Bloodchild,” where she sought to explore and convey this dynamic within her narrative.

Furthermore, longevity in speculative fiction, from its inception, has consistently served as an empowering tool for the oppressed, a revolutionary intervention against historical *telos* and the progressive domination of the ruling classes. It is described as “a figure and a disguise for [...] historical change, for radical mutations in society and collective life itself” (Jameson, 2006). The unexpected emergence of longevity in narratives often marks a pivotal threshold, where disruptions render previous historical conditions obsolete, eroding established categories of race and gender, not in a post-racial or post-feminist sense, but by subverting colonialist and upper-class paradigms, as exemplified in Wells’ *War of the Worlds* (Jameson, 2006).

Significantly, in the late 20th century, the theme of longevity began to evolve toward the politically unconscious expression of the individual’s vulnerability and transience, juxtaposed against the seemingly *immortal* dominance of the neocolonialist condition driven by transnational corporations that position themselves as the global precondition for Utopia, welfare, and scientific progress (Jameson, 2006). In “Bloodchild,” however, this theme does not replicate the dynamics of biopower, as some critics have suggested. Instead, the encounter between species (and the subsequent theme of longevity, achieved through sterile eggs) represents Butler’s alternative vision of power and economic distribution in contemporary biopolitics. This vision reframes historical progression, challenging the entrenched social categories of race and gender and shifting the focus back to the alien environment, rather than to corporatist structures (which cannot conquer it) as a foundation for sustainable communal longevity.

Interestingly, Jameson argues that progression and succession in longevity narratives often occur diagonally and non-linearly, moving not from father/mother to son/daughter but from “uncle to nephew,” in order to defamiliarize readers from the conventional,

anthropocentric progression of history (Jameson, 2006). Similarly, in "Bloodchild," Gan consents to give birth to his surrogate nephews and nieces, a dynamic that reflects the story's non-linear familial structures. This occurs because T'Gatoi, a surrogate sister gestated by Gan's father before Gan was born, stands in a hybrid familial relationship to him. This layered complexity is why Gan's sexual encounter with T'Gatoi is often interpreted as punishment by incest, symbolizing the experiences of African American women. However, Butler herself challenges such reductive readings, framing the relationship as an act of love. She describes "Bloodchild" as "a love story between two very different beings," a "coming-of-age story in which a boy must absorb disturbing information and use it to make a decision that will affect the rest of his life," and a "pregnant man story" where a man "put into that most unlikely of all positions" chooses "to become pregnant—not through misplaced competitiveness to prove that a man could do anything a woman could do, not because he was forced to, not even out of curiosity—but as an act of love, choosing pregnancy in spite of, as well as because of, surrounding difficulties" (Butler, 2005).

The story's central tension, then, extends beyond survival to the possibility of love, which Butler positions as the antidote to power imbalances that often corrupt relationships (Japtok, 2020). Examining the subversive dimensions of this love reveals its departure from traditional space operas, which typically rely on heteronormative romantic subplots for melodramatic effect. Notably, such subplots did not undergo a feminist reimagining until the late 1990s (LaVigne, 2005). Butler highlights this disparity with irony, noting that her male readers often interpret Gan and T'Gatoi's relationship as a "horrible case of slavery," while women readers respond dismissively, remarking, "oh well, they had caesarians, big deal" (Kenan, 1991). This divergence, Butler asserts, underscores the historical context: Women's medical realities in European history, until late modernity, were far more precarious than the circumstances faced by the Terrans in the story. In those times, the preference for saving the baby's life over the mother's during emergencies reflected the systemic devaluation of women's lives. In contrast, the Tlic genuinely care for their hosts. Butler speculates that it would be a remarkable step forward if humanity, despite its hubris, could ever "make that good deal with another species" (Kenan, 1991).

As Jackson notes, male pregnancy narratives in science fiction have historically fantasized childbirth as painless, enabling easy penetration into a traditionally female domain. "Bloodchild," however, subverts this trope through Gan's impregnation by an

insect, which strips men of the power of penetration—not by feminizing Gan, but by framing pregnancy as an act of interdependence, something that patriarchy equates with castration (Jackson, 2020). By contrast, Gan's older brother, Qui, embodies a cynical stance toward the Tlic, viewing his siblings as shields between himself and what he perceives as monstrous animals. This bitterness is rooted in his witnessing of a botched procedure that he claims led to a Terran's brutal death. Qui's disillusionment starkly contrasts Gan's eventual growth, emphasizing the nuanced dynamics of fear, love, and agency in "Bloodchild."

Still, the decision to frame this love story as incest appears to be a deliberate narrative device to transcend social norms and enter a subjectless act of becoming. By challenging and transgressing the familial structures that reproduce these norms, "Bloodchild" disrupts traditional frameworks. Deleuze and Guattari, in their exploration of minor literature, describe an *equalized* form of incest, which they term "schizo incest," as occurring between siblings and providing evidence of a nonhuman sexuality akin to "becoming-animal" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2003). According to them, this form of incest cannot be reduced to the patriarchal and oedipal structures of conventional incest, which channel all acts of liberation into mere substitutions for the mother and father. Within these confines, untamed incestuous relationships are reabsorbed into the family structure, where they can only exist through coercion, manipulation, neurosis, displacement, reaction-formation, narcissism, and delusion (Deleuze & Guattari, 2003).

The interspecies pseudo-schizo-incest depicted in the Tlic-Terran relationship in "Bloodchild" dismantles the structure of the nuclear family, facilitating the emergence of a new form of collectivity. This collectivity transcends compartmentalization and the self-regulated hierarchies inherent in the micro-politics of daily life. It is crucial to emphasize, however, that this form of collectivity is a minor one in the Deleuzian sense, disrupting established norms without reverting to master-slave symbolism or oppressive binaries. Only within such a framework does it become possible to interpret symbiosis as love, to view the encounter with the Alien as an expression of the utopian impulse, and to recognize this unity as a revolutionary force propelling longevity and transformation.

However, the opening scene reveals more of Gan's naive projection of his male ego-ideal than genuine love. For love to be fully actualized in the narrative, this projection must be tested—a trial that doubles as a political project. Butler juxtaposes this theme

with the enduring dilemma of security versus freedom, an issue that has increasingly supplanted natural disasters and human nature as central concerns in speculative fiction since the early 20th century. This rising focus stems from the organization of post-industrial societies around the risks and fears generated by their own activities, such as ecological destruction. These societies often push the concept of freedom into the realm of individual rights rather than interrogating the broader systemic premises that uphold sociological structures and social classes, because undertaking such an inquiry would destabilize these foundations (Beck, 1992).

In contrast, Butler envisions a symbiotic solidarity that relinquishes the traditional notions of institutionalized and individual security, rejecting the illusion of human autonomy. This transformation begins with Gan's realization that the solace he finds in his attachment to T'Gatoi is also the source of his suffering. His love must evolve to survive or even *emerge* after T'Gatoi proves unable to fulfill the expectations he has placed on her. This epiphany serves as the seed for a broader potential, one that gestures toward a social movement embracing freedom in its truest sense, encompassing both the human and the non-human.

This transformation first requires Gan's alienation, a paradoxical process that unfolds through his voluntary collaboration with T'Gatoi during an emergency procedure, disrupting the tranquility established in the opening scene. T'Gatoi is initially reluctant to carry out the procedure, let alone permit Gan to assist her, as it raises two significant challenges. First, N'Tlics (pregnant Terrans whose assigned T'lic is absent) depend on their specific T'lics—the biological mothers of the larvae—to be present during the birth. Only these T'lics can effectively soothe the Terrans' pain without endangering the larvae, underscoring the intimate bond between the two species. Second, T'Gatoi recognizes that the traumatic nature of the event will deeply affect Gan, who has spent his life sheltered as a figurative parasite to T'Gatoi and his parents.

Despite these concerns, T'Gatoi is compelled to act. The larvae, if not removed in time, will eat their way out of the human host's body. Confronted with this urgency, T'Gatoi resolves to save Lomas, a Terran whose T'lic is unwell and absent, and reluctantly accedes to Gan's insistent desire to help her, driven by the pressing time constraints. In the process, Gan takes a pivotal step in his maturation: he kills an animal for the first time to provide food for the newborn larvae. To do so, he uses a gun that his family has secretly kept, in defiance of the prohibition on Terrans possessing weapons.

This passage reveals that Gan's mother raises "a few Terran animals for the table and several thousand local ones for their fur," and that his siblings are skilled in slaughtering them. This suggests that the Terrans are not entirely exempt from the colonizing tendencies they attribute to the Tlic, even though T'Gatoi herself avoids consuming Terran animals. Still grappling with the shock of killing an animal for the first time, Gan participates in the operation and witnesses a visceral scene: Lomas' body writhes and convulses in pain, his screams give way to unconsciousness, and T'Gatoi cuts him open to reveal a swarm of ravenous grubs emerging from the soup of his viscera.

However, Gan's subsequent alienation from T'Gatoi is not driven by an increased sympathy for his fellow Terrans or a rejection of the Tlic species. Instead, it arises from his inability to perceive T'Gatoi's vulnerability and her genuine intent to *save* Lomas. Gan erroneously interprets her actions as prioritizing the survival of her species at the cost of human life, perhaps even deriving pleasure from the gruesome process. This sense of abjection reaches its peak when T'Gatoi licks Lomas' blood off an egg case, a stark reminder to Gan that T'Gatoi herself was once a larva sustained by a human host, namely Gan's own father. This realization prompts him to question, "Did she like the taste? Did childhood habits die hard—or not die at all?" (Butler, 2005). At this moment of profound abjection, T'Gatoi is unveiled as the quintessential Alien, shattering Gan's idealized projections and compelling him to confront the void of the Other.

From parasitism to symbiosis: An ecofeminist nature writing in space

It is not surprising that Gan, at this critical juncture in the story, becomes susceptible to his brother's disillusioned perspective of the Tlic-Terran relationship as mere parasitism. Interestingly, Butler stated that she began writing "Bloodchild" from a similar emotional standpoint to Gan's, in an effort to confront her own fears of encountering the Other. This fear was embodied for her by the terrifying image of botflies, which she encountered during research in the Peruvian Amazon for *Lilith's Brood*. Much like the Tlic, botflies lay their eggs under the skin, and untrained attempts to remove them can lead to severe infections (Butler, 2005). Refusing to romanticize nature or shy away from this unsettling representation of the Other, Butler chose instead to interrogate her own biases and her place within the natural world. Through this process, "Bloodchild" emerged as a science fiction writer's symbolic exploration of nature writing, bridging the gaps between fear, coexistence, and understanding.

To this end, Butler subverted the entire colonial dynamics of space fiction to face her own anthropocentric attitude, which was ultimately reflected in Gan’s journey. Rather than constructing an allegory of domination or victimization, Butler crafted a narrative that forces both the protagonist and the reader to confront the complexities of interdependence, vulnerability, and agency. Gan’s initial revulsion mirrors Butler’s own discomfort with the unsettling realities of parasitism, yet his transformation into an active participant in the symbiotic relationship with T’Gatoi suggests a shift away from fear and resistance toward acceptance and negotiation. In doing so, Butler not only challenged the colonial frameworks embedded in traditional space fiction but also invited a reevaluation of the human position within ecological and interspecies entanglements.

Through “Bloodchild,” she proposes that true survival—whether in speculative or real-world contexts—requires an acknowledgment of mutual dependence rather than the illusion of absolute autonomy, which is often foundational to traditional space fiction. In works such as Heinlein’s *Starship Troopers*, for instance, extraterrestrial arachnoid collectivity is explicitly associated with primitive servitude. By contrast, the encounter with the real-life species inspired Butler to conceptualize the alien Tlic as a liberating opportunity to engage with life’s creative power and to facilitate self-transformation and self-dispossession through the Other. She constructed a narrative agency that avoids reverting to anthropocentric frameworks and offers a perspective that neither seeks patronizing sympathy from humans nor can be entirely understood or mastered by them.

This vision depends on a collective effort to foster social change that dismantles the logic of mastery and moral conformity. Such a perspective aligns with Donna Haraway’s ontology of extended bodies, which posits that “from the parasite’s point of view, the host is part of the parasite’s phenotype,” whereas “from the point of the host, the parasite looks like an invader,” and ultimately, “disease is a relationship” (Haraway, 2000).

Warwick Anderson highlights how colonial Europe (and North America, up to the mid-20th century) prioritized microbiology and the study of viral and bacterial epidemics while relegating parasitology to tropical medicine and agriculture (Anderson, 2016). In contrast, postcolonial and ecocritical approaches to the history of science have since rejected this segregation. These perspectives demonstrate that in stable environments, host-parasite relationships tend to achieve equilibrium. This balance not only facilitates coexistence but also serves as a mechanism through which both species evolve, offering

mutual survival advantages over time (Anderson, 2016). However, Anderson notes that human-induced environmental changes disrupt such equilibrium (Anderson, 2016). He calls for a dynamic, interdisciplinary evaluation of reciprocal dynamics between species, emphasizing the need to consider parallels between biological processes in cosmopolitan centers and colonized margins, as well as human activities in both contexts (Anderson, 2016).

In her *Lilith's Brood*, which she was working on when she wrote "Bloodchild," Butler's central thematic concern is "the humans' drive to survival and adaptation" within "a post-nuclear, post-ecocide world," addressing "not only power relations but also narratives of evolution, including the potential creation of new, mixed-species beings" (Ferreira, 2010). According to Ferreira, Butler juxtaposes parasitism and infection, transforming both into symbiosis as she reimagines species as hybrid entities adapted to mutual survival rather than isolated hereditary conceptions (Ferreira, 2010). Butler "reimagines symbiosis to encompass parasitism as a mode of living together," offering a method "of navigating tough partnerships" that dissolves the rigid boundary between the Inside and the Outside (Lee, 2023).

In doing so, Butler *contaminates* both the Tlic and Terran perspectives, particularly in "Bloodchild," challenging the concept of disease as merely a marker of difference between altered Terrans and readers with human-centered preconceptions. By internalizing the external, the text gains additional depth as it engages more directly with socio-political discourses. Gan's story follows a similar trajectory of tensions: His initial traumatic encounter during the operation, his subsequent confrontation with his own feelings toward T'Gatoi, and his ultimate decision to become pregnant. This act is both transgressive and therapeutic, embodying a transformed awareness and a state of in-betweenness that signals a shift from unrelenting parasitism to active symbiosis.

Eventually, Gan realizes that his need to question his place in the world should not lead him to isolation, like his brother Qui, who avoids meaningful connections under the guise of self-preservation. This understanding emerges after Gan confronts T'Gatoi, who reminds him that he has the option to forgo the process entirely, allowing her to impregnate his sister, Xuan Hoa, instead. However, this alternative is not T'Gatoi's ideal choice. The Tlic generally prefer male hosts—despite the advantage of women's higher body fat percentage making them biologically better hosts—because T'Gatoi desires

her children to be nurtured by someone with the greatest capacity for love. Although Hoa is willing to assume the role, her willingness stems more from an acceptance of the socially prescribed maternal role than from genuine affection for T'Gatoi or her future children.

Faced with this option and realizing that his consent genuinely matters, Gan understands that adopting an oppositional stance like his brother Qui would be a misstep, even if it might temporarily relieve him of responsibility. He comes to see that the only true escape from his predicament is death, evident in his conversation with T'Gatoi, held with a gun pointed at his own throat. However, rather than succumbing to despair, Gan searches desperately for an alternative that would allow him to form a meaningful, balanced connection with T'Gatoi and restore his faith in life. Initially, he feigns a willingness to accept impregnation as an act of chivalry to spare his sister, Xuan Hoa. Yet, his deeper motives are revealed when he lowers the gun and recognizes that T'Gatoi's insistence on taking it from him stems not from control but from fear. Far from being an unfeeling parasite, she is just as vulnerable as he is.

To further expose the complexities of the Terran and Tlic relations, T'Gatoi confides in Gan her own traumatic experiences, recounting how she witnessed the Terrans attempting to massacre the Tlic. Additionally, the Tlic species as a whole may be acting out of a deep, self-destructive reproductive anxiety (Jenkins and Scieurba, 2022). Despite Gan's perception of the Tlic as tyrannical parasites, T'Gatoi explains that the Tlic, at least those she represents, have grown to value the Terrans. She acknowledges that the presence of the Terrans has taught the Tlic "what it means to be healthy, thriving people," a perspective the Tlic had lost when their previous hosts began killing their eggs. The establishment of the Preserve represents the Tlic's recognition of the Terrans as equals, she continues, even from the time "when they still tried to kill us as worms" (Butler, 2005). This revelation underscores that the Tlic are not the aggressors they appear to be but rather survivors of the systematic and relentless Terran aggression. Viewed through this lens, the Tlic's survival mechanisms, no matter how grotesque or violent they seem to the Terrans, are comparatively benign.

This passage functions not only as a metaphorical extension of T'Gatoi's hand towards Gan in a gesture of love but also underscores the urgent need to counter victimization through symbiotic solidarity founded on equity. It enables Gan to confront multiple layers of hidden violence, such as the oppressive underpinnings of seemingly benevolent structures

like the Preserve, the problematic notion of unilateral preservation, and the parallels between personal relationships and broader macropolitics. These conflicts find expression in his evolving relationship with T'Gatoi, where genuine love becomes a possibility.

When Gan refuses to hand T'Gatoi the gun and insists that she must “accept the risk” for their relationship to be based on trust and equality rather than oppression or performative trust devoid of actual vulnerability, he reveals a deeper motivation. He admits that his consent stems not just from duty but also from an emotional desire: “to keep you for myself” (Butler, 2005). This moment unveils Gan’s “jealousy and fear of loss,” tempered with a newfound courage (McIntyre et al., 2010). Likewise, when T'Gatoi, despite having safer alternatives, agrees to let the Terrans possess guns to ensure that her children are entrusted to Gan’s care, Gan becomes motivated and hopeful for a future of mutual understanding. He suggests that his body serves as the first public demonstration of a successful birth procedure, allowing Terran children to witness a positive outcome and avoid trauma from unexpected, tragic encounters. “Not protected,” he asserts, “Shown. Shown when we’re young kids, and shown more than once. Gatoi, no Terran ever sees a birth that goes right. All we see is N'Tlic—pain and terror and maybe death” (Butler, 2005).

At this pivotal moment, Gan comprehends his mother’s earlier advice to “take care of her.” His newfound understanding reflects that protection and preservation must be reciprocal acts, not unilateral gestures from one party to another. This realization dismantles the notion of Terran dominance or Tlic benevolence as isolated solutions. Instead, it highlights the need for balanced coexistence. T'Gatoi’s closing promise to take care of Gan underscores the necessity of this mutual reciprocity.

Nature, as Butler illustrates, cannot act as a nurturing mother, nor can humans adopt a paternalistic attitude toward the non-human. Sustainability arises only through reciprocal preservation. This reciprocity, in turn, erodes the artificial boundaries between the Preserve and the Outside, challenging death, intraspecies stratification, and the commodification of the environment. Such interconnected *co-preservation* celebrates differences while rejecting the notion of autonomy as a fixed, separate state of being.

Gan’s solution, in Deleuze’s terms, transforms his body into a public “zone of undecidability between man and animal” (or, in this context, man and Alien), where “man becomes” alien while the alien “becomes spirit at the same time, the spirit of man, the physical spirit of man presented in the mirror as Eumenides or Fate” (Deleuze, 2003).

By embracing this process of becoming-alien, Gan opens his perspective to encompass the Other, creating a space for transformation and inclusion.

The story, of course, does not prescribe this exact model but instead offers symbiosis as a valid method of breaking down dualistic boundaries between human and non-human, male and female, colonizer and colonized, while maintaining the inherent tension of these oppositions. Gan’s highly politicized and sexualized contact with his surrogate sister, T’Gatoi, in the closing scene, “more a scene of lovemaking than of alien or insect implantation”—enables him to renounce his stable sense of self as an autonomous being. This act challenges heteronormativity by incorporating “a number of elements [...] including notions of beauty, maternity, partnership, and choice” and aligns “the alien body and its relationship to Gan (and thus to the reader) with queer heteronormativity on a number of levels, evident in the re-imagining of family, birth, and eroticism” (Thibodeau, 2012).

By abandoning his individualistic and fixed identity, Gan enters a transformative process of subjectivization that is crucial for a new understanding of trans-species interconnectedness. This transformation reflects an “embodied sensibility” toward the possibilities of active becoming, defining the ethical subject as one who responds “to its proximal relationship to the other through a mode of wonderment that is antecedent to consciousness” (Barad, 2007). As a result of his connection with T’Gatoi, Gan’s *last day of childhood* culminates in a step into *alienhood* rather than traditional *manhood*. By the end of his journey, Gan emerges as a pregnant man—an ethical subject capable of forming meaningful connections with both *the impossible* and his own kind—not out of narcissism or self-sacrifice but as an act of love.

Elyce Rae Helford observes that what makes “Bloodchild” simultaneously disturbing and compelling is the impossibility of determining which of the two characters belongs to which gender, racial position, or even species by the end of the story (Helford, 1994). However, this resolution is ambivalent. For centuries, it has been difficult to conceive of humanity (and even human culture) as an intrinsic part of the physical processes we label as nature. The narrative does not depict a utopian formation in any anthropocentric sense. Despite indications that even the native/immigrant dichotomy might dissolve and the planet could foster a sense of belonging for all its inhabitants through reciprocal metamorphosis, the Terrans remain tenants rather than landlords. They are stripped of the power and dominance often expected in space fiction narratives.

This resolution and the story's underlying potential may seem compromising—if not outright oppressive—when viewed through the lens of privileged habits of reading. This perspective may explain, at least in part, why so few critics have taken Butler's remarks about the story seriously.

Conclusion

As I have argued, the focus of the novelette is not domination but symbiosis. The issues Butler addresses in "Bloodchild" are profoundly challenging, and complex problems often require equally complex solutions, particularly in science fiction, a genre that frequently engages with the multifaceted issues of its time. It is, therefore, easy to fall back on normative dichotomies of gender, race, and historically ingrained categories of humanism, which subtly shape our perspectives when interpreting literary texts, even those as nuanced as Butler's. "Bloodchild," with its deliberate ambiguity and resistance to easy categorization, demands an equally nuanced and reflective reading.

Even a widely read, anthologized, critically acclaimed, and multiple award-winning story like "Bloodchild" is not immune to reductive interpretations. Butler's text calls for an ethical transformation in its readers, an invitation to grapple with its themes on a deeper level to fully appreciate its significance. The question we should be asking is not whether we would choose to stand in Gan's place, but whether we, like Gan, are willing to embrace the liberating potential of rejecting masculine, authoritarian, and human-centered perspectives.

Are we prepared, in other words, to step out of our comfort zones, dismantle fixed identities, and relinquish or even *contaminate* the illusion of autonomy? Are we ready to embrace the hybridity that comes with continuous, heterarchical interaction with others? Butler challenges us to move beyond the self-centered worldview of utilitarian ownership and to reimagine ourselves as somatic tenants, integral parts of this universe, interconnected and interdependent. By doing so, we embark on the subjectless process of *becoming-alien*, a transformative journey that reshapes how we view ourselves, others, and the environment. This entails not only a subversion of the stories we tell about other planets but also a redefinition of symbiosis—not as a comfort zone, but as a disruption of all our historically contingent assumptions about the human being, particularly those shaped by the colonialist ideal of Man.

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A Gynocritical Analysis of Newman's *Julia* as a Response to Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*

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ABSTRACT

Elaine Showalter believes it is restrictive to read stories about women written by male writers because male-dominated narration is filled with stereotypical representations of women, which consequently maintains the victimization of women. With her idea of *gynocriticism*, she refers to the need for female writers to write about the female. In that sense, she demands female characters to be put at the centre of literary works in order to reach a more inclusive understanding of human experience. Building on her theory of female writing, this paper attempts to show that female experience, perspective, and voice must be communicated within the literary landscape to have a better and multifaceted understanding of the lives of women and to fix the misinterpretations of womanhood through the analysis of *Julia* (2023) by Sandra Newman and *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949) by George Orwell. Even though Orwell manages to critique the horrible outcomes of totalitarianism in his canonical dystopia through his protagonist Winston, he completely ignores what Julia feels, thinks, or experiences. There is not much information about Julia's life as an individual or as a woman. Therefore, Newman reconstructs Julia as the protagonist of her dystopia by focusing solely on Julia's thoughts, endeavours, and emotions by filling in the missing parts that Orwell does not touch upon. Accordingly, this paper examines how a female writer establishes a society that is not solely governed by universally accepted male-dominated ideals, creating a space for a formerly silenced and decentralised character so that she can be valued on her own terms.

Keywords: Showalter, gynocriticism, Julia, feminist criticism, female writing



Introduction

By the late 1970s, Elaine Showalter, an American feminist and literary critic, observed that feminist criticism had encountered what she termed a 'theoretical impasse', which she attributes to the male-dominated nature of 'theory' itself. "When we consider the historical conditions in which critical ideologies are produced" (Showalter, 1997, p. 218), it can be seen that feminist criticism was the most avoided out of all the critical approaches because during this period theoretical perspectives were predominantly shaped by men. By highlighting the male-centric nature of much feminist critique, Showalter underscores the risk of perpetuating the very dynamics that feminism seeks to challenge. She points out that feminist critics may unintentionally continue to marginalize women's authentic voice and experience with stereotypes created by men, critics being male, or interpretive methodologies developed by men. This may obscure the historical and ideological biases inherent in these theories.

In this respect, in her influential essay "Towards A Feminist Poetics," Elaine Showalter explains two forms of feminist criticism. The first one is *feminist critique* which "is concerned with *woman as reader* - with woman as the consumer of male-produced literature" (Showalter, 1997, p. 216). She argues that feminist critique often focuses too much on men because when one examines the stereotypes about women, what is learned is only the male perspective of women, not women's actual experiences and feelings due to the biases of male critics and the restricted roles of women in literary history. In other words, feminist critique reinforces the established patriarchal values and gendered biases by emphasizing the inferiority and victimization of women rather than giving them a voice. Accordingly, Showalter created a new form of feminist criticism, which she calls *gynocriticism*. Gynocriticism "is concerned with *woman as writer* - with woman as the producer of textual meaning, with the history, themes, genres and structures of literature by women" (Showalter, 1997, p. 216). Showalter offers a shifting perspective of feminist criticism towards a more woman-centred approach, one that acknowledges and values women's perspectives and experiences independently of male-dominated frameworks. She claims that this change would not only enhance feminist scholarship but also foster a more nuanced and equitable understanding of gender in literary studies. This is because "the task of feminist critics is to find a new language, a new way of reading that can integrate our intelligence and our experience, our reason and our suffering, our scepticism and our vision" (p. 219). In her model of gynocriticism, Showalter explains that what women experience to find their place in society is reflected in their writing.

Showalter describes the three stages of the evolution of women's voice in literature with *feminine*, *feminist*, and *female* to show how women have found their place in society and gained awareness. *Feminine phase* (1840-1880) is a "phase of imitation of the prevailing modes of the dominant tradition, and internalization of its standards of art and its views on social roles" (Showalter, 1977, p. 13). She explains that at first, women were considered to be weak and passive members of a male-dominated society. Consequently, female characters are depicted as characters who lack freedom and agency. Since "all language is the language of the dominant order, and women, if they speak at all, must speak through it" (Showalter, 1981, p. 200), female authors internalized the male-dominated narrative standards. This meant that they had to adopt the dominant stereotypes about women, which influenced the way they wrote in terms of the tone, characters, and structure of their novels. They even wrote under male pseudonyms because it was "particularly problematic for those women who want to appropriate the pen by becoming women writers" (Gubar, 2014, p. 253). On the other hand, in the *feminist phase* (1880-1920), which coincided with the suffrage movement, female writers wanted to destroy the stereotypical perceptions of femininity. Therefore, they became more overtly political and engaged with feminist themes in their works; hence, there appeared "a phase of *protest* against these standards and values, and *advocacy* of minority rights and values, including a demand for autonomy" (Showalter, 1977, p. 13). Female writers thus created female characters who are more active, dynamic, and not confined to the space of the house. In a way, female writers explored women's rights and independence in their literary works by emphasizing the importance of female autonomy and addressing the oppressive nature of patriarchal society to "protest against male values and advocate separatist utopias and suffragette sisterhoods" (Selden et al, 2005, p. 127). The last phase, *the female phase*, ongoing since 1920, is associated with self-discovery. Showalter believes that in this phase, women recognize their unique identity and their distinct features from men. As a result, they develop self-awareness and are able to free themselves from the constraints of male-dominated perceptions in patriarchal societies. In this phase, female writers attempt to "turn instead to female experience as the source of an autonomous art, extending the feminist analysis of culture to the forms and techniques of literature" (Showalter, 1997, p. 218). Hence, women have stopped being obedient to male dominance and started to express their own experiences by themselves. She claims that this self-discovery enabled women to redefine their roles as independent individuals, which they represented through their characters in their literary works. This means "as for other subcultures, literature became a symbol of achievement" (Showalter, 1977, p. 21) for women as well. Showalter

claims that the purpose of gynocriticism is to create the idea of female not based on the male point of view, but on the female perspective, enabling women to underscore the fact that they have their own thoughts, emotions, ideas, and independent experiences.

Showalter's approach intends to rediscover and revalue women's contributions to literature, and thus create a more inclusive and diverse literary landscape that includes the full spectrum of human experience. Therefore, it can be suggested that "gynocriticism is a framework for women in which a woman can judge a woman's literature, womanly" (Gharachorlou & Derabi, 2017, p. 629). From this perspective, in this paper, two modes of feminist criticism will be analysed through two dystopian novels. *Nineteen Eighty-Four* by George Orwell is an example of a male-produced literature where the woman is the reader (feminist critique), while *Julia* by Sandra Newman is a portrayal of a woman-centred work where the woman is the producer (gynocriticism). Newman reconstructs one of the marginalized female characters, Julia, in canonical literature in order to reflect the different portrayals of this undermined female character in both novels. Showalter's theory of gynocriticism is relevant because it helps the reader realize how a contemporary female author reconstructs the female character's identity by bringing her own experience into the foreground and emphasizing the formerly discredited female subjectivity. This article attempts to convey how Newman fills the blanks that Orwell leaves unattended and explores why Julia is attracted to Winston, what happens to Julia after the torture, and how Julia feels as an individual throughout the story.

Through 'His' Eyes, Not 'Hers': The Analysis of Male Narrative in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* by Orwell

Nineteen Eighty-Four stands out as one of the most widely known dystopias warning the reader about the consequences of oppressive regimes. Published in 1949, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* depicts the story of a totalitarian government ruled by The Party, watching everyone and controlling thoughts by changing language. In addition to the themes of loss of individuality and freedom, constant surveillance, and government control, another disturbing pattern is putting a male character at the centre of the novel while presenting female characters as secondary, which makes the reader navigate through the nightmarish society only from the perspective of a male protagonist, Winston Smith.

Apart from the protagonist, all figures holding power in shaping, creating, transforming, or preserving societal structures, as well as those who play a role—whether

major or minor- in the course of events, are all male. This male dominance reinforces the patriarchal framework of the society. The face of the Party is represented by Big Brother. Although his physical presence is never encountered, the whole society is under the rule of this symbolic figure of man. Therefore, the idea of masculinity runs deep in the minds of the citizens. Moreover, the notion of "BIG BROTHER IS WATCHING YOU" can be interpreted through the lens of the male gaze, which directly puts women in the inferior position. Additionally, the most powerful man in the Party, whom Winston admires, is O'Brien. The relationship between O'Brien and Winston is at the centre of the novel more than what happens between Winston and Julia, the only distinguishable female character in the novel. Therefore, "when the reader is a woman, ... she becomes aware of being excluded by the narrative,- of being outside the intimate narrative framework of author-text-reader" (Patai, 1984, p. 17). As Showalter argues in her theory, Orwell is a writer who completely leaves feminine experience outside of his story by portraying Julia as merely a companion of the male protagonist rather than a distinct individual with distinct experiences, ideas, and feelings.

Orwell uses a third-person narrator to tell the story; however, the narrator presents Winston's thoughts as though they constitute an objective truth. When Winston sees Julia for the first time, he refers to her appearance in the following manner:

She was a bold-looking girl, of about twenty-seven, with thick dark hair, a freckled face and swift, athletic movements. A narrow scarlet sash, emblem of the Junior Anti-Sex League, was wound several times round the waist of her overalls, just tightly enough to bring out the shapeliness of her hips. (Orwell, 2023, p. 15)

From the very beginning, Winston perceives Julia merely from a physical and visual lens rather than considering her agency, personality, thoughts, or individuality. Julia is reduced to a sexual object as "the sash that seems to mark Julia's submission to the anti-erotic policies of [the] Party ... makes her an object of desire for Winston, whose sexuality is bound up in his nascent resistance to the regime" (Jacobs, 2007, p. 8). Therefore, the way Winston reduces Julia's identity to her physicality shows that his perspective on her seems to be shaped by his own desires and ideological conditioning. This is a clear manifestation of the patriarchal framework that prioritizes Julia's bodiliness and sexual function over her agency, reinforcing the dynamics of the male gaze rather than presenting her as an independent subject. The male-dominated language is

flawed in that it is "like the gray inaudible wife who services the great man: an ideal engine, utterly self-effacing, devoted without remainder to its task" (Gass, 1972, p. 93). In that sense, Winston's portrayal of Julia reflects the way in which language is often used as a medium for male meaning-making as "men look at women from their point of view and even teach women to look at themselves from men's point of view" (Mhamane, 2021, p. 114). Therefore, just like the language of the story is controlled by a male author, Julia is constructed in a reductionist way through Winston's gaze by the narrator.

At one point, the narrator says that Winston "hated her because she was young and pretty and sexless, because he wanted to go to bed with her and would never do so" (Orwell, 2023, p. 20). This is most probably because he assumes that she is a member of the Thought Police, which means the act of sex would never happen between them. Winston apparently wants Julia's body; however, having sex with Julia is not a symbol of his love for her. Since "the Party seeks to discourage any form of intimacy or personal connection between individuals" (Philip, 2023, p. 39), Julia would be committing sexcrime. Accordingly, being with Julia is a form of rebellion for Winston; when they are together, he only talks about political issues. He neither has romantic dreams about having a life together nor contemplates on love or their relationship. Although at one scene he tells Julia that he loves her, he never appreciates her as a person as "their initial love-making was infused with political hatred" (Connors, 1971, p. 470). Basically, Julia does not matter in the story of Winston; she is a side character appearing as an expendable tool in order to construct Winston's journey. Since Showalter believes "the woman-produced text will occupy a totally different status from the 'male' text" (Moi, 1988, p. 76), this is exactly what she is against because it prevents Julia from being an individual by herself.

Besides being a physical object, Julia is also described as an ignorant woman with expressions such as "not clever" (Orwell, 2023, p. 135) and "didn't much care for reading" (p. 135). In one scene, Julia is portrayed as "bored and confused" (p. 161), paying no attention to what Winston is saying based on politics, which demonstrates her indifference to any intellectual activity. She even falls asleep while Winston reads the ideologies of the Party from Goldstein's book. While Winston has different rebellious ideas about the Party, Julia defies the system with small acts of rebellion such as buying things from the black market, wearing make-up, putting on fancy dresses, or wearing perfume, which makes her "not only very much prettier, but, above all, far

more feminine" (pp. 147–148). Even when Orwell reflects Julia's rebellious nature, he does so by emphasizing her sexuality, rather than her intellect. Basically, throughout the novel, her body becomes the primary focus. She does not look for any permanent changes in society; instead, she tries to find a way to live the best of her own life. Apart from these features, there is not much else to her character. Winston describes Julia as "a rebel from the waist downwards" (Orwell, 2023, p. 161), existing solely as a means of fulfilling Winston's sexual desires and existing as a tool for him to make his own rebellion real, rather than as a multifaceted person. Namely, for him "the simple animal instinct ... and the primitive emotions and intimacies to which it gives rise carry a revolutionary potential" (Jacobs, 2007, p. 8). Julia is undermined by O'Brien as well. When Winston and Julia go to O'Brien's apartment, O'Brien "almost ignored Julia, seeming to take it for granted that Winston could speak for her" (Orwell, 2023, p. 179). They both treat Julia as if she does not exist in that room. Winston is expected to speak on her behalf, leaving the woman out. This scene shows that while the two male figures have serious conversations, the woman and her ideas are always left aside because for the male "the experience of woman can easily disappear, become mute, invalid and invisible" (Showalter, 1997, p. 219). That is why the reader cannot hear Julia uttering even a word of her own, which is a highly restrictive point of view, and this kind of narration puts the male protagonist in a smart position while the female character stays relatively shallow. It is disappointing to realize that "the 'social construction of reality' has been done by males, and that construction cast women in the role of the other and seen their experience as deviant, or has not seen it all" (Donovan, 1984, p. 102). While Orwell portrays Winston as intellectual, smart, and politically engaged, he depicts Julia as silly, emotional, and empty-minded. She is obviously the "other" in Orwell's world.

Similarly, when O'Brien tortures Winston to death after his arrest, the narrator depicts Winston's unending thoughts for O'Brien. Even though Winston is betrayed by O'Brien, whom he considers to be a friend and ally, he "continues to feel a sense of kinship with O'Brien, admiring his intelligence and his ability to navigate the treacherous world of the party... [and] continues to cling to the idea that O'Brien is secretly on his side" (Philip, 2023, p. 39). However, Julia is rarely mentioned as Winston "hardly thought of Julia. He could not fix his mind on her... He felt no love for her, and he hardly even wondered what was happening to her. He thought oftener of O'Brien with a flickering hope" (Orwell, 2023, p. 237). There is a competition between O'Brien and Julia, which O'Brien wins at the end because "Winston has

sacrificed Julia to save himself" (Hunt, 2013, p. 559). Winston's so-called "love" for Julia is easily crushed with the statement "Do it to Julia" (Orwell, 2023, p. 295). With regards to the feminist critique of Showalter, it can be claimed that Orwell lets Julia exist in the narrative; however, he does not let Julia be a part of the author-reader connection; therefore, female readers would most probably feel distanced from the story as Julia is never fully appreciated as an individual or given a voice. Orwell's silencing or sidelining of Julia in a male-centred narrative makes her presence bound to her relationship with Winston rather than her own agency. She exists if Winston thinks about her and has a scene with her, and she disappears if he does not think or talk about her.

Considering this masculine mode of writing, it can be claimed that *Nineteen Eighty-Four* reflects the diminishing of women's agency. It lacks the opportunity to focus on what women uniquely experience while living under totalitarian regimes. The predominance of male characters can be noticed with the female character depicted as a side character in the journey of the male protagonist. Due to his underrepresentation of female experience, Orwell "has been criticized by feminists ... that his works offer a portrait of patriarchal power, was colored by personal overtones and gender issues" (Xinyue, 2021, p. 153). He does not provide Julia with the opportunity to express her ideas, feelings, or motivations, and he portrays her as a low-profile figure whom the reader can only see in relation to men. Even though Julia somehow exists in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, the reader cannot learn about her personal feelings, emotions, or experiences because the story is based on what the protagonist experiences, neglecting the female voice and experience. While Orwell may have unconsciously cantered masculinity in his works, he openly states his discomfort with feminist ideas in his personal letters or essays; hence, it can be claimed that regrettably "he was certainly conscious of his own misogyny and antifeminism" (Patai, 1984, p. 17). That is why, while he creates a dystopian world where Winston has full autonomy, agency, intelligence, and self-determination, Julia is reflected as a secondary figure whose voice, emotions, and experience are neither fully realized nor given equal importance. At the hands of the male author, Julia exists as a tool to satisfy the desires and needs of the male protagonist, Winston. This oversimplifies the life, struggles, emotions, and thoughts of Julia. It is apparent that "equal gender representation is limited" (Lucas and Ordeniza, 2023, p. 9) as Orwell lacks the nuanced understanding of female experience in his novel.

Through 'Her' Eyes, Not 'His': The Analysis of the Female Narrative in *Julia*

In order to deconstruct the male vision of dystopia, Sandra Newman recreated the world of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* from the perspective of "the inscrutable femme fatale whose manipulations send Winston Smith to his doom" (Adee, 2023). In other words, in Newman's novel, Julia appears not to be a mere seductress causing Winston's doom, but an individual navigating the harsh realities of the Party with her intelligence, adaptability, and self-preservation. Orwell portrays Julia as a flat character even without a surname, while the novel starts by mentioning the name and surname of the male protagonist, Winston Smith. To a certain point in the novel, Winston describes Julia by using the phrases "the girl" or "she". The reader cannot learn much about Julia's background, her ideas about the topics that interest her, or her motivations for her actions; however, the narrator depicts her body in a detailed way. By making the name of a female character the title of her novel, Newman adopts a more female-centred narration because within the boundaries of the male-constructed language, a woman's "experience lies outside the dominant discourse" (Greene, 1990, p. 83). Therefore, in Newman's novel, where there are many female characters but only a few male characters, women's experiences, which are invisible in male-dominated narrations, are highlighted and depicted in a more detailed way. Newman gives Julia the surname Worthing, showing that she belongs to somewhere and has a family like every other individual. Basically, while the overall story is the same as Orwell's, *Julia* moves her voice to the front to show that she is a 'worthy' human being just like Winston. In doing so, "Newman furnishes her with a rich backstory and a life of her own" (Hughes, 2023) and portrays both her achievements and failures.

In public, Julia follows all the rules set by the Party, such as using the Newspeak language, showing excitement for false Party propaganda, and joining the Anti-Sex League. Beneath the surface, however, she is clever and sociable, and she has numerous sexual affairs with men. Her first job involves writing porn for the proles with titles like "Inner Party Sinners: 'My Telescreen Is Broken, Comrade!'" At the beginning of the novel, she works as a technician in the Fiction Department, living in a dormitory with thirty other single women. Like many people living under authoritarian regimes, she is trying to figure out a way to bend the rules and find moments of freedom, joy, and self-expression outside the telescreens' reach. Thus, it can be suggested that Newman's Julia embodies the qualities that Showalter describes; she is a feminine, feminist, and

female character. In other words, she is neither a totally submissive nor entirely defiant; rather, she is “a nuanced and psychologically complex character” (Ettler, 2024).

Orwell presents Julia as a character reflecting the prejudices related to female sexuality; women being abused by men or women being inferior due to their sexuality. Newman describes how Julia is abused by a much older Party member. When she is only sixteen and staying in the village with her revolutionary mother during their exile, Julia is sexually violated by Plentyman, who is in charge of agricultural collectivisation. She willingly exchanges her body in return for food and information as she wants to survive the famine. Newman shows with this painful story that this is what women experience in a patriarchal society. Julia's “teenage molestation has profoundly and negatively impacted her adult sexuality” (Ettler, 2024). In other words, this sexual abuse explains the reason behind her sexually liberated attitude. Due to this abuse, as Julia grows older, she constantly has fantasies with various men, such as the pilots, Big Brother, O'Brien, and Winston. “Women's presentation in male terms trivializes traditional female experience” (Kitch, 1987, p. 11); although untraditional, Julia's childhood is presented with a preceding narrative to explain her survival skills, which helps the reader to gain a deeper understanding of her actions. Julia is chosen for the ArtSem program to bear the child of Big Brother; “with Big Future, [she is] to be a true bride of Ingsoc, one of the pure vessels of a higher race” (Newman, 2023, p. 198).

By depicting Julia as biologically destined for reproduction, Newman foregrounds the feminine aspect of womanhood and women's being passive carriers of life rather than autonomous individuals. Accordingly, Julia feels lucky to be chosen for the program and does not act against it because she considers the baby a protection. Since she has a lot of affairs with various men and does not have access to birth control, she thinks this would help her hide her real pregnancy from another man, who is either Parsons or Winston.

While Orwell does not give any explanation for Julia's interest in Winston, Newman grounds their affair on O'Brien, who manipulates Julia to perform a job. Her duty is to deceive men from the Records by having sex with them in the room with a telescreen in it and make them speak ill about the Party, so that they can be caught by the Thought Police. All O'Brien is to get the funds of the Records Department by showing that the men working in that department are criminals and the department itself is corrupt. By saying “you are more than a woman; more indeed than a man.” You are *Homo oceanicus*,

the race yet to come" (Newman, 2023, p. 143), O'Brien officially weaponizes Julia's femininity by making her a Thought Police. Basically, the Party exploits Julia's sexuality, turning her into a tool for their purposes. She gets frustrated at first, but she hides her feelings because she knows that she has no other choice but to accept if she wants to live. Clearly, Julia is "a toothpick, a tissue—a thing that gets used once and thrown in the bin" (Newman, 2023, p. 284). Being confined to a room to please men sexually and to entrap them by using her body is a stereotypical portrayal of womanhood, but Julia reveals an important plot twist. The reader learns that she actually participates in the betrayal of Winston and other male members of the Records Department. Newman prefers to justify Julia's actions based on what she herself experiences; hence, the reader now knows the real reason behind Julia's interest in Winston and how she feels about this task.

Newman depicts Julia as a mobile and self-confident figure going from one place to another. Through Julia, the reader can visualize the daily life in Oceania. One day, when she is stalking Winston, Julia sees him going inside a mysterious shop. She actually considers this a leverage against Winston. Should any issues arise, she can use his secret visit to this shop in order to save herself. Therefore, the moment Winston comes out of the shop, she thinks "she'd caught him at some unspeakable crime" (Newman, 2023, p. 72). Besides, by giving more details related to the diary Winston keeps, Newman gives another reason why Julia sustains the relationship with him. The fact that Winston keeps a diary strikes "her as simple madness" (p. 124). She tells him to destroy it and warns him not to write her name. Actually, Julia wants to end the relationship, yet she cannot because then he would "write about her in his blasted diary" (p. 127). Obviously, Julia is keeping the relationship going not out of love but out of necessity as she is planning to convince him to destroy the diary. Unlike Orwell's Julia, Newman's Julia has her own schemes and ideas, and she is a strong-willed woman, not a passive one. Accordingly, in Orwell's novel, it is implied that Julia loves Winston due to the 'I love you' note she has given him; however, Newman cleverly reverses this in *Julia*. First, Vicky, who is a 17-year-old girl, gives the note to Julia. Vicky lives in the dorm with all the other girls, and she is secretly in love with Julia. Then, Julia hands the note to Winston at the Ministry of Truth just to get rid of it. This is a brave and smart portrayal of Julia as opposed to the shallow and ignorant one in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, which shows that there is an "essential difference between the work of women who write from within their gender identities and that of writers ... who follow the forms of traditional, male-dominated literature" (Kitch, 1987, p. 7). Julia is a clever woman; she knows that she

cannot keep the note in the dorm. She has considered all the possibilities of getting caught while passing the note and makes her own choice:

if it came to Julia's word over Smith's, he would never be believed. She was a well-liked, attractive girl, and one who would compromise twenty well-placed men if she were ever interrogated. Smith was a friendless prig, who worked in the disreputable Records Department. (Newman, 2023, p. 96)

Julia has total self-confidence due to her popularity and position at the department. She believes that nobody would be suspicious of her because both the writing does not belong to her and she is admired by everyone. On the contrary, Smith is portrayed as an isolated and insignificant man. This scene creates a sharp distinction between Julia and Winston in terms of power dynamics, giving Julia the upper hand. While Julia's social network and charm provide her with reliability, Winston seems to be prone to any kind of mistrust. Besides, she knows little about Winston; he might hurt or even kill her, yet she continues with the urge to be with him "for romance, for erotic delight, she was courting death" (Newman, 2023, p. 107). This shows that Julia wishes to give the note to someone else and chooses Winston for the mission. Nonetheless, she has not done this out of love, but simply to get rid of the note.

The female writer basically challenges the marginalization of the female character in the male-dominated literary canon; hence, Newman makes the female protagonist, Julia, visible. Unlike Orwell's narrator, Newman's third person narrator follows Julia everywhere so that the reader can understand what she has been going through. Actually, the reader goes to the places Winston never goes, as exemplified by Julia's meetings at the Junior Anti-Sex League, her dealings on the black-market, her trysts with her other lovers, and the place she lives. In some of the memorable scenes where Julia is portrayed as a secondary character in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, Newman represents what she has been actually thinking during those moments, reflecting her personal growth, struggles, and own ideas. In that sense, Newman adopts a hypocritical approach that focuses on the history, themes, genres, and structures of literature by women, aiming to uncover and explore the female experience "to make the invisible visible, to make the silent speak" (Showalter, 1981, p. 201). Therefore, the narrator always focuses on Julia's inner world, thoughts, and emotions. Basically, *Julia* challenges the traditional male-dominated narrative by highlighting the female perspective and experience.

In *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, “the woman is stripped of her intellectual and physical freedom” (Rania & Latiff, 2020, p. 902); hence, the place where Julia and the other girls live or the lives of women is not depicted, which adds to the total erasure of female identity and autonomy. However, Newman offers a comprehensive depiction of this feminine space, providing an intricate portrayal of female bodily representations. Newman’s portrayal of the dorm thus stands as a symbolic space because it helps the reader recognize the subtle distinctions and complexities of womanhood and female identity, which Orwell deliberately ignores. “Women’s fiction describes a world so alien to the patriarchy” (Pratt, 1982, p. 177) that these female spaces serve as sites of identity formation and resistance with Newman’s depiction of the dorm and the women’s experiences within it. Life in this dorm is not easy for the girls; during their sleep, they hear the voice of the Big Brother, which is sometimes disturbing and sometimes comforting for the girls. They are so accustomed to the sound of him that they cannot go to sleep without his voice. In addition, Newman portrays the hardship of female experience in such an oppressive society with the scene where Julia is called to fix a blocked toilet in the hostel and finds a fetus aborted by Vicky. Vicky has been sexually molested and impregnated by the Central Committee Chairperson, Whitehead, for whom she works. Besides, Whitehead is the same person who has arranged “anti-sex” pills for her to abort the baby. This drastic scene portrays that “women constitute a muted group, the boundaries of whose culture and reality overlap but are not wholly contained by the dominant (male) group” (Rani, 2013, p. 4). Newman depicts what women might go through under the regime of a patriarchal and oppressive government, which is often neglected in male-dominated literature. With the detailed depiction of the life in the dorm, Julia’s connections with other women are introduced, showing how women’s lives differ from men’s, and proving the fact that female “experience is directly available in the texts written by women” (Moi, 1988, p. 76). Surveillance and loss of private life weigh differently on women, manifesting more acutely in the form of abuse, lack of physical autonomy, and the threat of unwanted pregnancy. Therefore, Newman shows that “good sisterhood is the only thing these women can do, in order to be able cope with those problems” (Putri, 2014, p. 5). In the dorm, there are telescreens everywhere and “Julia had a habit of smiling at each telescreen as she passed, imagining some bored men in surveillance being cheered by her appearance” (Newman, 2023, p. 9). Julia clearly likes being watched because she likes her body and she is aware of the voyeuristic nature of the surveillance system; hence, she intentionally plays with the system in her own way as a form of resistance. Instead of being abused by it, she tries to manipulate the system psychologically. Unlike Winston, who is afraid of the

telescreens and tries to hide from them all the time, Julia has no fear of engaging with them. She in a way claims her own autonomy, control, and resistance in her own way. This is a strong example of a character created by female writers who “develop their own language suitable/proper to express female experiences, emotions and feelings” (Mhamane, 2021, p. 116). Unlike the shallow and passive Julia in Orwell's world, Julia here might turn the Party's mechanisms against itself by performing compliance while secretly maintaining her independence.

Contrary to *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, Winston in *Julia* does not have much to offer as an individual. Once celebrated as the protagonist of a canonical text, Winston now exists in the shadow of Julia. In another instance, when she is with Winston, he tells her that O'Brien has invited him to his apartment, which makes Julia jealous and disappointed because she is actually O'Brien's partner in crime. In this scene, Julia has the upper hand over Winston. Even though Winston has naïve thoughts about O'Brien and feels that he is special, the reader and Julia herself know that Winston is not special at all since Julia has been to his apartment before. Newman explores Winston's transformation from a grounded and bold character to a relatively meek character. Accordingly, in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, Orwell depicts the scene in which Julia and Winston go to O'Brien's apartment in a way that reinforces the passivity of Julia as a woman. Nevertheless, Newman shows the motivation behind Julia's silence in this scene; she is basically pretending not to make Winston suspicious of her deceptive duty. When Julia and Winston are at his apartment, O'Brien asks him if he can commit various crimes, to which Winston says “yes”. O'Brien in a way tries to test Winston's loyalty to the Brotherhood to see if he is willing to rebel. Nevertheless, during this moment, like in the original novel, Julia stays silent, but the narrator describes her thoughts. Julia feels surprised because she does not think he has the courage to do all these things; “he could not even buy his own black-market goods! Murder, blackmail, suicide—he hadn't the foggiest conception what these words really meant” (Newman, 2023, p. 222). These small details show that “there is an innate difference between men's writing and women's writing” (Mhamane, 2021, p. 113). Since the male and the female have distinct social, cultural, and personal experiences, this affects their tone of voice, the themes they choose, the way they represent their characters, and the priorities in their writing, which can be clearly seen in the distinction between Orwell's and Newman's modes of writing.

During their arrest, interrogation, torture, and afterwards, Orwell does not provide any explanation or details about what happens to Julia, which Newman alters by letting

her think and feel. The fact that the Thought Police arrest and beat Julia as well does not make sense for her, and she actually feels scared; “she tried to think she was afraid for Winston, but that was a lie. She had no room in her fear for him” (Newman, 2023, p. 272). After all the torture, Julia wakes up in another room and sees Winston staying in another cell on the telescreen. She watches from the telescreen that O’Brien talks to Winston about Room 101 and the rats. In the meantime, “Julia tried to tell herself that she was safe.” Rats were Winston’s fear, not hers” (p. 301). At the moment of seeing the rats, Winston yells out of fear “Do it to Julia!”. As a result, they put Julia’s head in a cage filled with rats; “Julia tries desperately to think. Winston had escaped by betraying her, but whom could she betray? She’d betrayed everyone already. There was no one” (p. 303). Julia remembers her conversation with Diana Winters, a former revolutionary, about Room 101 in the prison, so she bites a small part of her tongue and throws it at the rats so that she can distract them for fifteen minutes. Basically, Newman creates a powerful, self-determined, and autonomous woman protagonist as “she games the harsh system for forbidden luxuries and even Room 101 cannot completely break her spirit” (Shilling, 2024). After they have been released, she is still pregnant but feels insecure and lonely. However, as long as she has the baby, she believes she is safe. Two months later, she sees Winston in the neighborhood, and she thinks he would kill her due to her betrayal, but he does not even care; “all he saw was that his lover had lost her figure. He’d been cheated as a man: that was all the bloodshot eyes expressed” (Newman, 2023, p. 326). Winston feels disappointed, and they never see each other again.

Since Julia knows that it would be impossible to survive under the rule of the Party, she wants to join the Brotherhood and become a member of it. However, she needs to be interviewed first and her past has to be rewritten. She thinks of lying about her past, which is not so difficult for her as she “had told such implausible lies all her life” (Newman, 2023, p. 380). She even answers in the affirmative when asked all the questions, including throwing sulphuric acid to a child’s face. Newman actually justifies Julia’s actions with her pregnancy because Julia claims that she does not have any other choice but to do “what was safe” (Newman, 2023, pp. 383–384) for her baby. Therefore, instead of ending the novel with Winston being crushed, Newman continues with Julia’s self-discovery, will to survive, and personal journey. Newman gives Julia Worthing the chance to live her own story and destiny; hence, “unlike Winston — but like so many women — she is the ultimate pragmatist, cynically using the system to survive” (Morris, 2023). After all she has gone through, she wants to find the rebels if they exist. Therefore, Newman chooses to make the Brotherhood real and allows Julia to join

them to see if it would offer a better path to go along with an alternative resistance group. When Julia accidentally finds the Crystal Palace where the Brotherhood keeps Big Brother, whose name is Humphrey Pease, she is offered to meet him in person. Even though she feels hatred towards him at first, when she sees him in a desperate situation, she does not "want a suffering person to suffer more" (Newman, 2023, p. 369). This might seem as weakness, but it can also be taken as an act of resistance to the dehumanizing effect of the totalitarian government. Julia's empathy might be due to her choice not to cause further suffering, which shows a female character's autonomy and personal rejection of the vicious cycle of violence and retribution.

Surprisingly, in the Crystal Palace, Julia sees Vicky, who has already joined the Brotherhood as well. This is a big relief for Julia because "beneath all the misery and preoccupation of these days, she'd been thinking of Vicky" (Newman, 2023, p. 232). Having Vicky on her side, Julia would not be more pleased. At the end of the novel, it becomes clear that "while Newman's Julia enjoys voyeuristic pornographic sex with men, she can never truly love them . . . because beneath all the rubbing, juicing and performing for the telescreens Julia nurses a secret passion for her fellow at the women's hostel, Vicky" (Ettler, 2024). Newman chooses to finish the novel with Julia and Vicky coming together in order to showcase the critical role of women in each other's lives. In patriarchal societies where women are marginalized, silenced, or put aside, the relationship between women means overcoming their isolation, inferiority, and disempowerment. This emphasizes the idea that "the female's tradition can be positive source of strength and solidarity" (Showalter, 1981, p. 204). Besides, by having Vicky as her future partner, Julia completes her self-discovery as she is ready "to live out the rest of her life as another person" (Newman, 2023, p. 384).

Considering what Julia has been through, it can be suggested that Newman wishes to promote a more nuanced world for the women living under the rule of the Party in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. While male-dominated language creates a hierarchy between men and women by putting women in an inferior position, female-dominated language endeavours to bring equality by showing that women also have feelings, emotions, and a voice. In male-dominated literature, the narrative voice generally aligns with the male character's point of view and concerns, whereas female-dominated novels written by female writers prioritize female voices, giving depth to their experiences and thoughts. In this novel, Newman saves Julia from being only Winston's lover. She has her own life, personal experience, personal choices, and her own story. In this respect, gynocriticism

enables the reader to witness the experience of the female by looking beyond the traditionally set patriarchal stereotypes. In *Julia* Newman expands Orwell's world into one where women have humanity and voice, and where women are not the projections of male desire, but people with personal desires to see "how such a character would behave in the settings the author provides her, what would be an exciting way of revealing the character's secrets to the reader" (Gardiner, 1981, p. 357). She is neither fully submissive nor rebellious, which is the way male authors have been portraying women. Lerner asserts that "woman's culture is not and should not be seen as a subculture" (qtd. in Showalter 1981, p. 199). If feminist criticism remains fixated on the portrayal of women as victims, it can inadvertently reinforce a narrow and disempowering view of women. Showalter strongly believes that the representation of female characters through the male gaze prevents the reader from witnessing the inner lives of women. This shift in focus could provide a more balanced and empowering understanding of women's roles and achievements. Hence, Newman creates Julia as a human being like any other human being trying to survive in an oppressive regime, "which projects the pure woman character which breathes without the help of maleness" (Dasgupta and Sharma, 2013, p. 2). Therefore, Julia navigates through the rule of the Party both by submitting to some of its deeds and by secretly rebelling. She is not to be regarded as a damsel in distress in need of saving by the male, nor is she a seductive femme fatale trying to destroy the male. Rather, she is a human being striving to survive. Therefore, *Julia* can be regarded as offering a more nuanced and fuller representation of Julia by including her family background, the reasons and motivations underlying her actions, and her personal thoughts and feelings, the parts that Orwell does not bother to explain.

Conclusion

Showalter claims that if one limits themselves to a male-oriented feminist critique, which only deals with the stereotypical representations of women and the restricted female agency in literary history, one will never be able to fully grasp "what women have felt and experienced, but only what men have thought women should be" (Showalter, 1997, p. 216). Accordingly, gynocriticism begins where one can reinterpret the established male literary history. However, gynocriticism is not about destroying the differences between men and women or creating a utopia where there are no gender issues. Instead, it asserts that writers must "stop trying to fit women between the lines of the male tradition, and focus instead on the nearly visible world of female

culture" (p. 217). Gynocriticism enables female writers to move beyond the superficial approach and to create a literature where female characters are on stage reflecting their own experiences and feelings, giving way to a more balanced and nuanced literary landscape.

While Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* portrays Julia as a minor character with a limited voice, Newman's *Julia* reflects her as the protagonist and lets the reader see, hear, and feel what it is like to be a woman in the dystopian world. Newman has established a world that is not governed only by universally accepted male-dominated ideals. This is the main endeavour of gynocriticism, which Newman implements in a successful way by focusing on the female experiences and feelings of Julia. The fact that *Julia* was "written by a woman for a woman and is also addressed to a woman" (Pujara, 2024, p. 1255) emphasizes female authorship and readership in literature. By portraying Julia as sexually promiscuous and rebellious, Orwell wrongly contributes to the idea that women can only be described through their sexuality. Therefore, the objectification of women and the absence of female autonomy portrayed in the novel demonstrates the male author's prejudiced perspective towards women. Since the narrator's voice is masculine, it is impossible to have access to the life, views, or inner world of Julia in the story; thus, she serves in Winston's journey as a side character. Just like Showalter, "feminist writers believe that the entire literary tradition, which men had a monopoly over, has misinterpreted feminine reality" (Nodeh & Pourgiv, 2012, p. 2) because the existence of female characters in a way depends on their relation to men. Therefore, in Orwell's narration, Julia's worth as an individual only matters at the physical level. However, with Newman's narration, the reader can see her being scared, confused, vulnerable, desperate, exploited, and brainwashed but also joyful, determined, and fearless. Thus, it can be claimed that the purpose of this rewriting is not to depict Julia as a heroine overcoming and defying all the challenges, but to imagine her seeking ways to survive and make the most of her life under the totalitarian regime. Newman achieves this by portraying Julia fully with her family background, with the reasons and motivations behind her actions, and with her thoughts and feelings towards, which Orwell does not even partially mention. Showalter emphasizes the significance of exploring and portraying the distinct and often marginalized experiences of women that have been overlooked or misrepresented by traditional, male-dominated literary criticism. Representing the uncharted, unexplored territory of women's experiences that lie beyond the dominant male culture's understanding, Showalter's model of gynocriticism aims at establishing a space for women where they can be heard and

valued on their own terms, rather than through the lens of male interpretation and standards. Women's writing would make it possible for women to shape a new understanding about what it means to be a woman "to construct a female framework for the analysis of women's literature, to develop new models based on the study of female experience, rather than to adapt male models and theories" (Showalter, 1997, p. 217). Consequently, through their writing, women can discover themselves and be no longer in the inferior position. Showalter's ideas are still relevant based on the fact that a contemporary author creates a work of literature to critique the neglect of the female perspective by giving voice to Julia.

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Echoes of the Hakawati: The art of Storytelling in *The Map of Salt and Stars*

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ABSTRACT

This paper reflects on how the storytelling tradition in Syria, practiced by hakawatis, has become the narrative strategy of the novel *The Map of Salt and Stars* (2019) by Jennifer Zaynab Joukhadar, a Syrian American writer. Hakawatis, the storytellers, are keen observers of political and cultural developments in society, and narration is a tool for the reaction to these changes. Gravely affected by the civil war, Syrian culture suffers from the disruption of its long-cherished cultural practices, including storytelling. *The Map of Salt and Stars* employs the lens of the characteristic features of a story narrated by hakawati. This study argues that the novelist transfigures herself into a modern hakawati, realising the power of storytelling and deploying it as a medium of truthful representation and social criticism. Joukhadar transforms the oral storytelling tradition into a written narrative, informing the world about the gruesome realities of the civil war and forced migration. She considers this the most appropriate and accessible form of expression and adheres to the hakawati tradition throughout the text. This paper follows the method of textual analysis and evaluates aspects of the novel, such as the narrative, the plot, the characters, the spectacle, and the message—the key traits of a story recounted by a hakawati, as Ahmed Yousaf, a famous storyteller from the United Arab Emirates, states.

Keywords: Syria, culture, hakawati, storytelling, civil war



Culture is ever-developing in a dynamic society, and efforts to hold fast to the celebrated aspects of each culture are part of national consciousness. The unprecedented movement of people across borders due to political, climatic, ethnic, and economic reasons largely gives rise to progressive and occasionally repressive effects on culture and traditions. This paper aims to analyze the influence of the civil war on Syrian culture in the context of the heated refugee issue and to determine the significance of this approach as the number of Syrian refugees swells every day.

Historians have described the rich national culture of Syria in detail through various narratives. At the beginning of the twentieth century, Greater Syria (Bilad al-Sham) encompassed Lebanon, Syria, Israel, Palestine, Jordan, and some parts of Turkey. Syria has always been an influential actor and center of complex political engagement. *The History of Syria* states, "[t]hroughout the country, before the civil war, visitors encountered a highly educated population that, though modern, was not Westernized" (Shoup, 2018, p. xiii). Other authors have also noted the attachment to the national past and the joy of social life in Syria. In the preface to *Destroying a Nation: The Civil War in Syria*, Van Dam (2017) discusses the magnificent cultural heritage of Syria as follows:

What struck me most during my frequent visits to Syria over the years was the kindness and great hospitality of the Syrian people wherever I went. I got to know the Syrians as friendly and charming, open-minded, tolerant, and respectful heirs of rich civilizations. I enjoyed the fascinating historical cities of Aleppo and Damascus, with their industrious people, the smells of oriental spices, and the busy sounds of market life; the ingenious architectural splendor of beautifully decorated palaces and traditional houses, with their treasures surprisingly hidden behind anonymous walls; all this next to the cosmopolitan buzz of the modern city quarters, where people remained attached to their valuable traditions. The soft-spoken Syrian Arabic sounded like harmonious music to my ears. (p. ix)

The political and cultural invasions of the country by different empires across time have made the land susceptible to sudden and convoluted alterations. The end of Ottoman rule and the dissection of Greater Syria under colonial powers through the implementation of the 1916 Sykes-Picot agreement (Shoup, 2018, p. 101) had a long-lasting effect on national history. After becoming a republic in 1945 (p. 109), Syria was confronted with political uncertainty, and the struggle to define and practice Arab nationalism culminated

in a “bloody war among Syrians themselves” and the interference of other nations in Syria’s internal issues (Van Dam, 2017, p. xi). The Arab Spring aroused the vigor and enthusiasm to fight the despoiled government, which gradually gave way to the civil war (Shoup, 2018, p. 144).

The civil war has distorted the very existence of the material and non-material cultural heritage of Syria. Youssef Kanjou (2018) points out the adverse influences triggered by the civil war and the resultant social fragmentation, displacement, and migration that threatened the intangible cultural heritage of the nation. In his view, “the loss of human life includes the loss of oral traditions and traditional skills” (p. 377). He again maintains that cultural heritage represents the identity of a community, that heritage comes from the past, lives in the present, and is transmitted to future generations (p. 382).

The hakawati, or storyteller, plays a crucial role in the cultural life of the Arabian Peninsula and the Middle East in sustaining and transmitting fables and tales of legendary kings and warriors. The oral transmission of such stories preserves the dramatic elements embedded in them and thus “breathing life into them” (Chaudhary, 2014, para. 1). In the context of the civil war, the role of public storytellers becomes problematic, and it challenges the opportunities for criticism and commentaries on the political system that are once enjoyed by the practice. Moreover, this crisis in the storytelling tradition is an example of how conflicts and violence destroy the cultural fabric of a nation.

Jennifer Zaynab Joukhadar, a Syrian-American writer, proficiently employs the storytelling tradition of her nation in *The Map of Salt and Stars*. The intertwining of stories is a fundamental characteristic of hakawati, which is applied in the novel by narrating the twin stories of Nour and Rawiya. The novel incorporates myth, allegory, music, satire, and dramatic narration of emotions, gestures, and facial expressions, all of which are fundamental elements of hakawati. This paper argues that the meticulous act of storytelling in the novel equates the author, Jennifer Zaynab Joukhadar, to a modern hakawati, who turns an established oral cultural tradition into a literary narrative to elaborate upon displacement. A close reading of the novel substantiates this point through an analytical framework of the established storytelling culture of the Arab region.

Hakawati: The Storyteller

The word hakawati originates from two Arabic words, *hekaye* and *haki*. The first word means 'story', and the latter means 'to talk' (Chaudhary, 2014, para. 5). Storytellers historically emerged as town criers during the pre-Islamic period and also served as news correspondents in society. At the beginning of the Islamic era in 622 C.E., "a new generation of Hakawati appeared whose role was to spread the story of the Islamic prophet Muhammad" (Skeiker, 2010, p. 225). Later, in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, their popularity increased, and they appeared as secular entertainers in public spaces (Nassar, 2006, p. 20), narrating love stories and war stories (Skeiker, 2010, p. 225). Hakawati transformed into a public influencer who could influence people's attitudes toward the social, political, and cultural issues of the time. He was believed and accepted by the public and occupied "the second most important position" in society, just after the ruler (Chaudhary, 2014, para. 21). Storytelling is a profession, a medium of expression, and a call to evaluate the existing systems. A hakawati's example "demonstrates how popular artistic forms can provide a safe environment for people to voice their concerns, articulate their social problems, and share their hope for a better future" (Skeiker, 2010, p. 224).

The profession of storytelling is maintained across generations. First, it can be a matter of inheritance: the father is a master of storytelling, and the son learns from him. The second mode of transference is "borrowing" through observing and reproducing the art of narration from another storyteller (p. 229). The traditional hakawati was a male who met his male audience at coffee shops and public spaces during day and night. According to Royce Lyssah Malabonga, women also told stories, but in their domestic spheres, only in the evening, particularly bedtime stories at home (2019, p. 36). The advent of radio, television, and other internet facilities mostly replaced these proficient storytellers in the late twentieth century (pp. 38–39).

Syria's tumultuous political condition and the resultant civil war have made social gatherings and public narration impossible. The long-endured culture of storytelling and many other culturally specific, prestigious practices have faced severe challenges. In her essay titled "Remembering the Storyteller of Damascus, Before the War", Michelle Hoover (2016) describes her meeting with Abu Shadi-Rasheed Al Hallaq in 2009, the last professional storyteller of Damascus, before the outbreak of Arab nationalism and the civil war. She says the man was later forced to flee to Lebanon as the situation in

his country worsened: "Because of war and violence and greed, the lesson seems, the storytellers of Syria have lost their faith in dreaming" (para. 22). Once "kings too depended on storytellers to spread their messages" (Chaudhary, 2014, para. 21), but now hakawati is compelled to weave "stories that only distracted his listeners from solutions needed in the present day" (Hoover, 2016, para. 21).

Suchitra Bajpai Chaudhary (2014) quotes Ahmed Yousaf, an acclaimed storyteller from the United Arab Emirates, in her article "Hakawati: An Ancient Arab Art of Storytelling". In Yousaf's words, the essential matters a storyteller must keep in mind during his public narration are as follows:

The narrative: Every story selected should have a strong plot that captures the interest of listeners.

The characters: There must be a minimum of three to four characters in the story who interact and move the story towards its climax.

The action: The story must have sound and fury- a clash of kings, an adventure on the high seas or a quest for something that is undertaken over a vast expanse of sand dunes. The sweep of the story and its setting is what engages the listener.

The spectacle: This includes music, soundtrack and colors that work as symbols. For example, blue to represent the sea or yellow to represent the sand or sun. The spectacle helps the audience to be led willingly into the thick of the tale.

The message: Stories must act as an important community service and the storyteller must shoulder the responsibility of communicating the importance of living a principled life to the people at large. (para. 26)

Malabonga (2019) states after a personal interview with Paul Mattar, the lead researcher on the oral tradition in Lebanon, that "[a]n important aspect of ancient storytelling is its attachment to the cycle of life. Similar to life, storytelling follows a course of movement; it is dynamic and evolving" (p. 36). Storytelling is also a part of social activism to criticize and ridicule contemporary realities using metaphors and fables. According to Barbara

Romaine (2007–2008), “the theme of storytelling recurs most strikingly as a feature of societies in conflict, especially as part of a culture of resistance, where telling a story may constitute a political statement” (p. 259). Furthermore, hakawati is a messenger. The selection of stories and the incorporation of myths and fables are based on the message to be delivered. Nassar’s words: “At the same time, he has personal freedom to reflect and comment upon current events taking place in his society” (2006, p. 22).

In an online article titled “The Storytellers of Syria: Displaced Women Keep Tradition and History Alive with Folktales”, Catherine Cartier (2018) delineates the role of women as the preservers of their traditional stories and carriers of the storytelling profession. After a meeting with the woman storyteller Aisha, Cartier states, “[l]ike other Syrian storytellers, she draws upon lived experience combined with a long history of literature and folklore. Through storytelling, the younger generation connects with this history, which is largely unknown to them” (para. 10). The essay also notes the transformation of the themes and contents of stories and how they are being shared now due to the changing realities of life in Syria. Thus, they are not mere stories for entertainment but a rich repertoire of facts mingled with imagination for narrative appropriateness.

This essay studies the novel *The Map of Salt and Stars* as narrated by a modern hakawati, Jennifer Zaynab Joukhadar. The novel’s distinctive features, identified when analyzed from the perspective of Ahamad Yousaf, qualify the text as a new version of the hakawati tradition. Joukhadar follows the complicated political situation in the country and is very specific in selecting themes and content. This article evaluates how the author elucidates the life of the Syrian people by incorporating history, fables, and imagination. In a context in which the direct storytelling method is not possible, the author appears to be a hakawati who assumes the role of a traditional storyteller in all its implications.

The Map of Salt and Stars: A Resumption of Hakawati

The amalgamation of history and creativity is a brave attempt at narrative composition in *The Map of Salt and Stars*, which prompts readers to assimilate the situation with the backup of fantasy and excitement. The famous mapmaker Abu Abd Allah Muhammed al-Idrisi, the Sicilian king Roger II, and his son William I are the historical characters in the novel. Similarly, Joukhadar introduces the readers to the

North African indigenous ethnic group Amazigh, which is considered barbarian and thus called Berbers by Arab migrants. Along with these historical references, the well-known collection of Middle Eastern folktales, *One Thousand and One Nights*, has been revisited in the novel. The author borrows the mythical roc from the tale of Sinbad the Sailor, and the legend of the roc's eye stone is from the tale of the fisherman and the jinni. Incorporating these elements into a recent novel is not an unconscious act of narration but rather an intended effort to revive and restate the rich storytelling tradition in the Arab and Islamic world, as the author's note claims: "Everybody knows the story of Rawiya; they just don't know they know it" (Joukhadar, 2019, p. 6). The style in which Nour begins telling Rawiya's story articulates the author's deliberate act of storytelling as a hakawati does.

The Map of Salt and Stars tells the story of a girl named Nour, born and raised in Manhattan, the United States, to a Syrian couple. She loses her father to cancer and leaves the US with her mother and two elder sisters, Huda and Zahra, to Syria. The loss of her father haunts her day and night, and the nostalgic voice of his telling stories reverberates in her memory. In Homs, Syria, violence and turmoil shadow the lives of the people at the onset of the civil war immediately after the family's return. They flee from Homs with Baba's friend Abu Sayeed and move to Jordan and Ceuta. The twin narrative of the novel begins at the very beginning of the narration, as Nour tries to identify herself with Rawiya, the main character of her favorite story, as told by her father. Rawiya lost her father as a child and embarked on her journey from Ceuta to become an apprentice to the famous mapmaker Al-Idrisi. Under the orders of King Roger of Palermo, the expedition headed by Al-Idrisi marks the boundaries of various dynasties and engages in battle with bandits and warriors. The victory over the deadly roc makes Rawiya the hero of the group. Her story ends with her return to her mother in Ceuta after she was saved from the civil war in Palermo and then ruled by Roger's son, William I. Nour is fascinated by the story and finds that both travel through exact locations throughout their journeys. During his escape, Nour recognizes that she is not Rawiya and cannot save others from troubles as Rawiya could. However, days of separation and suffering end at Ceuta for the cost of Abu Sayeed.

In Noah Bogdonoff's (2020) opinion, the subordinate story of Rawiya does not "denigrate or commodify the pain of displacement" detailed in the novel (p. 274). Instead, Joukhadar could juxtapose, with precision and brilliance, the magical world of imagination and adventure with the horrific refugee life. Narrated from the perspective of a child, the

novel marvels in its construction and presentation and is capable of swaying grown-up minds. In the novel, there is a reference to a man among the refugees, a hakawati, who was a storyteller in a café in Damascus before the war. He left Syria when the café was shelled and could not find work. He says that he used to tell “Tales of kings and adventures. . . . Salah ad-Din. Sinbad the Voyager. The great love stories, fables that fed my parents and grandparents” (Joukhadar, 2019, p. 107). The hakawati continues, “I don’t tell stories anymore. . . . just the truth of things. I used to love the tales of jinn and the deeds of princes. My heart beat for all that once was – the lovers, the mapmakers, the adventures” (p. 108). He concludes by saying, “Don’t forget. . . . stories ease the pain of living, not dying. People always think dying is going to hurt. But it does not. It’s living that hurts us” (p. 108). This reference ascertains the author’s knowledge of the status and role of hakawati in Syrian culture and society. Through the novel, she transforms this information into the practical level and demonstrates herself as a hakawati. The typical characteristics of the story narrated by a hakawati can be found while examining the novel through the lens of its narrative, action, characters, spectacle, and message.

Joukhadar selects a strong plot for the novel that unfolds against the Syrian civil war. The failure of Nour’s attempt to narrate her favorite story foreshadows the destruction of order and spontaneity of life in the immediate future. The author, to imply the gravity of the situation, chooses to locate the commencement of the novel on the eve of Ramadan, the most auspicious occasion for Syrian people. The abrupt swing into rising action occurs in the main plot and is gradual in the second story. The first-person narrator of the novel, Nour, transforms into an omniscient narrator as she begins recounting the story of Rawiya. Joukhadar is aware of the questions that can be raised on the reliability of the novel written by an American writer with only a basic knowledge of Arabic who lives miles away. The problem is solved through the character of Nour: Nour, just like the author, is a Syrian American born to a Muslim father and Christian mother, accustomed to the language and culture of the US than that of Syria and often feels “not-homeness” (Joukhadar, 2019, p. 21) in the land. The author’s careful attribution of her own traits to Nour helps readers grasp and appreciate the uniqueness of Syrian culture, rather than being skeptical of the narration’s dependability.

The story is told straightforwardly, avoiding all the complexities of narration to make it comprehensible to the reader. The careful interweaving of two parallel stories follows a chronological storytelling pattern with a beginning, middle, and end. The author maintains a reasonable pace for the development of the two stories and takes utmost

care to ensure that both journeys spatially coincide throughout the novel. The novel can also be approached as a quest narrative in which the main characters are invigorated by their aspirations toward the goals they have to accomplish. The first phase of Nour's life is motivated by her pursuit of the purple-green stone, the roc's eye, which she believes is on her premises. The roc's eye is Nour's childhood fascination, but a sudden growth to maturity is presented after she achieves the stone. In the latter half, she is on a mission to find the unrevealed place where she is supposed to unite with her mother. Rawiya is fascinated by the prospect of exploring the world with the renowned mapmaker Al-Idrisi. The roc's eye stone is a magical potion that imparts superpowers to Nour and Rawiya to help them achieve their goals. The novel follows the traits of a viewpoint narrative as it explains the feelings and experiences of the protagonist. Although the narrative is subjective, readers find it trustworthy because the context of war and its consequences are familiar in the current scenario.

The actions depicted in the novel encompass sound, fury, and adventure. From the beginning to the end, the narrative is filled with conflict, dilemma, suspense, and tension. The horrible faces of the civil war are presented through the details of bombings, explosions, blockade of water, electricity, and food, pro-government and anti-government movements, forced displacements, death, separation, mental and physical pain, human trafficking, border crossings, firing and fights, detention camps, and abuses. The tension is evident from the opening of the novel as the characters anticipate an attack at any time. The most sacred and festive occasion of Ramadan eve is ravaged by shelling, which ends up in family displacement. The fatal wounds carried by the characters, especially Huda, in their bodies signify the trauma and deepen the action of the novel. The dilemma regarding their future and the complexities of refugee life are well presented during their journey. Nour's continuous pursuit of the purple-green stone seems out of context but is necessary for the development of the character. The tragic elements of the story gradually intensify with the wreckage of the boat in which Abu Sayeed drowns in his attempt to save others. The separation of Nour and Zahra from Mama and Huda arouses tension, but the reader is trained to hold the hope of reunion, which becomes true at the end when the characters gather at Uncle Ma'mun's in Ceuta.

The second story is quite interesting, although it is filled with similar conflicts and dilemmas. Rawiya is determined to attain her wishes and displays incomparable willpower and talent. Every step she takes is exciting as she hides her identity: she appears like a boy and cracks the puzzles Al-Idrisi puts forward. The friendship between King Roger of

Palermo and Al-Idrisi is the relief factor in the novel, and the mission entrusted by the king is a call for Rawiya to find her true self. The dropping of the dead body at the khan by an anonymous creature hints at the possible dangers the expedition has to overcome during their journey. Rawiya's story is very active and thrilling, with the fast movement of the horse riders and rivalry among kings and warriors; the magical appearance of the mythical characters, like the deadly roc and the valley inhabited by green serpents, marks a new turn in the novel. Knowing the roc's only weakness, Rawiya asks Khaldun, the poet, to sing his sweet songs and thus plans to attack the roc in his slumber. The expedition encounters the roc three times in the novel: the occasions are filled with suspense and terror. The adventure story is rich in antagonists like the mythical roc, the Fatimid and Almohad warriors, Ibn Hakim and Mennad, and the giant green serpents.

The expedition passes through mountains, valleys, wadies, souqs, dunes, rocky areas, ancient cities, forgone courts, and seas. The victory of virtue over sin and reward for the deserved are portrayed elegantly. The romance between Rawiya and Khaldun adds flavor to the plot but receives limited attention, of course, to highlight the gravity of their situation. The combat with the warriors of the Fatimid and Almohad empires on different occasions raises the tempo of the novel. The fight with the Almohad Empire is furious, accompanied by an unexpected attack by giant serpents and a revenge-seeking roc. After being relieved of their enemies and escaping the roc, the group sails to Palermo with the Sicilian army. The roc's last attempt to defeat the sailors is ferocious, and he is defeated by the wit and valor of Rawiya, the perfect time to disclose her identity to Al-Idrisi. The novel develops into the death of King Roger and the civil war against the newly enthroned King William, his son, followed by the return of Al Idrisi and Rawiya to their native land, Ceuta.

The novel introduces several characters who participate in the development of the story in their own ways. The first narrative deals with the life of Nour, a small girl who acts and thinks like a typical child but instills a ray of hope in the reader. Nour struggles in Syria as a foreigner, especially with the Arabic language, but tries to find her place in the family and culture. She is a good storyteller, which is evident from how she recounts the story of Rawiya. Her constant presence and interaction with every character make a close reading of events and personalities possible. Nour is both observant and critical: she forms opinions about everything and everyone. Gifted with synesthesia, Nour attributes colors to every feeling and vision she experiences. She is absorbed by Rawiya's story and receives Rawiya as a loadstar who guides her. She spends most of her time reviving her favorite story and searching for different types of stones. Nour's

presence of mind and resilience is noteworthy compared to the atrocities she is facing. She is very attached to her elder sister Huda, whose fatal wound and pain prompt her to think seriously about life and death. After two boys attempt to rape Huda, Nour reiterates, "I am not safe, and I can't keep anybody else safe either. I am not Rawiya. I repeat it over and over: 'I'm not, I'm not'" (p. 164). Recognizing her inability to save everyone, she stops identifying with Rawiya. Rawiya's journey was an adventure, but Nour's journey is a matter of life and death. This is the transformation that takes place in Nour. Nevertheless, it is undeniable that, Nour, like Rawiya, is efficient in utilizing the opportunities and potentials she has to encounter the realities of life.

Along with Nour, the protagonist, the novel portrays other significant characters like Mama, Abu Sayeed, Huda, and Zahra and several supporting characters such as Umm Yusuf, Yusuf, Rahila, and Sitt Shadid. Mama is a static character throughout the text and, according to Baba, "is always a lady" (p. 53). She is a mapmaker and protective mother who firmly believes in Nour's ability to read colors. Abu Sayeed is Baba's friend. In Baba's absence, he accompanies the family and is a part of all their struggles. Obsessed with the study of stones, he is the one who understands and supports Nour's quest for the roc's eye stone. Huda suffers much physically but is resilient and mature. In Nour's account, Zahra is "the worst sister ever" (p. 29), who complains about and criticizes people and situations. Likewise, Yusuf is a tough boy who invokes tension in his mother and grandmother and terror in Nour. While all the other characters support the flow of the story, Zahra and Yusuf undergo a transformative process as they experience the insecurity of life. When they love each other, their softer feelings emerge, and they show empathy and compassion during distress. In the second narrative, the main characters are Rawiya and Al-Idrisi, with whom Khaldun later joins. Al-Idrisi and Khaldun set the background for Rawiya's character development, and she is confident about challenges and knowledgeable, skilled, and courageous.

The Map of Salt and Stars is rich with spectacular elements such as music and colors. The novel comprises five parts, each beginning with a poem as a prologue and a pictorial representation of the countries Nour's family passes by. The content of the poems suits the mood of each chapter and serves as an entry point for the following events. The poetic style is so impressive and emotional that it prompts the readers to visualize and feel the details in each line. The use of symbols like salt and stars and references to constellations spark the reader's imagination. Nour describes her feelings and experiences through the use of colors, which makes understanding them easy. For example, when

Mama is angry, she says, “her voice all red edges” (p. 60). The novel is rich in imagery, as shown in expressions like “I taste purple air and oil” (p. 6), “I rub the smell of water out of the fig’s bark” (p. 6), “...Huda’s pink-and-purple laugh” (p. 13), and “blue marbles of conversation” (p. 17). The map is a spectacle, indicating their refugee life and the places they are destined to be. Nour discovers that Mama secretly scribbled the poems under the colors of each country; the poems appear as prologues. The bombing of the house and the city, the roc’s attack, the fight with the opponents, the construction of the silver planisphere, and the civil war in Palermo provide vivid portrayals in which readers are emotionally and imaginatively immersed in the fictional world.

The novel plays a significant role in promoting peace and harmony. Primarily, *The Map of Salt and Stars* is a refugee novel intended to disclose the realities of refugee lives. The production of the novel is an intentional act, and the author dedicates the text to the Syrian people, both in Syria and in the diaspora, and all refugees. The author juxtaposes reality and fiction to point out the consequences of war. The first depiction is the Syrian Civil War and how it affected the people and forced them to leave the country helpless and wounded. Without any exaggeration, the realities are presented in detail, such as charred buildings, overcrowded hospitals, long queues of refugees injured and separated from families, smuggling of people, boat wrecks, and drowning of forced migrants. The second narrative, a historical fiction, presents the emergence of the civil war in Palermo. William I, the successor of King Roger II, was overthrown by a conspiracy due to his ineffective rule. This historical narrative directs the reader to seek and comprehend the reasons for civil war wherever it happens. The transhistorical nature of such atrocities implies that human beings never learn anything from the past, and the situation may continue unless they take the initial steps toward change. The novel also states that “[i]n times like these, it’s the small people who suffer” (p. 80). The narrative is an excellent example of how human beings transform in the face of suffering and loss. The instances of the deadly roc and the proud and crooked characters like Ibn Hakim and Mennad, indicate that justice will rule over wickedness.

Conclusion

The widely accepted and long-lived customs in society enable people to communicate their feelings, thoughts, and tensions creatively. Art and artistic expressions are not mere agents of entertainment: they are cultural, social, and political barometers of a given society. In Syria, the civil war emerged as a result of a series of conflicts and

discordance over decades and radically disheveled the country's glorious cultural heritage. This study is focused on one of those lost cultural practices: storytelling and the art of storytelling exercised by hakawati or storyteller. Storytelling is an integral part of the Arab tradition and a prominent component of its non-material cultural heritage cherished by Arab peoples. Stories facilitate recounting the past, evaluating the present, and preparing people for future experiences. This article revisits the tradition and analyzes the novel *The Map of Salt and Stars*, using the fundamental elements of storytelling, narrative, action, characters, spectacle, and message.

Hakawati is a professional storyteller and a constant presence in Syria's social life. Jennifer Zaynab Joukhadar, in her novel *The Map of Salt and Stars*, presents herself as a hakawati to revive the Syrian storytelling culture. Loyal to all the essential characteristics of a story narrated by hakawati, Joukhadar skillfully weaves the stories of Nour and Rawiya, one fleeing Syria amidst the civil war and the latter setting out on an adventurous journey. The difficulty of incorporating all the characteristics of a tale told by a hakawati in a novel has been incapacitated by bestowing a child narrator. A child's world of wonder and curiosity has been manipulated brilliantly to accommodate the atrocities of war and displacement without affecting the originality of both stories. The spectacular representation of the world of colors and suspense is similarly made possible. The novel ridicules the existing political system in Syria, which is blind to the people it 'serves' and is an act of cultural resistance through storytelling. The theme of discussion is not just the experience of a person or family but the shared trauma of a nation and its people. As a modern hakawati, the author realizes the power of storytelling and deploys it as a medium for truthful representation of war-torn Syria. The social criticism in the novel seeks to promote a practical solution to the refugee crisis by pointing out its causes and consequences.

This paper recognizes its limitation in conducting an in-depth analysis of the storytelling tradition of the country. The lack of authentic records on the cultural practices of Syria with a particular reference to its performing art forms makes such a study challenging. The narratives on prewar Syria mainly address the historical and political landscape of the country in comprehensive detail. Attempts have also been made to study the nation's material culture, particularly its rich architecture, historical buildings, and museums. This article proposes that extensive research can be conducted on the performing arts of Syria and acknowledge the initiatives undertaken by the local community and the diaspora to safeguard these cultural forms specifically after the outbreak of the civil war.

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Beyond Tokenism: A Study of Arab-American Muslim Identity, Belonging, and Social Dynamics in *The Other Americans* and *Between Two Moons*

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ABSTRACT

This paper critically examines Arab American Muslim women's identities, belonging, and social dynamics in Laila Lalami's *The Other Americans* (2019) and Aisha Abdel Gawad's *Between Two Moons* (2023). The analysis addresses a significant gap in current scholarship: the insufficient exploration of how these novels avoid tokenism by providing complex and authentic representations of Arab American Muslim women. This paper uses symbolic inclusion to explore how cultural heritage, assimilation, and societal integration shape the protagonists' identities. The methodology of textual analysis focuses on the extent to which the two novelists resist the superficial inclusion of marginalized characters, offering narratives where characters are both "seen" and "othered," challenging stereotypes and advocating for genuine inclusion within diasporic narratives. The key findings indicate that: (1) both novels depict Arab American Muslim women with depth, showcasing their struggles and resilience in navigating complex cultural and social landscapes; (2) the narratives challenge tokenism by portraying characters' internal conflicts and multifaceted identities rather than reducing them to mere cultural markers; and (3) the novels highlight the protagonists' agency in asserting their identities, countering the stereotypical portrayals often found in mainstream media. The study implies that Arab-American narratives can effectively foster genuine inclusion and understanding of diverse identities within diasporic narratives.

Keywords: Arab-American identity, social dynamics, symbolic inclusion, tokenism, representation



Introduction

Arab-American literature has emerged as a vital area of study that critically examines issues of identity, cultural negotiation, and the multifaceted challenges encountered by women in the diaspora. Authors like Diana Abu-Jaber and Mohja Kahf employ hybrid narrative structures to examine the complex situation of Arab-American Muslim women, aptly merging Western and Eastern storytelling traditions (Michael, 2011; Berrebbah, 2020). Moreover, their works address pressing and sensitive topics, such as the structures of patriarchy, the nuances of women's rights within an Islamic framework, and the pervasive issue of domestic violence. These narratives not only challenge existing stereotypes but also navigate the complex intersections of secular and Islamic feminist paradigms, offering a rich and nuanced exploration of these social dynamics (Berrebbah, 2021; Berrebbah, 2020). Arab-American literature has developed throughout the 20th and 21st centuries to address pressing issues of race, ethnicity, politics, and transnationalism. Although initially marginalized within ethnic studies, recent scholarship has begun to carve out a place for Arab-American literature within the "ethnic borderland," promoting interethnic connections and solidarities (Fadda-Conrey, 2006).

This study seeks to interrogate the portrayal of Arab-American experiences in two significant narratives: Laila Lalami's *The Other Americans* (2019) and Aisha Abdel Gawad's *Between Two Moons* (2023). The discussion explores the tokenistic and superficial representations commonly found in mainstream narratives. Tokenism, defined as the superficial inclusion of minorities to create an illusion of diversity without engaging with their authentic experiences, perpetuates harmful stereotypes and oversimplifies complex identities (Du Datta & Bhardwaj, 2024; Childress et al., 2024). This analysis addresses the prevalence of tokenism within narratives surrounding Arab-American Muslim women, thereby highlighting the critical need for symbolic inclusion to ensure the authentic representation of the diverse identities and experiences within this demographic.

Literature review

Laila Lalami's *The Other Americans* (2019) and Aisha Abdel Gawad's *Between Two Moons* (2023) are engaging novels that explore the intricacies of Arab-American Muslim women's encounters with prejudice. Past studies of these two works of fiction explore numerous themes, as this section will illustrate. Their narrative techniques offer nuanced

portrayals of human experience, inviting readers to reflect on the universal themes of longing, resilience, and the transformative power of memory within the context of diasporic life (Alsultany, 2012; Dwivedi, 2023). *The Other Americans* (Lalami, 2019) and *Between Two Moons* (Abdel Gawad, 2023) are two compelling narratives that explore the struggles of Arab-American Muslim women facing discrimination, highlighting their ongoing struggle for social justice and the complexities of maintaining cultural identity amidst societal prejudice (Abu-Lughod, 2002; El Boubekri, 2022; Boutine & Abu Amrieh, 2023). Both *The Other Americans* and *Between Two Moons* contribute significantly to contemporary Arab-American literature by presenting authentic and nuanced portrayals of Arab-American identity and belonging (Said, 1978; Khrebtan-Hörhager, 2016).

Laila Lalami's *The Other Americans* (2019) and Aisha Abdel Gawad's *Between Two Moons* (2023) critically address the widespread stereotypes about Muslims and American Muslims. Both authors use characterizations that highlight Islamic values such as perseverance, compassion, and innovation to counter negative narratives of savagery and backwardness (Kirkus Reviews, 2019; Edouihri, 2021; Febrina, 2022). These novels reject superficial representations, offering nuanced depictions of Arab-American lives and challenging exclusionary perceptions of belonging within the US (Boutine & Abu Amrieh, 2023; El Boubekri, 2022). *The Other Americans* by Lalami (2019) specifically critiques post-9/11 stereotypes and the concept of "Othering" by highlighting the peaceful tenets of Islam while contrasting them with biased Orientalist views (El Boubekri, 2022). Moreover, Lalami's work intricately explores the diasporic experience, weaving in the complexities of belonging and the challenges of Arab American muslim women in foreign lands, while memory and storytelling become potent tools for characters to reclaim their personal histories, assert agency, and demonstrate resilience amidst displacement and cultural dislocation (Edouihri, 2021; Boutine & Abu Amrieh, 2023; El Boubekri, 2022). Through these narrative strategies, the novels collectively work to undermine anti-Muslim racism and foster a more complex and empathetic understanding of the Muslim identity in America.

Similarly, *Between Two Moons* (Abdel Gawad, 2023) tackles the integration of Muslim minorities within American society against a highly politicized backdrop. In this context, Abdel Gawad advocates for love and forgiveness as alternatives to violence and vendetta (Boutine & El Boubekri, 2022; Abu Amrieh, 2023). The novel explores themes of identification and surveillance, showcasing the resilience of marginalized characters

such as Amira and Lina (Febrina, 2022; Abdel Gawad, 2023; Pamungkas, 2023). Furthermore, both novels project the experiences of aging immigrants living far from their original homelands, illustrating how dislocation drives them into creative nostalgia as they attempt to recreate their lost surroundings. This thematic concern intricately connects aging, place, and nostalgia through sophisticated portrayals of diasporic life (Ali, 1992; Kumar & Sushil, 2022).

In addition, these two novels illustrate how dislocation profoundly impacts the memories of elderly immigrants, compelling them to reconstruct their past through reclaimed memories (Chaudhry, 2023). *Between Two Moons* (Abdel Gawad, 2023) primarily uses nostalgia as a vehicle for navigating aging in foreign lands, highlighting the enduring connection between memory, identity, and place within the diaspora (Maji, 2018; Elreedy et al., 2023). At the same time, these narratives move beyond mere resilience by critiquing the harsh realities of discrimination and Islamophobia, particularly in Lalami's *The Other Americans* (2019), which underscores the limitations of individual fortitude in the face of systemic bias (Febrina, 2022; Roy, 2022; El Mitry, 2023). Nevertheless, both novels counter reductionist portrayals of Arab Americans, offering nuanced and complex characters that resist mainstream stereotypes (Singh et al., 2023; Smith, 2018) and illuminating the necessity for genuine inclusion and understanding rather than symbolic gestures (Ghosh & Barber, 2021; Mugo & Puplampu, 2022).

Through their compelling characters and engaging narratives, these novels offer insightful explorations of social dynamics, advocating for genuine representation (Asmawati et al., 2023). Additionally, Lalami's work critiques superficial representations by emphasizing themes of love, forgiveness, and the struggle for integration amidst political tensions. At the same time, Abdel Gawad's narrative explores the intersections of multiple cultural identities and internal conflicts within diasporic characters. These novels reflect broader societal issues such as diversity, inclusion, and social justice, contributing to meaningful discussions on identity formation and cultural representation in literature. However, despite recent scholarly interest in cultural diversity, there remains a gap in academic studies addressing how these novels avoid the pitfalls of tokenism, where characters are included as Arab-Americans without any complexity. The authors of these narratives, Laila Lalami and Aisha Abdel Gawad, craft stories that highlight their characters' struggles with personal and cultural identity, particularly as they navigate spaces where they are both "seen" and "othered." These characters grapple with the complexities of balancing their Arab-American identities while confronting

societal expectations and stereotypes. This dynamic emphasizes the need for genuine inclusion and social justice within diasporic narratives.

Theoretical Framework and Methodology

This section delineates the theoretical framework and research approach employed in this study to analyze Arab-American Muslim narratives, with particular emphasis on the issues of symbolic inclusion and representation. The framework offers a critical lens for comprehending the duality of experiences and the intricacies of the representations of Arab American Muslim women (Said, 1978). Symbolic inclusion denotes a significant departure from superficial tokenism, serving as a mechanism for authentic representation and empowerment (Grant, 2017). In contrast to tokenism, which Stuart Hall (1997) characterizes as a superficial gesture that reinforces prevailing power structures by situating marginalized individuals within dominant frameworks without genuinely challenging them, symbolic inclusion aspires to engender authentic and nuanced representations. This approach integrates marginalized identities not as peripheral figures or clichéd stereotypes but as central characters possessing agency and complex narratives. The primary objective of symbolic inclusion is to cultivate genuine, multi-dimensional portrayals that resist tokenism. Hall (1997) posits that cultural members generate and disseminate “meaning” through “representation” (p. 15), underscoring that tokenism operates within dominant ideologies, reducing subaltern groups to mere symbols and perpetuating established power relations. Hall (1997) further observes that “stereotypes” simplify individuals to a limited set of fixed characteristics, thereby reinforcing the existing power dynamics (p. 257). He emphasizes that representation functions as a “site of struggle” (p. 25), wherein dominant groups uphold power hierarchies by controlling the depiction of identities. Hall argues that the essence of representation resides in its practice, suggesting that if meaning is generated through representation rather than being predetermined, the act of representation serves as a crucial arena for contesting power (p. 25). Consequently, symbolic inclusion becomes vital in challenging these dynamics and promoting more equitable representations.

Similarly, this mode of representation originates from the socialist critiques of commodification and hegemonic influence. Horkheimer and Adorno (2002), among others, urged in their analysis of the culture industry that it was dangerous how privileged cultural forces tended to flatten complex identities into simplistic, highly marketable caricatures serving better the interests of the dominant culture than any accurate

reflection of genuine lived realities. This concern was with the “culture industry,” which “impresses the same stamp on everything” (Horkheimer & Adorno, 2002, p. 95). To this end, symbolic inclusion challenges reductive thinking by promoting representations that reflect the diverse and multifaceted lived experiences of marginalized communities. This theoretical underpinning strongly aligns with the critical race theory, which includes the intersectionality of oppression (Crenshaw, 1989, p. 140). This theory acknowledges marginalization arising from overlapping factors like race, class, and gender, emphasizing the need for intersectionality in symbolic inclusion.

Edward Said’s assertion that the relationship between the West and the East is characterized by power dynamics and complex hegemony illustrates how hegemonic narratives often reduce non-Western identities to simplistic stereotypes, highlighting the need for more inclusive portrayals (Said, 1978, p. 5). Similarly, Frantz Fanon’s critique of being objectified through a Eurocentric lens underscores the dehumanizing effects of such representations, emphasizing the necessity for narratives that affirm agency and complexity (Fanon, 1952, p. 116). Homi Bhabha’s notion of hybridity, which addresses the complexities and disruptions inherent in sites of discrimination and domination, further reinforces the importance of symbolic inclusion in capturing the fluid and intersectional identities of marginalized groups, such as Arab American Muslim women (Bhabha, 1994, p. 159). Collectively, these theories highlight the urgent need for narratives that resist reductive stereotypes, ensuring that marginalized characters are authentically represented and empowered within their cultural contexts.

Moreover, Said’s critique of Orientalism provides a crucial framework for understanding the misrepresentation often found in tokenism. He articulates that the “Orient” has been largely constructed by Western narratives as a place filled with romance and exoticism, where the distinction between East and West serves as a form of power (Said, 1978, p. 1). This construction creates a homogenized and stereotypical image of the Arab and Muslim cultures, stripping them of their diversity and agency. In response, symbolic inclusion seeks to counter these misrepresentations by portraying these communities in their authentic richness and complexity, thereby fostering a more nuanced understanding of their identities.

Understanding the role of misrepresentation and the necessity for symbolic inclusion can be framed through W.E.B. Du Bois’s concept of “double consciousness.” He describes this phenomenon as the experience of viewing oneself through the lens of a prejudiced

society, which often leads to feelings of contempt and pity from others (Du Bois, 1903, p. 3). This dual perspective emphasizes the importance of self-representation that fosters self-respect and counters negative societal perceptions. Postcolonial theories reveal that representation is deeply entwined with power dynamics. Spivak critiques how dominant powers distort subaltern voices through “strategic essentialism” (Spivak, 1988, p. 93), while Bell Hooks advocates for a decolonized, counter-hegemonic perspective as central to Black liberation. Together, these arguments call for authentic representations that truly empower marginalized identities (Hooks, 1990, p. 251).

This section establishes a robust theoretical framework for analyzing Arab-American Muslim narratives, decisively prioritizing symbolic inclusion over tokenism. By integrating critical race theory, postcolonial thought, and socialist critiques of commodification, this approach elucidates how tokenism not only perpetuates detrimental stereotypes but also reinforces existing power imbalances. Key thinkers like Hall, Said, Fanon, Du Bois, and Hooks reveal representation as a site of struggle, with their works underscoring the need for nuanced, authentic portrayals that empower marginalized voices. This framework stresses that real inclusion goes beyond simple representation and requires deep, multifaceted stories that actively fight hegemonic forces and allow for self-determination. This shows how important authentic stories and agency are for people from marginalized communities. Ultimately, this framework establishes symbolic inclusion as a crucial tool for disrupting established hierarchies and fostering a more equitable and representative cultural landscape. Based on this theoretical foundation, the two selected novels are examined through comparative textual analysis and close reading in this article.

Discussion and Findings

Complex Portrayals of Arab American Muslim Women: Moving Beyond Tokenism Through Symbolic Inclusion

Both *The Other Americans* (2019) and *Between Two Moons* (2023) are significant literary works that reject tokenism in their portrayal of Arab-American characters, offering multi-dimensional representations that delve into the complexities of their inner lives. Authors Laila Lalami and Aisha Abdel Gawad each utilize unique strategies to achieve symbolic inclusion, confronting cultural oppression and affirming identity. Through their narratives, they provide a nuanced exploration of the Arab-Muslim-

American experience in the post-9/11 landscape, inviting readers to engage with the diverse and distinct journeys of these characters, thereby fostering a deeper understanding of their realities beyond simplistic stereotypes (Ghosh & Barber, 2021; El Boubekri, 2022). These novels actively contribute to the ongoing discourse surrounding representation and defy the reductive nature of tokenism, which persists in contemporary literature and media (Stroshine & Brandl, 2011; Lee, 2020). Unlike tokenism, which uses the superficial incorporation of marginalized characters as mere symbols, symbolic inclusion entails the authentic integration of identities within the plot and narrative. By utilizing symbolic inclusion and tokenism as a framework, this paper explores the extent to which Lalami and Abdel Gawad move beyond surface-level representations to critique the portrayal of Arab-American Muslim women, emphasizing their experiences of being both visible and unseen, included yet marginalized. Importantly, this nuanced approach underscores how these authors challenge reductive stereotypes and advocate for a more complex understanding of the multifaceted identities within the Arab-American community.

Lalami's *The Other Americans* (2019) actively resists tokenistic depictions, instead presenting protagonist Nora's deeply personal, cultural, and emotional life with complexity. As the novel opens, Nora's narrative is grounded in a specific, impactful moment: "My father was killed on a spring night four years ago while I sat in the corner booth of a new bistro in Oakland" (Lalami, 2019, p. 10). This opening scene highlights the theme of symbolic inclusion, integrating Nora's experiences with race, class, and belonging. Her father's death introduces invisible barriers that complicate questions of inclusion. Moreover, Lalami weaves Nora's cultural heritage into the story, challenging tokenism and capturing the complexity of marginalized identities. This approach rejects easy simplification and offers a fuller representation of Nora's lived experience, compelling readers to engage beyond superficial levels. Indeed, tokenism often flattens characters, reinforces social prejudices, and ultimately fails to address systemic injustices (Spivak, 1988; Bhabha, 1994; Hall, 1997). Instead, *The Other Americans* (Lalami, 2019) goes beyond superficial representations, rendering its characters, as Maryam reflects, simultaneously "seen" and "othered." This demonstrates the necessity for authentic and diverse depictions in literature that transcend superficial labels and promote a more profound understanding. As Maryam poignantly states:

Time passed, yet I still found myself reaching for two glasses when I made mint tea in the morning, looking for my husband's socks when I folded

the laundry, or wanting him to hand me a fresh towel when I stepped out of the shower. These little moments were painful; they reminded me that I was no longer his wife, that I was his widow now, a state of being I was still trying to accept. (Lalami, 2019, p. 131)

Moreover, Laila Lalami's *The Other Americans* (2019) actively resists the tokenistic portrayals of Arab-American Muslim women, offering deeply nuanced characters like Maryam and Nora. Maryam, facing widowhood, is portrayed beyond simplistic stereotypes, with her struggles embedded in broader contexts of identity and belonging. As Said (1978) states, "The Orient was almost a European invention, and had been since antiquity a place of romance, exotic beings, haunting memories and landscapes, remarkable experiences" (p. 1). This emphasizes the significance of understanding power dynamics to prevent misrepresentations of underrepresented populations. Said advocates highlighting the protagonist's culture and emotions rather than relying on stereotypes. Authors can combat historical misrepresentations and challenge supremacy by providing detailed and authentic representations. In this context, Lalami avoids tokenism by illustrating the complex tension between societal expectations and personal reality. As Maryam reflects: "But life has to be faced, even when it can't be accepted, and after I received a second phone call from the restaurant manager, asking me when we planned to reopen, by which he meant something else, of course—he meant that the staff had bills to pay and families to support—I realized I could no longer delay the inevitable." "I had to go to work" (Lalami, 2019, p. 131). Her hardships are not reduced to cultural or religious tropes; instead, they are grounded in financial imperatives and individual fortitude, showcasing her autonomy as a proprietor and provider (Lamghari, 2024, p. 148). Similarly, Nora's character is deliberately multifaceted, reflecting the struggles of many Arab-American Muslim women. Nora articulates her desire to be seen as an individual:

I had never seen myself as an immigrant before. I had always been just me, born in California, raised in the Mojave Desert, and one hundred percent American. I wanted to be judged by what I made of myself, not by where my parents came from, not by the sound of my name, not by the color of my skin. (Lalami, 2019, p. 34)

This internal conflict, along with her assertion of being "one hundred percent American," is counterposed by societal assumptions about her identity, revealing the

tension between symbolic inclusion and tokenism (Du Bois, 1903; Said, 1978). Lalami further emphasizes this complexity through Nora's emotional landscape, using a powerful metaphor: "Under my headlights, I could see only twenty feet ahead. But the fog lifted at dawn, and by the time I reached the Mojave, the sun was out and the sky a brazen blue" (Lalami, 2019, p. 10). This journey from darkness to light embodies both Nora's struggles and a broader critique of how society reshapes individuals based on racial or ethnic identities, challenging monolithic narratives (Said, 1978; Febrina, 2022). Additionally, Lalami showcases Nora's complex relationships, mainly the "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" policy about her sex life with her mother:

For years, we had been operating under a Don't Ask, Don't Tell policy about my sex life, and our mutual violation of that agreement while I was home—she asked, I told—had given her yet another reason to be disappointed in me. Why couldn't I be more like Salma, she moaned, find myself a nice Muslim doctor or engineer, and marry him? (Lalami, 2019, p. 280)

Nora Guerraou underscores the complex dynamics of the muslim identity within Arab-American communities and the challenges of balancing traditional cultural expectations with modern life. Her feelings of being objectified are also powerfully portrayed:

I couldn't shake the unwavering gaze at the cabin window. Whenever I tried to interpret the expression in Fierro's eyes, I couldn't decide whether it was disgust or desire, but both made me feel like I was nothing more than a body or even a commodity. (Lalami, 2019, p. 280)

In addition, Nora highlights her struggle against being reduced to a mere object. Du Bois, W.E.B. (1903) refers "the 'sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity'" (p. 3). Here, Du Bois highlights the internal conflict faced by Arab Americans, who navigate their identity through heritage and dominant culture, balancing traditional values with modern life. Finally, Nora's desire to be judged by her merits encapsulates Lalami's dedication to presenting her as a fully realized individual beyond cultural stereotypes: "I wanted to be judged by what I made of myself, not by where my parents came from" (Lalami, 2019, p. 109). As scholar Waleed Serhan (2024) observes, Lalami's narrative "resists the reduction of Arab Muslim women to static roles," emphasizing

the fluidity of their identities shaped by personal choices, exemplified by a character who “wore a headscarf because she wanted to, not because her husband asked her to. She had made that choice herself” (Lalami, 2019, p. 63). Through this nuanced portrayal, Lalami challenges tokenistic representations and advocates for a deeper understanding of Arab-American Muslim women (Said, 1978; Spivak, 1988).

Similarly, Aisha Abdel Gawad’s *Between Two Moons* (2023) explores the lives of two young Arab-American Muslim women, Amira and Lina, in post-9/11 New York City, highlighting the complexities of symbolic inclusion and their shared struggles with societal pressures. Abdel Gawad illustrates how the character’s Muslim identity leads to an increased awareness of police surveillance. The moment described involves a conversation between the narrator and Sami, where the narrator expresses an expectation of a defensive or embarrassed reaction due to the context of being watched by the police. The statement, “The police,” followed by an explanation, “They watch what Muslims do online,” signals a subtle yet powerful moment of realization about the pervasive surveillance of Muslims, especially in the aftermath of 9/11. Abdel Gawad narrates,

I expected Sami to jump at the sound of my voice behind him. I expected him to be embarrassed or defensive. But he just said, ‘Why?’ [...] ‘The police,’ I said, unsure if I was being played. ‘They watch what Muslims do online. (Abdel Gawad, 2023, p. 107)

Here, Abdel Gawad reveals the disparity between symbolic inclusion and actual acceptance. Muslims in America after 9/11 may experience symbolic recognition in some spaces, but simultaneously, they are forced to bear constant surveillance and suspicion, which indicates that such inclusion is not genuine. They are “seen” in public places but are also “othered” and scrutinized based on their cultural identity. The fear and suspicion that mark the character’s discovery that he is being followed by the police illustrate how the cosmetic inclusion under such circumstances leads to no acceptance in society. Rather, it emphasizes a level of alienation, where persons are identified through their identity and are suspected rather than being assimilated into the social structure (Chin & Levey, 2022).

The emotional burden of constant surveillance underscores the inadequacy of superficial inclusion, which fails to account for the textured realities of their lives. Moreover, when Faraj chastises Amira for her headscarf falling in public, he points to

her head and says, "You should be more careful next time. We're in public" (Abdel Gawad, 2023, p. 107). Amira apologizes, saying, "I am sorry." Faraj stands up, brushes his hands off his jeans, and replies, "I have to get going" (Abdel Gawad, 2023, p. 107). Abdel Gawad highlights how, even within marginalized communities, there are pressures to adhere to externally imposed notions of modesty. This reduces the hijab to a point of surveillance and control, thereby reinforcing tokenism. In addition, the differing perceptions of Amira and Lina further expose the limitations of superficial understanding. As Amira reflects;

People were always saying that Lina was sneaky and untrustworthy. However, really, I was opaque and Lina was transparent. I grew up watching siblings who were born with a natural talent for self-destruction. I didn't have that. I was cautious by nature, defensive, withdrawn. (Abdel Gawad, 2023, p. 179)

Here, Lina's labeling as "sneaky" exemplifies tokenism, simplifying her identity into a stereotype, while Amira's self-perception as "opaque" stems from her struggle with visibility and her desire to escape societal control. The tension between symbolic inclusion and tokenism is further captured in Lina's declaration: "This is why I don't date Muslims," she grumbled. "Got to keep that shit separate" (Abdel Gawad, 2023, p. 130). This poignant moment reveals her resistance to the cultural pressures that essentialize her life experience, thereby reducing her identity to a mere representative one (Childress et al., 2024). At the same time, this statement highlights her yearning for authentic interaction, free from cultural judgment. These narratives demonstrate how, by focusing on the complex inner lives of Amira and Lina, Abdel Gawad avoids tokenism and promotes a richer understanding of the multifaceted lives of Arab-American Muslim women.

Moreover, Aisha Abdel Gawad's *Between Two Moons* (2023) skillfully employs symbolic inclusion to challenge the tokenistic representations of Arab-American Muslim women, presenting them as complex individuals navigating the societal pressures of post-9/11 America (Tănăsescu, 2023). The novel explores how Amira and Lina navigate their identities in a culture that perceives them as inherently "other." Amira's awareness of surveillance reveals the emotional strain experienced by Arab Muslims. Amira's sense of alienation and fear of being scrutinized is further illustrated when she expresses her uncertainty about those around her: "I can't tell who's an enemy. I can't tell if you're an

enemy" (Abdel Gawad, 2023, p. 265). This moment highlights the emotional toll that constant surveillance takes on Arab Muslims, showing how symbolic inclusion often fails to acknowledge their lived experiences and human complexities. In addition, Amira's sense of alienation is further highlighted when she states: "I wanted to be accepted, but how could I when all I saw were strangers, and even my own family didn't seem to understand me?" (Abdel Gawad, 2023, p. 155). This encapsulates her separation from mainstream society and her heritage, suggesting that authentic and rich depictions are crucial for capturing the depth of identity beyond tokenism.

Similarly, Lina's character illuminates the tension between tokenism and genuine representation. By stating, "This is why I don't date Muslims" (Abdel Gawad, 2023, p. 130), she expresses her desire to distance herself from cultural expectations, criticizing how tokenism reduces individuals to mere symbols rather than acknowledging their distinct identities. Therefore, Lina's struggle reveals how attempts to conform to societal norms can lead to alienation and a yearning for authenticity in a world that labels them superficially. While the characters' lives are intrinsically linked to their culture, Abdel Gawad avoids simplifying their experiences. Amira's contemplation of her hijab, "Every time I wore it, I felt the weight of my ancestors on my shoulders, but I also felt the judgment of strangers who saw me as just a headscarf" (Abdel Gawad, 2023, p. 178), captures the tension between heritage and societal perception. By showcasing Amira's psychological anguish, Abdel Gawad goes beyond tokenism, allowing readers to connect with her as a complex individual. Ultimately, the novel's use of symbolic inclusion demonstrates how Amira and Lina navigate their identities in a society that often views them as culturally distinct. Amira's awareness of surveillance highlights the emotional burden faced by Arab-American Muslims.

Both *The Other Americans* (Lalami, 2019) and *Between Two Moons* (Abdel Gawad, 2023) move beyond the tokenistic representations of Arab-American Muslim women, offering profound, complex articulations of their identities. These novels demonstrate how symbolic inclusion while aiming for authentic representation can paradoxically highlight societal prejudices. In *Between Two Moons* (Abdel Gawad, 2023), Amira's inner conflict exemplifies this, as her hijab automatically makes her "other," even in New York, a city known for its cultural diversity as "This bearded terrorist-looking guy and this hijabi terrorist-looking girl out on a date in their neighborhood. No one stared at us. It was New York" (Abdel Gawad, 2023, p. 118). It contrasts the characters' "terrorist-looking" appearance with their anonymity and acceptance in a multicultural space to challenge

stereotypes. Similarly, Lalami's portrayal of the generational conflict between Nora and Maryam in *The Other Americans* (2019) exposes cultural and ideological tensions within immigrant families: "Maryam's world was one of order and faith, where everything had its place, and deviations were not easily tolerated" (Lalami, 2019, p. 178). Both novels utilize multi-dimensional characters to resist simplistic narratives.

Furthermore, Abdel Gawad explores these complexities through Lina, who mockingly suggests that Faraj is ready to settle down with a "good Muslima": "He's totally your future husband," she says, "You said he's older, so he's probably tired of hooking up with white girls and ready to wife a good Muslima" (Abdel Gawad, 2023, p. 39). This interaction reveals the complex interplay between romantic pursuits and societal expectations, highlighting the ambivalence faced by Arab-American Muslim women (Said, 1978; Spivak, 1988). Lalami similarly uses symbolic inclusion to introduce Nora, whose life reflects the tension between identity and societal expectations: "At recess, the kids fanned out and gathered again in small groups—military kids, church kids, trailer-park kids, hippie kids—groups in which I knew no one and no one knew me" (Lalami, 2019, p. 25). This moment highlights Nora's early experience of being othered and her struggle to find belonging within societal structures (Fuleihan, 2022). Lalami critiques tokenism through Nora's artistic struggles, as society pigeonholes her based on her ethnicity despite her talent as a composer. This is evident when she is urged to abandon distractions and fully commit to her art: "If you're going to do something as crazy as writing music, you might as well commit to it. Get rid of the diner and go write the best goddamn music you can." (Lalami, 2019, p. 265). This moment illustrates her emotional battle in a society that acknowledges her heritage but often overlooks her individuality as an artist, pressuring her to navigate between personal ambition and external expectations. Meanwhile, Lina's choice to socialize with "the good Muslim girls" at "the Starbucks on 3rd instead of drinking with the Mexicans in Sunset Park" (Abdel Gawad, 2023, p. 14) highlights the pressures of cultural expectations and the struggle to balance cultural loyalty and personal freedom. This dichotomy reveals how the portrayals of Arab-American Muslim women can be reduced to simplistic choices that fail to encompass their complex identities.

In sum, Lalami's *The Other Americans* (2019) and Abdel Gawad's *Between Two Moons* (2023) effectively combat tokenism by employing symbolic inclusion to depict the nuanced experiences of Arab-American Muslim women in post-9/11 America. These novels advance beyond superficial representations by developing multi-dimensional

characters who navigate cultural oppression and individual challenges, thereby fostering empathy and understanding. Lalami concentrates on the exploration of internal emotional landscapes, while Abdel Gawad emphasizes the ramifications of the social gaze; nevertheless, both authors highlight the agency and resilience of their protagonists. Ultimately, these works contribute to the essential discourse surrounding authentic representation, advocating for complex narratives that mirror the richness and intricacies of marginalized identities. They encourage readers to engage with the multifaceted realities of the Arab-Muslim-American experience.

Symbolic Inclusion as a Tool for Authentic Representation in *The Other Americans* (2019) and *Between Two Moons* (2023)

Symbolic inclusion provides a theoretical framework for examining the depth and authenticity of the portrayal of Arab Muslim American women in Laila Lalami's *The Other Americans* (2019) and Aisha Abdel Gawad's *Between Two Moons* (2023). Moreover, symbolic inclusion prioritizes the meaningful depiction of marginalized communities beyond mere visibility (Tănăsescu, 2023). It comprehensively portrays these individuals while acknowledging their identities, challenges, and successes within their social environments. In contrast, tokenism frequently leads to superficial or stereotypical portrayals that do not question prevailing narratives (Serhan, 2024). Both Lalami and Abdel Gawad employ symbolic inclusion to construct narratives that recognize the complex experiences of Arab Muslim American women, integrating their stories into broader social and cultural contexts.

Lalami illustrates this complexity through Jeremy's introspection, where he says: "I'd tell myself, If you fall asleep now, you could still get four hours of sleep, or three hours, or two" (Lalami, 2019, p. 14). Despite his insomnia, Jeremy struggles for control and sincerity. His attempt to rationalize his way to sleep demonstrates a desire to manage his unpredictable condition. This inner dialogue represents the battle for honest representation and the difficulty of maintaining sincerity under adversity. Edward Said (1978) posits, "The relationship between the Occident and the Orient is a relationship of power, of domination, of varying degrees of a complex hegemony" (p. 5). By examining subtle power structures and how characters' actions, thoughts, and feelings are shaped by their perceptions, Said provides a lens through which writers can depict the gaze of the dominant culture. The cultural landscape of the novel should reflect or challenge hegemony, as seen in characters seeking media normalcy. Lalami notes Maryam's efforts

to connect with her new environment when she states, “I was trying to stay awake, so I switched on the radio and looked for Claudia Corbett’s show on KDGL” (Lalami, 2019, p. 37). This moment illustrates Maryam’s desire for connection and normalcy in a new culture. Listening to popular radio shows offers her emotional and cultural support, symbolically aiding her integration into society while contrasting her traditional habits with new cultural experiences. Authentic inclusion and complex, empowering representations of Arab American Muslim women challenge the culture industry’s focus on profit and stereotypical narratives (Horkheimer & Adorno, 2002; Abu-Lughod, 2002).

In addition, Laila Lalami masterfully employs symbolic inclusion in *The Other Americans* (1982) to challenge the shallow representations of Arab-American Muslim women often found in conventional narratives. Beyond simple tokenism, Lalami uses Nora’s character to explore the interconnections of gender, ethnicity, and social class, presenting a fully developed figure battling individual and collective issues. As Lalami illustrates through Nora’s perspective, “Nora felt the weight of her father’s expectations and her ambitions pulling her in opposite directions, each demanding a sacrifice she was not sure she was ready to make” (Lalami, 2019, p. 213). This internal conflict mirrors the Arab-American experience, where group identification frequently supersedes individual objectives, highlighting the struggle to balance personal desires with familial obligations (Dwivedi, 2023). Lalami embeds Nora’s narrative within a broader socio-political context, underscoring her encounters with prejudice and discrimination. Through symbolic inclusion, Lalami critiques individual biases and the structural prejudices that Arab-American Muslim women confront (French et al., 2013). She emphasizes how societal perceptions shape Nora’s artistic trajectory, noting, “She had learned early on that her name, her appearance, the cadence of her speech—none of it fit the image of what an artist was supposed to be in America. She was too much of a foreigner and an ‘other’” (Lalami, 2019, p. 147). This highlights the strong connection between Nora’s identity and her sense of belonging—or lack thereof—in American culture.

By exploring these complexities, Lalami provides a nuanced and authentic portrayal of Arab-American Muslim women that transcends superficiality. The forced representation of Nora and Sonya in the Christmas play, despite their protests, as “Magi,” with “flowing white scarves covering our long hair and robes dissimulating our budding breasts and hips” (Lalami, 2019, p. 101), exemplifies the novel’s critique of superficial inclusion. Although seemingly inclusive, it reveals how Muslim women are often portrayed in broad or superficial terms in public and cultural spaces, lacking respect for their identities (Johnson,

2014). This scene underscores how such inclusions often fail to acknowledge the authentic experiences of marginalized groups, instead reinforcing existing stereotypes.

While tokenism often relies on shallow characters that reinforce stereotypes, both *The Other Americans* (Lalami, 2019) and *Between Two Moons* (Abdel Gawad, 2023) delve beyond surface-level portrayals to explore their protagonists' identity conflicts. Laila Lalami and Aisha Abdel Gawad counter stereotypical narratives by showcasing the multifaceted identities of Arab-American Muslim women through Nora in *The Other Americans* (2019) and Amira and Lina in *Between Two Moons* (2023). Lalami's novel introduces Nora, shaped by her Arab-American heritage, grappling with identity, cultural expectations, and societal pressures. This reality is reflected in her internal conflict when she says: "I could have talked to him one more time, heard the care in his voice, and yet I had squandered the chance" (Lalami, 2019, p. 1). In this context, "him" refers to her father, highlighting the emotional weight of her regret. This multi-dimensionality in Nora's journey starkly contrasts with the simplistic portrayals often seen in the literature and media.

Conversely, in *Between Two Moons* (2023), Abdel Gawad portrays Amira's mother's psychological struggle by juxtaposing her memories of Alexandria with her current life in America:

When she was a new mother and a new American, she used to lie awake at night and torture herself by remembering a single, sharp detail of the life she had left behind... she would close her eyes and listen to the sounds of the Brooklyn streets below and pretend they were the sounds of Alexandria, the ancient Russian Ladas honking, the tram rumbling past her window. (Abdel Gawad, 2023, p. 191)

This reveals the emotional challenges that Arab-American Muslim women face when crossing cultures, yearning for authenticity and a connection to their roots within a culture that often marginalizes their history. Both Lalami and Abdel Gawad addressed the challenges faced by Arab-American Muslim women in navigating symbolic inclusion and genuine representation. Lalami highlights how humility, a trait often valued within their culture, can be misconstrued as passiveness, hindering their full participation and recognition. She notes: "Humility had been drilled in me, as it was in most of the women I knew, and I found it hard to get rid of it, even though it was frequently mistaken for inability" (Lalami, 2019, p. 199). This underscores the problem of inclusion, where their

presence does not equate to respect or recognition and, in fact, perpetuates stereotypical images (Said, 1978).

Similarly, Abdel Gawad's *Between Two Moons* (2023) illustrates the struggle of Arab-American Muslim women to be seen and understood within cultural narratives. Lina expresses her ambiguous desire for freedom when she says, "Don't let me go back... I didn't know if she meant back to Lotus or back to Andres or that motel, but I nodded anyway because I would have promised her anything" (Abdel Gawad, 2023, p. 215). This quote highlights the internal struggles these women face when navigating cultural and social expectations, as the narrator's promise of "anything" reveals an emotional bond yet underscores the limitations in understanding Lina's complexities.

In addition, Abdel Gawad illustrates the exclusion of Arab-American Muslim women from fully participating in and benefiting from their cultural traditions: "We were women preparing for a feast that we could not yet eat" (Abdel Gawad, 2023, p. 215). This metaphor emphasizes how these women are often visible within a cultural framework, yet their agency and autonomy are limited. Both novels demonstrate a move beyond tokenism, offering nuanced portrayals of Arab-American Muslims who navigate complex societal landscapes (Said, 1978). Through the lens of symbolic inclusion, Laila Lalami's *The Other Americans* (2019) and Aisha Abdel Gawad's *Between Two Moons* (2023) transcend tokenistic representation by providing nuanced, multi-dimensional portrayals of Arab-American Muslim women. These portrayals challenge reductive stereotypes and facilitate a more profound engagement with their complex realities. By situating characters within socio-political contexts and delving into their inner struggles, these authors do more than enhance visibility; they actively critique societal biases that perpetuate inadequate and superficial representations. Lalami and Abdel Gawad's work ultimately advocates the dismantling of tokenistic frameworks and the embrace of complex narratives that promote a deeper understanding of underrepresented voices. Their stories illustrate the rich tapestry of identities within American society, challenging the limits of authentic representation and advocating for true inclusion in literature and beyond.

Conclusion

This study focuses on the representation of Arab-American Muslim women in two narratives, Laila Lalami's *The Other Americans* (2019) and Aisha Abdel Gawad's *Between*

Two Moons (2023), to show how these novels counteract tokenism through complex characterizations. Using symbolic inclusion as an approach, the analysis elucidated how both authors render their works beyond representation, doing so with the lived experiences of their characters that encompass both inner turmoil and the societal constraints of their respective times. Key findings indicate that Lalami and Abdel Gawad present Arab-American Muslim women as complex individuals rather than mere cultural symbols, integrating their cultural backgrounds, personal aspirations, and social conflicts seamlessly into the narrative fabric. In *The Other Americans* (Lalami, 2019), Nora's journey highlights the tension between personal achievement and a public identity defined by ethnicity and religion, while *Between Two Moons* (Abdel Gawad, 2023) explores Amira and Lina's navigation of surveillance, Islamophobia, and cultural negotiation in a world quick to label them as "other." Both novels effectively challenge simplistic stereotypes, presenting characters who actively negotiate Western and Arab-centric gender expectations and assert their agency against patriarchal structures and systemic bias.

Ultimately, the works of Lalami and Abdel Gawad significantly elevate the practice of symbolic inclusion within Arab American literature. By moving beyond tokenism to construct narratives in which the protagonists' identities are integral to complex conflicts and nuanced character development, they illuminate the complexities of identity negotiation and challenge damaging stereotypes. Their texts call for the acknowledgment of the realities of life of Arab American Muslim women, accentuating the need to represent marginalized groups without bias or oversimplification. Such an approach not only counters ineffective attempts to provide a multi-faceted view of diverse cultures but also reveals the literature's ability to build understanding and construct a meaningful discourse on Arab and Muslim identities in the modern world. Although this analysis highlights two particular novels, its conclusions suggest that other works of Arab American literature may benefit from similar strategies designed to explore the multi-layered responses posed by the persistent confrontation with racialization and Islamophobia.

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Carnavalesque Grotesque as a Mode of Subversion: A Bakhtinian Study of Elif Shafak's *The Architect's Apprentice*

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ABSTRACT

Elif Shafak's *The Architect's Apprentice* (2014) transcends a mere narrative, transforming into a potential critique of power structures. This study explores how Shafak's novel subverts the established regime and questions the power politics that exploit the fate of marginalized sections of society. It explores how grotesque imagery and subversive tactics are used to create a destabilized and de-hierarchized world in which the privileged are decentered, binary distinctions are broken and blurred, patriarchy is overturned, and authorities are overthrown. Grotesque realism is a strategy for reversing the old order by regenerating decayed values and acts as a means of dissent against the marginalization of the downtrodden. The taboos are mocked, power is stripped of its exploitative guise, and authority is subverted through the presentation of the grotesque, allowing a rebellion against the oppression and exploitation of the authoritative forces. The author empowers the marginalized by stripping the power of its false glory and unveiling its exploitative nature through the grotesque. Bakhtin's concept of carnivalesque has been used as a lens to expose the oppression of the marginalized at the hands of rulers. By being subversive, we argue that *The Architect's Apprentice* (2014) challenges stereotypical social, political, and religious norms and is directly aligned with the spirit of carnivalesque.

Keywords: Carnavalesque, grotesque, subversion, monstrosity, Bakhtin



This study examines Shafak's (2014) *The Architect's Apprentice* is a narrative of hideous bodies and orifices, of holes pricked and punctured. Through grotesque imagery and comedic moments that highlight the inconsistencies instilled in various characters, this study examines how Shafak's novel subverts the stereotypical norms of existence. It also addresses how exploitative and powerful officialdoms can be opposed by giving the voiceless a platform. From a bodily perspective, Shafak's world seems to be filled with grotesque images, and these images also permeate the surroundings in which these bodies are fighting for survival. Shafak (2014) attempts to transcend the traditional understanding of realism and incorporates bizarre, surreal, and disgusting imagery into her body of work using innovative methods and techniques. In this study, Shafak's novel is examined from the standpoint of Rabelaisian aesthetics, and it traces the ideologies of Russian literary theorist Mikhail Bakhtin (1984) regarding grotesque realism, imagery, grotesque laughter, and market language. It argues that *The Architect's Apprentice* (Shafak, 2014) employs grotesque realism as an effective trope to unearth the victimization of females, whores, hermaphrodites, gypsies, and the poor and helpless, and fights against all the power structures, stereotypes, cannons, customs, so-called established hierarchies, prohibitions, fundamentalism, ferocity, restrictions, and racism.

Elif Shafak (1971-present) is a Turkish-British award-winning writer and activist who advocates for the rights of the marginalized. Shafak is a Turkish-British novelist who has examined controversial subjects such as politics, society, religion, and violence against the oppressed (2006, 2013), following in the footsteps of Sabahattin Ali and Orhan Pamuk. Shafak's novels voice the stories of women, minorities, immigrants, and eunuchs (Al-Zahrani & Al-Sharqi, 2022, p. 89). Her work, *The Architect's Apprentice*, attempts to address a wide range of societal, political, identity, and class issues by unmasking themes of power and powerlessness, faith and doubt, rich and poor, and clerical and secular. In *Three Daughters of Eve*, Shafak (2016) describes three women's lives by labelling them: "the believer, the confused, and the sinner" (p. 212), to depict their search for the meanings of existence.

Shafak's fiction tries to depict the carnivalesque grotesque to bring out the putrid reality beneath the existing order through the employment of grotesque images of body functions like urination, excrement, vomiting, and so on. Shafak employs grotesque realism as it "reflects cultural shocks and shifting traditions, offering new ways of experiencing a world that is no longer quite familiar" (Gniadek, 2005, p. 24). Grotesque realism in Shafak's works appears to be closely connected with Bakhtin's ideas of

grotesque imagery, grotesque laughter, excess, and extravagance. In *Rabelais and His World* (1984), Bakhtin scrutinises the positive role of grotesque exaggeration and carnival of the historical medieval period, drawing on the French author Francois Rabelais' *Gargantua and Pantagruel*, published in the 16th century. The carnivalesque grotesque creates its dimensions and establishes its realm for the unauthorized practice of freedom to unravel the mysteries surrounding the essence of truth and reality. It presents a varied picture of reality that includes both ugly and beautiful aspects. It protests and revolts against all forms of oppression, suppression, and restriction during the carnivals and medieval rituals. It fights against the solemnity and horror caused by political and ecclesiastical powers, the ferocity of stereotypical institutions obstructing liberty, and all forms of oppression, suppression, and restriction. Cremona (2018) opines in the context of Maltese carnival that "the Paidean space of carnival allows for liberties that are not permitted in the restrained world of every day" (p. 45). Shafak's carnival space also allows for a kind of freedom where male dominance is toppled, and normal hierarchies are reversed.

Monstrosity is an important feature of the carnivalesque, as the entanglement of fairy tales, myths, and monsters with their corporal frames adds to the intensity of carnivalesque rituals. Monsters metaphorically represent the agitations and aberration (Punter & Byron, 2004). They represent anomalies and abnormalities embedded in social, cultural, and political systems of power. Asma (2020) records that monsters epitomize some kind of moral infringement as well as some transgressive behaviour. Shafak experiments with this aspect and employs it in collaboration with the postmodern spirit. The carnivalesque is intensified as a mode of subversion by Warner's (1994) critical reflections in "Managing Monsters: Six Myths of Our Time from the Beast to the Blond" and Kerchy's (2008) insights in "Body Texts in the Novels of Angela Carter: Writing from a Corporeographic Point of View."

Literature Review

This study focuses on the key carnivalesque elements concerning the horrific monstrosity of *The Architect's Apprentice* (Shafak, 2014). The investigation of carnivalesque tradition, in collaboration with the grotesque, is a new field to investigate the victimization of the marginal and voiceless, despite a wide range of works in various dimensions. Researchers have long been drawn to the carnivalesque subgenre. *The Architect's Apprentice's* (2014) main concern is the conflict and friction between male-dominant

behaviour and the submissive feminine predicament, powerful and powerless, for which carnivalesque serves as a mode to bring out the varied nature of reality.

Grosz (1987) discussed the growing interest in the role of the body in the social context of sex, body, and identity. The body was presented without a social perspective. In the modern era, bodies are no longer reduced to essentialist and naturalist positions but can be viewed as the primary concern of social inscription and production. It is not linked to any stable concept; rather, it is contextualized within the larger social and cultural paradigm. According to Gardiner (1992, p. 25), Bakhtin's description of the carnival serves as a utopian critique of society because it offers a place for subversion and challenges prevailing cultural norms and values while also suspending hierarchy. According to Gardiner, the carnival is a form of utopian critique in that it provides a temporary realization of a different, more egalitarian, and joyful world. This utopian space, however, is always transitory and exists in opposition to the dominant social order. According to Gardiner, the carnival and its celebration of the carnival spirit can be seen as a form of cultural critique that has the power to bring about long-lasting social change.

Russo (1995, p. 62) illuminates the concept of the grotesque body through the lens of gender. Angela Carter, David Cronenberg, Mikhail Bakhtin, Julia Kristeva, Sigmund Freud, and Slavoj Žižek are among the influential figures she investigates. Through her analysis, Russo reveals how the grotesque is portrayed in Western culture, and by fusing iconography and history, she pinpoints the significance of the female body in the discourse surrounding it. The strange and grotesque body forms the central image of grotesque realism in Bakhtinian carnivalesque.

In her article on magical realism and carnivalesque, Arva (2008, p. 60) holds the opinion that the genre of carnivalesque must be observed by transcending the confines of reality and embracing the dual ontological structure of the text, which encompasses the ordinary and the marvellous, as well as the gothic and the carnival, and the normal and the grotesque exist side by side. This brings out the inherent nature of reality and demystifies the established norms and conventions of the postmodern world. Such contradictory elements are left for the audience to debate. This open-ended situation is a trademark of the carnivalesque spirit, with an emphasis on searching for meaning in a disintegrated and chaotic world. "The eloquent gestures and images indicate the direct pressure of events, whether they are enlarging, buoyant, limiting, or harsh" (Arva, 2008, p. 73).

Prosser (2019, p. 519) discusses how Shafak's impressive historical fiction restructures the era, life, and work of Sinan, the most famous architect of the Ottoman Empire, and compares it to Enard's *Tell Them of Battles, Kings, and Elephants* (2018), in which history has been created from a counterfactual angle. Shafak is not oneiric and fragmentary like Enard but realistic and keen on providing details. Prosser explores the depiction of 16th-century Ottoman Empire architecture in two novels, *The Architect's Apprentice* by Shafak (2014) and *Tell Them of Battles, Kings, and Elephants* by Mathias Enard (2010). Using Walter Benjamin's idea of architecture as a reflection of mythology, he examines the novels as "architecture-ologies" that challenge myths about the empire during times of construction. He draws on the relationship between literature and architecture, inspired by Henry James' "House of Fiction" to show how the novels use dome and bridge symbols in their storytelling, providing new perspectives on imperial conquests and transcultural violence that underlie the work of architects such as Sinan and Michelangelo.

Shafak's (2014) *The Architect's Apprentice* reconstructs history from a new dimension and critically unearths the quiescent mythologies and shared dreams of the great Ottoman empire. Her narration of the Ottoman Empire marks a mythical return to the epoch of literal reconstruction of the empire. Her work can be termed architecturology because it reveals the intricacies and enigmas of human existence beneath the mythologies of the Ottoman Empire.

Burley (2019) examines the idea of the "grotesque body" from artistic and literary perspectives and relates it to the festival setting within the temple and the phenomenon of possession in other cultures. Through this analysis, the author sheds light on the central themes of divine possession, animal sacrifice, and rituals that defy societal norms. Laschinger (2020) asserts that Shafak's *The Flea Palace* (2004) manifests unorthodox Istanbul as a grotesque, unorthodox realm. By displaying the apartment structure as its synecdoche and mediating the character's destinies within the historical backdrop of modern Istanbul, the novel exhibits alienation and conflict as the sine qua non of modernised Istanbul in the light of Sufism. On the other hand, although Shafak's (2014) *The Architect's Apprentice* also reveals secular Istanbul as a grotesque periphery, it does not employ any Sufi tradition for this purpose. She emphasizes the individuals' internal struggles and reveals the entire journey of negotiating their situation and coming to terms with their fate.

Grotesque takes place in a realistic setting, from either the past or the present. Grotesqueness and monstrosity in combination with carnivalesqueness is a unique

approach that has not been touched upon in the past. A lot of work has been done on the subject from different perspectives. Yuan, Termizi, Mghadam, and Talif (2018) highlight the importance of maggot therapy as a natural healing method. It conveys a sense of grotesque and monstrous in its exaggeration and gory drama. They contend that the grotesque is concerned with the distortion and deformation of the natural environment and order. They demonstrate how the fusion of animal, plant, and human characteristics results in exaggerated and extravagant displays at art exhibitions. In contrast, Shafak's treatment of the grotesque in *The Architect's Apprentice* (2014) is realistic and intense. She emphasises the use of the body principle. Alhashmi (2020) explores the grotesque and monstrous aspects of the Frankenstein monster. He has examined the monstrous body using the ideologies of Bakhtin, Hannah Arendt, and Emmanuel Levinas to highlight issues of justice and violence. While Frankenstein's monster was created on purpose, Saadawi's monster was created by chance. Hadi, the protagonist, discovers a slew of corpses lying in the bloody streets of Baghdad and gathers them into one heap to give them a proper burial. The author has used the metaphorical implications of Frankenstein's devilish monster to depict the dystopian atmosphere of Baghdad after 2003 and to reveal the bitter realities of war and the consequences of colonialism.

Semler (2020) describes the distinct aspects of the grotesque in early modern England in *The Early Modern Grotesque*. His approach to the grotesque is entirely different from Kayser's (1963) and Bakhtin's (1984). He is more in line with Barasch, who took an evidence-based approach with the exception that his work *The Grotesque: A Study in Meanings* is a knowledge compendium of 15 genres, countless authors, four centuries, and three countries. Semler examines how the term "grotesque" was appropriated from Roman art and was treated at the dawn of modern England. Semler's distinctiveness stems from his use of a constellation of grotesque terminology, such as "grottesco, grotesque, grotesque," antick, antique, antica," and so on. He not only defines terms, but he also places them in historical and generic contexts.

Taylor (2020) discusses the corporeal body in the context of Joyce's *Ulysses* (1922). Joyce referred to *Ulysses* as an "epic of the human body," and Leopold Bloom's nomadic itinerary catalogues the levels of his corporeality and desires of the flesh. His wild hunger and physical body serve as a lens through which we can look not only at the desiring physical body as a locus of critique but also to highlight more. It reconciles desire and disgust, ingestion and excess, and consecration and profane. The Bakhtinian

body, on the other hand, emphasises the physicality of being. The physical body provides a site of resistance through its transgressive behaviour.

AYAN (written in the capital) (2022) examines *Sexing the Cherry* through the lens of Bakhtinian grotesque realism and an ecocentric perspective. This section delves into the novel's depiction of the negative impact of patriarchal and authoritarian attitudes on both human and nonhuman communities. The author, Jeanette Winterson, utilises the concept of grotesque realism to challenge Cartesian binary opposition and promote a more harmonious relationship between humans and the environment. The article highlights the main characters' responses to environmental issues, reflecting Winterson's optimistic vision of a world in which humans and nonhumans are united. Ultimately, this examination sheds light on the novel's exploration of environmental concerns and the desire for equality and balance between humans and nature.

After Debord, Ellul (1981), in his book *The Humiliation of the Word*, further critiques the primacy of images in the contemporary representation of reality, which, according to him, has paved the way to the humiliation of the word. Grotesque images and carnivalesque events add to the meaning of reality. If the art of story has gradually lost its charm, it is not because of its intrinsic disability as a carrier of meanings but because of what Lacan and Fink (2006) in their book *Ecrits: The First Complete Edition in English* refer to as the precarious status of reality itself, or what Žižek calls the "fantasy frame of reality" (1999, p. 89). Žižek notes, "although the reality is determined by reality testing, reality's frame is structured by the left-over of hallucinatory fantasy". Carnavalesque is a form of subversion that exposes oppression and exploitation while shattering established social norms and hierarchies.

Theoretical Framework

The concepts of carnivalesque and grotesque, which were advanced by Bakhtin in *Rabelais and His World* (1984), serve as the foundation for the research's theoretical framework. Brown (2004) defines carnival as a world of topsy-turvy, of heteroglot exuberance, of ceaseless overrunning and excess, where all is mixed, hybrid, ritually degraded, and defiled" (p. 67). Carnavalesque refers to more than just a performance for some people and observation and viewing for others. According to Bakhtin (1984) "it embraces all the people," making no distinction between actors and spectators" (p. 7). Bakhtin further presents carnival's "universal spirit" which "is the special condition

of the entire world, of the world's revival and renewal, in which all take part" (p. 7). By suspending "all hierarchical ranks, privileges, norms, and prohibitions of normal life, such a cosmic essence reduces distinctions and obstacles (Bakhtin, 1984, p. 10).

Carnavalesque exposes the depravity and debasement of people through grotesque realism. Bakhtin (1984, pp. 19–20) asserts, "The essential principle of grotesque realism is degradation, that is the lowering of all that is high, spiritual, ideal, or abstract; it is a transfer to the material level, to the sphere of earth and body in their inseparable unity." Moreover, the genital organs, the belly, and the buttocks are universally portrayed as elements that "devour" and "swallow up (the grave, the womb) at the same time as an element of birth, of renascence (the maternal breasts)" (Bakhtin, 1984, p. 21). The face or the head also stands in for these physical characteristics in higher, more divine realms.

Carnival is a time of revelry and profanity, a state of laughing, dancing, drinking, partying, processions, mock executions, entertainment, crowning, and dethroning that is separated from regular activity and everyday tedium. No doctrine, dogma, authoritarianism, or parochial seriousness can coincide with Rabelaisian images during the carnival period. These images run counter to everything that is honed and polished, as well as all petty thinking and outlook.

Analysis and Discussion

The Bakhtinian concept of the carnivalesque grotesque has been exploited as a valuable lens through which the subversion of authority has been analysed in Elif Shafak's *The Architect's Apprentice*. This section will delve deeper into the ways and strategies of the carnivalesque grotesque through which subversion occurs in the novel, as well as address issues of patriarchal discrimination, power exploitation, and marginalization of various sections of society.

The protagonist Jahan's journey to becoming a master-apprentice of royal architect Sinan is the subject of *The Architect's Apprentice* (Shafak, 2014). The master-apprentice relationship in *The Architect's Apprentice* blurs the lines between human and non-human worlds, capturing the carnivalesque's true spirit. The discrimination between different binaries is diminished as the historical and grand buildings of Turkey have not been there at the beginning of the human race. They were painstakingly built by Muslims and Christians, galley slaves, and artisans, as well as humans and animals. All are placed

on the same pedestal, and the discrimination between the high and the low is diminished. It is the carnival atmosphere where the binaries are blurred, and all are equal. The sacred and the profane are mixed. The animal and plant worlds work in collaboration with the human world.

Grotesque Realism

Grotesque has been aligned with bizarre and alienated. It has been employed as a powerful literary trope to revolt against the power systems of society. Semler (2020) opines that “grotesque is a powerful word. The concept and realities are intriguing, enduring, and profound” (p. 1). Grotesque realism in *The Architect’s Apprentice* (Shafak, 2014) becomes a means of subversion that uproots the decaying stereotypical old order and upholds the supremacy of a new era of change. The mode of grotesque has also been employed to subvert the obnoxious victimization of the marginalized at the hands of power-hungry elites.

In *The Architect’s Apprentice* (Shafak, 2014), the animal tamers who belong to the lowest hierarchy are supposed to “wipe urine off the basins, pick up the faeces, and rinse the feeding cups” (pp. 45–46) and are going through exploitation at the hands of their masters. The grotesque images of urine and faeces are symbolic of their state at the hands of their rulers. It presents a picture of the downtrodden and the marginalized. Power structures are inherent in the very fabric of society, and the grotesque hints at injustice and hegemony, thus creating a carnivalesque atmosphere.

Shafak’s language, too, captures the spirit of the grotesque. The grotesque imagery is reflected through the language of Captain Gareth, a cold-blooded sailor who takes advantage of Jehan and exploits him. He oppresses Jehan, which reflects the suffering endured by the poor. “He coughed; spittle dribbling from his lip.... They’d have mounted you, all of’em. When they were tired of your pretty arse, they’d have sold you to a bawdy house. You owe me, little scamp” (Shafak, 2014, p. 29).

Shafak delivers the sense of grotesque through language and exposes the wretched state of slaves exploited by the corrupt. Clark also favours this satirical grotesque, with an emphasis on grim black humour and scatological images. Such humourless comedy grimly satirizes the “proud, self-delusional man [who] ever aspires to elevate himself and his dignity” as degraded to the level of a “defecating animal” (Clark, 2014, p. 16).

The grotesque imagery not only reflects the callousness of the king but also juxtaposes the grave discrimination between the high and the low to subvert conventional authority. The grotesque images of the rats on the ship reaching Istanbul imply the corruption and chaos prevalent in Istanbul. "Did rodents, like genteel passengers, disembark in a file when a boat was in the quay?" ...he saw dozens of red-black tails scurrying in all directions, disappearing into the warren of streets and alleys that was Istanbul" (Shafak, 2014, p. 30). The carnivalesque grotesque subverts the existing order and revokes its nuances of victimization of the marginalized. Jehan is horrified to see the king's ruthless executions when he approaches the imperial gate:

He froze as he caught sight of the gibbets. There were three of them... Mounted on each of them was a severed head, silently rotting away; swollen; empurpled, the mouth stuffed with hay.... the insatiable greed of maggots crawling inside human flesh. (Shafak, 2014, pp. 34–35)

It emphasizes that the unusual and the uncanny, through the grotesque, attempt to project the inherent greed and avarice of the power-hungry under the veneer of so-called honour and bring to light the chaotic world that needs to be demolished. Bakhtinian grotesque illuminates the political and cultural power of Shafak's conspicuous attention to bodies—in their lust and decay, and their unbridled and untamed passions. Shafak's acceptance of the grotesque body actuates a new adherence to the collective cause of the downtrodden through a rejection of the notions of power and privilege, nationhood, and empire. Bakhtin (1984), by degrading the body, locates in the grotesque convention a 'utopian symbol' in its discovery of "the potentiality of an entirely different world, of another order, another way of life" (p. 48).

Grotesque imagery penetrates *The Architect's Apprentice* (Shafak, 2014) as the plague spreads throughout Istanbul. The rich and the poor are equally affected. Shafak uses grotesque images time and again to emphasise the rotten state of Istanbul as well as to show that even the plague is a protest against the devilish deeds of humans. "Yumrucuk. They were called-too pretty a name for the swellings that appeared on the armpits, thighs, and necks of the victims.... The body broke into boils that swiftly grew bigger, darker" (pp. 112–113). Taylor (2020) argues as follows:

This unstable and transgressive body always contains and signifies more than itself, physically merging with or consuming other bodies, generating

desires and waste, and gesturing toward alternate systems and structures of signification. A body is never only itself, and Bakhtin further celebrates in the tradition of grotesque realism the dissolution and reformulation of the boundaries of individual selfhood. The material bodily principle is contained not in the biological individual, not in the bourgeois ego, but in the people, a people who are continually growing and renewed. (p. 19)

In this way, the grotesque body enacts a counter-modern impulse with avowed political energies. Grotesque realism makes room for a reconceptualisation of the real world in a new vein through its capacity to broaden the lens and bring to light what is distorted and disfigured. This distortion dehumanises the individual and strips off their noble selves to adjust to the wickedness beneath. Shafak's fiction exhibits grotesque realism as it "reflects cultural shocks and shifting traditions, offering new ways of experiencing a world that is no longer quite familiar" (Gniadek, 2005, p. 24).

Shafak's (2014) *The Architect's Apprentice* tries to unearth the marginalization of the suppressed through grotesque realism, which is an aesthetic representation of Bakhtinian carnivalesque. Shafak embraces the carnivalesque grotesque as a setting for the feminist critique of the dominant patriarchal society, as exemplified by Mihrimah, the princess who is forced to marry against her will and is denied the freedom to live her life as her brothers do. Shafak puts the rich, like Mihrimah, and the low, like the wretched whores, at the same level of humanity when it comes to the exploitation of the female at the hands of patriarchy. Mihrimah's father, the Sultan of Istanbul, who used to take her with him to unknown lands, does not give her that privilege anymore as she is a grown-up girl now. "But he does not take me anywhere anymore... My brothers are as free as migratory birds. How I wish I had been born a boy" (p. 80).

In *The Architect's Apprentice* (2014), Shafak neither advocates the dominance of males as conventionally established superiors nor relegates women to inferior ranks. *The Architect's Apprentice* by Shafak aims to illustrate the most important aspect of hierarchy subversion, particularly regarding gender. It begins with the marginalisation of female characters, such as Princess Mihrama's treatment by King Suleiman and her forced marriage and reaches its pinnacle with the demise of masculine authority. Shafak topples the institute of patriarchy and hints at women's empowerment when the princess vows internally to avenge the forces of male oppression. Her love for the mahout Jahan indicates a subversive pattern, as she tries to rebel against the existing

order of patriarchy by falling in love with Jahan, an ordinary elephant tamer. Shafak has exposed the severe discrimination against women, whether of noble birth or not, as unjust and, wholly exploitation. In a similar vein, Jahan's mother endured horrendous torture at the hands of her second husband, who continued to kick her in the stomach while she was pregnant, ultimately killing her.

The plot of *The Architect's Apprentice* (Shafak, 2014) is woven around the characters Jahan and Mihrama, who make strenuous efforts to break the ruthless shackles of poverty and patriarchy to establish their true identities. Jahan strives to define and redefine his life and values as he tries to cope with the dilemma of the tragic death of his mother, the ensuing spirit of revenge, and the degrading treatment he faces at the hands of people in powerful positions. The element of carnivalesque is heightened with an emphasis on the nature of sexuality in the whores and acts as a mode of subversion to fight against the powerful and exploitative structures of society. Shafak employs the grotesque technique of combining the strange, mixing the real and the exotic. Huggan (2016) explains the strange and surreal as exotic:

... the exotic is not, as is often supposed, an inherent quality to be found 'in certain people, distinctive objects, or specific places; exoticism describes, rather, a particular mode of aesthetic perception –one which renders people, objects, and places strange even as it domesticates them... Exoticism, in this context, might be described as a kind of semiotic circuit that oscillates between the opposite poles of strangeness and familiarity. (p. 13)

Lutfi Pasha's stance on treating the whores while ignoring elites who use them is again symptomatic of the oppression and victimization faced by women of all classes and creeds:

It was the whore who was in the wrong and her genitals should be cut off. She would then be made to sit backwards on a donkey and be taken around so that everyone could see what awaited her likes. (Shafak, 2014, p. 127)

The grotesque body is directly linked to the outside material and physical world, and so those parts of the body are projected that are outside the body: "the open mouth,

the genital organs, the breasts, the phallus, the potbelly, the nose" (Bakhtin, 1984, p. 26). The grotesque body principle goes beyond the normal in its regenerative ability, "in copulation, pregnancy, childbirth, and the throes of death, eating, drinking, or defecation" (p. 26). AYAN (2022) reflects:

Bakhtin pointed out that bodies do not exist only for themselves but are part of a material corporeal whole. For this reason, the grotesque body is integrated into the rest of the world with its opposing, incomplete, outgrowing and transgressive characteristics through its open parts like the mouth, nose, breasts, potbelly, anus, genital organs and phallus. These convexities or orifices function as bridges between the human body and the nonhuman world. (p. 4)

At the same time, in *The Architect's Apprentice* (Shafak, 2014), the coexistence of myriad animals like giant turtles, gazelles, ostriches, roe deer, geese, lizards, porcupines, snakes, rabbits' crocodiles, civets, zebras, leopards, tigers, the giraffe, and the elephant (p.5) together in harmony with humans is a signal to the order that is disturbed, and rules are revoked by the wild animals like wolves. A persistent struggle in the world of nature is ongoing between the preservers and the destroyers. Chota, a 35-year-old white Asian elephant, is a metaphor for the relationship that exists between humans and non-humans. "Nature refusing a treat, Chota popped the nuts into his mouth with the swing of his trunk as he kept his gaze on the gate" (p. 6). The amicable bonding between Chota and Jahan transcends the boundaries between humans and animals and places them on a platform of mutual agreement and order, emphasizing order in society.

Shafak's *The Architect's Apprentice* (2014) is the perfect representation of the spirit of carnivalesque, as the boundaries between the rich and the poor are blurred and transcended at many points. Roles are destabilized, myths are debunked, and a new context emerges. In *The Architect's Apprentice*, female agency, employing the ideology of grotesque, is directly linked to the performance of body and gender and how "the old dying world gives birth to the new one" (Bakhtin, 1984, p. 435).

The wish tree in *The Architect's Apprentice* (Shafak, 2014) metaphorically signifies the idea that nature strives to be in harmony with the warring aspirations of human spirits. Hundreds of ribbons, scarves, laces, and pendants were dangling from the

branches, all of which represented the misery and misfortune of concubines or odalisques in the Sultan's harem, a place exuding corruption and lust. "The tree bristled with clashing places and warring prayers" (p. 8), but still, the wish tree was peaceful, trying to soothe and pacify the grief-stricken humanity. In *The Architect's Apprentice*, the subversion of conventional patriarchal dominance adds to the Bakhtinian carnivalesque. She uses grotesque images to intensify the horrible nature of the injustices prevalent in society. "It exaggerates and caricatures the negative, the inappropriate" (Bakhtin, 1984, p. 306). The Chief White Eunuch in the palace of King Suleiman is symbolic of debauchery and acts as a pimp for the king. His lust and avarice are manifestations of his heinous character, as are the monstrosity of his features.

His skin was so pale that one could see the fine tracery of veins underneath. He had dark circles under his eyes and was said to spend the nights walking the corridors because he could no more sleep than an owl on the hunt. (Shafak, 2014, p. 45)

The monstrosity of his physical features brings out the evil in his being and the power he exercises on his people to exploit them. As Kayser opines, some characters are physically, psychologically, and mentally heinous and distorted (Kayser, 1963, p. 105; McElroy, 1989, p. 12). When Chota, the elephant, gets sick, his condition becomes grotesque. "The elephant is sick," the boy said, gazing at the bowl where the phlegm had landed. The ship on which Jahan had come to Istanbul had been soiled by rats. "In his mind's eyes, he saw dozens of red-black tales scurrying in all directions..." (Shafak, 2014, p. 30).

The grotesque nature of Bakhtin is inherently linked with Carnival. As communicated in *Rabelais and His World* (Bakhtin, 1984), carnivals in medieval and Renaissance times were liminal instants of playful mirth associated with the scenes of feasting, festivals, markets, and myriad pageants. They were the representations of popular and folk culture that helped to release the transgressive spirit of society and liberate it from the vices of exploitation and injustice. Carnival, using grotesque, mockery, inversion, and travesty, "celebrated temporary liberation from the prevailing truth and the established order; it marked the suspension of all hierarchical rank, privileges, norms, and prohibitions" (Bakhtin, 1984, p. 10).

Carnavalesque grotesque is employed to expose the disproportionate and disfigured society reeking of corruption and exploitation to the bottom and aims to free it from

these ills and evils. It is concerned with change and renewal. In *The Architect's Apprentice* (Shafak, 2014), this very change is hinted when Jahan says,

We live, toil and die under the same invisible dome. Rich and poor, Mohammedan and baptized, free and slave, man and woman, Sultan and mahout, master and apprentice...there is one shape that reaches out to all of us, and it is the dome. That is, where all the distinctions disappear and every single sound, whether of joy or sorrow, merges into one huge silence of all-encompassing love. (p. 452)

In this way, humanity without distinctions and hierarchies can come into existence. Gardiner (1992, p. 516) establishes a strong link between the carnival and the political sphere and declares the carnivalesque grotesque as a vehicle of change in social life through subversion and transformation.

The carnivalesque grotesque imagery in *The Architect's Apprentice* (Shafak, 2014) operates within the cultural dimensions of the dominant upper class but simultaneously ridicules this very culture and its obnoxious practices through means of dirt and debasement. Grotesque realism, according to Bakhtin, is concretized through bodily manifestations as well as what is polluted and nauseating. It is "a transfer to the material level, to the sphere of earth and body" (Bakhtin, 1984, p. 19), and its corporeal and objective manifestation is therefore related to "the lower stratum of the body, the life of the belly, and the reproductive organs" (Bakhtin, 1984, p. 21). The entire episode of the birth of Chota is replete with bodily functions. Pakeeza was not ready to give birth to Chota the elephant as she was afraid of the world around her. The episode of the birth of Chota is replete with bodily functions. On the day of baby birth,

Pakeeza began to trumpet as her pouch twitched and quivered, expanding horribly...A sac emerged, wet and slimy as a river stone. It fell on the ground, sending forth a gush of fluid. Astonishingly fast, the calf was out, bespattered with blood and a sludgy substance so pale as to be translucent. A boy! Dazed and frail, he looked worn out as if he had come a great distance. (Shafak, 2014, pp. 55–56)

It particularly emphasizes the grotesque bodily principle.

The grotesque body is the open, protruding, extended, secreting body, the body of becoming and changing. The grotesque body is opposed to the Classical body which is monumental, static, closed and sleek, corresponding to the aspirations of bourgeois individualism; the grotesque body is connected to the rest of the World. (Russo, 1995, pp. 62–63)

The body of Pakeeza is in the process of giving birth, and through its disproportionate self, it creates a new order. Grosz (1987) also opines that material bodily functions are “how power is disseminated and is a potential object of resistance to power” (p. 12). Shafak's carnivalesque is not escapist. It is fantastic, and it has a social vein. The female characters in her novels represent suffragists and the entire women's suffrage movements of the 19th and 20th centuries. *The Architect's Apprentice* (Shafak, 2014) offers a postmodern critique. Postmodernism is neither a movement nor a period but a trend and a tendency in literature towards accommodation and celebration of disillusionment. It looks at the picture of society from multiple perspectives, with a broad range of issues being knit together. It is postmodern not only in terms of technique, style, and subject matter but also in the employment of language. Through the elements of gothic and romance, Carnavalesque reveals the grotesque monstrosity of humans to unveil the underlying corruption. In recent times, Croose (2017) highlights the potential of Carnival to establish an alternative and refined system of society by breaking established norms and patterns.

Grotesque Laughter

Carnavalesque grotesque operates through grotesque humour and laughter. This laughter has its roots in the Menippean satire, to which Bakhtin gave new force and dimensions and developed it in a direction that was altogether different from the Menippean origins (Branham, 2019). The function of humour and laughter is pervasive in fighting the hegemonic structures of power, control, and authority. Laughter has become a powerful form of discourse that helps reveal the incongruity beneath the perfect social order. Grotesque laughter acts as a mechanism to cope with the pressures of power politics. In Shafak's fiction satire, irony and humour have assumed the dimensions of a carnivalesque mode to articulate a different aesthetic of authority and control. Laughter and humour reiterate the values and traditions of different people and places, and they are effective in situating various groups either ‘in place’ or ‘out of place’ (Macpherson, 2008; Creswell, 2013; Ridanpaa, 2014, 2017).

Shafak's characters occasionally indulge in grotesque laughter and jokes as a way of revealing their dark selves. The heinous characters like those of Captain Gareth in "Delibash Reis- Captain Crazyhead" have no moral scruples or retorts to this mechanism. "One moment he could be joking and laughing with some sailor, and the next pulling out his sword to butcher him into a thousand pieces. Jahan had seen it happen" (Shafak, 2014, p. 28). Such frenzy laughter was even condemned by Plato in his *Republic* (2004), where he emphasized that the protectors of the state should not succumb to laughter because when one revels in laughter, this condition creates a violent reaction. However, Shafak has employed laughter in myriad shades to fully exhibit its power to reveal hypocrisy and grotesque behaviour and to rid mankind of the incongruities deeply rooted in society. Halliwell (2008) separates such laughter from simple humour and terms it 'consequential humour'. Shafak's laughter at times hints at the callousness of the people who laugh when they find the folks of low strata facing humiliation and disgrace. Such laughter is a slap on the face of humanity that is devoid of compassion and sympathy. When Sultana enters the garden and Jahan tries to approach her, a eunuch slaps him on the back and asks him to "Kneel. How dare you." Startled, Jahan bowed so low and so fast that his knees knocked against the stones. A giggle ran through those presents that made him blush up to his ears" (Shafak, 2014, p. 78).

Shafak's grotesque laughter displays the inner coarseness of different characters who do not have any sense of morality in a society of decayed values and impoverished infrastructure. The night before the battle, Jahan comes across three whores. One of them tries to seduce him and follows him to his camp. An older stable groom took advantage of the whore who willingly accompanied him. Jahan considers it an act of defiance and assault on the part of the groom, and discovering loneliness in the eyes of the whore, he tries to free her from his clutches only to realise that his noble and kind intentions have no value in this rotten system. The whore herself was part of the process of living and thriving in the dirt of society. When Jahan tumbled the groom to the floor, "His lips twisted in disdainful recognition of what had happened until he emitted a chuckle. The other grooms joined in. Jahan looked at the whore and saw that she, too, was laughing at him" (Shafak, 2014, p. 100).

This laughter is malicious in its very nature and exposes the ruthlessness of people involved in moral laxity who still have no conscience. They try to leash their inner congestion by poking fun at others. Shafak's humour, on the one hand, tries to expose the atrocities suffered by the marginalized and, on the other hand, also brings out the

notorious within the marginalized. The whore is subjected to the brutality of society, which knows her real place as she is disparagingly termed "a gazelle" (Shafak, 2014, p.100), but she too becomes what is dirty and grotesque. Shafak uses laughter as a lens to uncover the injustices suffered by the voiceless. Grotesque and laughter complement each other to subvert the existing pattern of injustice and exploitation.

Conclusion

This study highlights the dominant conventional power structures and challenges the established patterns of supremacy and authority. It has raised the voice for the cause of the subaltern and underprivileged by employing grotesque laughter. The article highlights the carnivalesque grotesque in *The Architect's Apprentice* (Shafak, 2014) as a formidable force to fight oppression, exploitation, and injustice. With a unique amalgamation of grotesque images and laughter, it operates as a medium for the subaltern and the marginalized to redeem their strength and voice from the clutches of authority. This technique of subversion defies the dominant hierarchies of power and the conventions of society, permitting the oppressed to proclaim their singular identities and fight the forces of tyranny.

This article explores the use of the carnivalesque grotesque in *The Architect's Apprentice* (Shafak, 2014) as a graphic example of the fortitude and resilience of the human spirit. The marginalized and the weak in *The Architect's Apprentice* employ this tool as a space of resistance to reclaim their voices and challenge the power structure that strives to perish them.

This study portrays the carnivalesque grotesque not only as a mode but also as an emblem of strength and courage for all who endeavour to contest the status quo and resist an oppressive regime. It acts as a powerful symbol of the human spirit's indomitable determination and its unyielding will to overcome challenges and adversity. This mechanism of subversion has the ingrained potential to fight for the cause of the marginalized and the voiceless, exuding hope in a world teeming with subjugation, domination, and injustice.

In *The Architect's Apprentice*, (Shafak, 2014) all the characters subordinated by the king assume dominant roles at the end. It represents Bakhtin's carnival, in which "all hierarchies are cancelled" (Bakhtin, 1984, p. 7). In this way, the novel portrays and

projects the breakdown of stereotypes and the downfall of dominant factions by representing the true spirit of Bakhtinian carnivalesque, which is a mode for a better understanding of the exploitation and victimization of the marginalized, and through grotesque realism, the subversion of the officially established customs and conventions takes place. Still, the study is hampered by the diversity of the term grotesque, as it seems to focus more on the corporeal nature of the being, and sometimes the metaphorical connotations remain elusive. Moreover, there is much more scope to explore the grotesque concerning metaphysical beings as well.

Carnavalesque grotesque does not imply negative connotations. On the contrary, it is ambivalent and draws its social power from embracing the opposite poles of interpretation and meaning. In *The Architect's Apprentice* (Shafak, 2014), grotesque realism embedded in the spirit of carnivalesque reveals the shared human experiences and the inherent tendencies of all realistically imagined procedures to exploit, exclude, and oppress marginalized groups. Carnavalesque grotesque in this vein subverts power-oriented oppression and tries to portray the plight of the marginalized in society.

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From Mundane to Memorable: The Poetics of Everyman in the Poetry of W.H. Auden and Orhan Veli Kanık*

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ABSTRACT

Twentieth-century poetry, shaped by the turmoil of the two World Wars, military conflicts, poverty, and oppressive regimes, often gives voice to those ignored by history. W. H. Auden in Anglo-American literature and Orhan Veli Kanık in Turkish verse emerge as pioneering figures of this chaotic era and offer a democratic poetics foregrounding the lives of ordinary people. Auden's "The Unknown Citizen" and Veli's "Epitaph" (Kitabe-i Sengi Mezar) portray the unremarkable lives and de-individualization of common men that eventually sink into oblivion upon death. Similarly, Auden's "Sonnet XVI" and Orhan Veli's "Bayrak" (The Flag) capture the despair and futility of war, defy its glorification, and reflect on how ordinary people are sent to their deaths by those in power. In that regard, this study argues that these poems exalt human life over socio-political ideologies and realistically portray the disparaged lives of the common people—whether lost within the masses or consumed by the horrors of war. By reclaiming the dignity of the individual reduced to a mere statistic or dispensable entity, Auden and Kanık, in these works, seek to re-humanize him and call for a deeper recognition of the value of the individual amidst the all-pervading forces of politics and war and, present a democratized, collectivist, and humanistic poetry that designates ordinary lives as extraordinary. Thus, these poems redefine poetry as a medium that celebrates the dignity and value of the common man's life over great historical figures and ideologies.

Keywords: The Unknown Citizen, Sonnet XVI, Kitabe-i Sengi Mezar, Bayrak, Common Man



Introduction

As a profound and enigmatic means of expressing the human condition, poetry has always had a say over the ills of its time and given voice to those on the periphery. However, twentieth-century poetry is particularly distinctive for its down-to-earth approach and focus on the ordinary person and his bereft individuality and autonomy. Rather than exploring mystical realms and transcendent states, the poetry of this chaotic century reflects real people's real-life experiences, grounded in the belief that something meaningful and worthwhile can be found in those lives. Accordingly, W. H. Auden in Anglo-American verse and Orhan Veli Kanık in Turkish poetry meet on common ground in their attempts to democratize poetry by thematizing the "man-in-the-street," a figure undermined by totalitarian states, economic crises, and two World Wars. Auden's "The Unknown Citizen" and Kanık's "Kitabe-i Sengi Mezar" present epitaphs for the everyman of the twentieth century, whose conformity, ignorance, and mediocrity eventually lead their heroes to oblivion. On the other hand, Auden's "Sonnet XVI" and Kanık's "Bayrak" (The Flag) suggest the disillusionment of war and challenge the romanticization of self-sacrifice and the devaluation of human life. In other words, while these poems represent the common man and his wasted life among the crowds and sometimes on a battlefield, they are also the manifestations of the two poets who designate poetry not only as a humanizing power that turns statistics into precious human lives but also as a democratising force exalting man in-the-street over ideologies.

This article fills a gap in the comparative literature by examining how W.H. Auden and Orhan Veli Kanık use irony, minimalist diction, unconventional form and depictions of ordinary people and everyday life to reimagine democratized poetics. Through close readings of selected poems, including Auden's "The Unknown Citizen" and "Sonnet XVI", and Orhan Veli's "Kitabe-i Sengi Mezar" and "Bayrak" (The Flag), the study explores how both poets reject elitist literary traditions and exalt the lives and struggles of ordinary people. Employing textual analysis, intertextual references, and cultural contextualization, the article explores how Auden and Orhan Veli redefine the notions of subjectivity and the role of poetry in a world shaped by war, political violence, and urban alienation.

Unlike previous studies that mainly address the poets' focus on the common man, this study emphasizes their formal innovations and ideological challenges. It argues that both poets represent a poetic rupture: Orhan Veli, rejecting traditional Turkish poetics through the Garip movement, and Auden, challenging modernist conventions.

Their poetry reflects a shared commitment to aesthetic democratization. This article, therefore, discusses how their efforts to make poetry accessible are linked to broader literary movements like Turkish Garip movement and Anglo-American modernism, both of which aimed to transform conventional poetic expression.

W. H. Auden and “The Unknown Citizen”

As one of the central figures of twentieth-century Anglo-American poetry, Wystan Hugh Auden (1907-1973) is a distinguished and prolific poet admired for his clear and witty expressions, formal achievements, and skilful treatment of the social and moral issues of his time. The unpretentious, colloquial language and diverse yet down-to-earth themes that characterize his verse helped define the poetics of the century. Alongside Stephen Spender, Louis MacNeice, and C. Day-Lewis, Auden was regarded as one of “the Thirties poets,” who collectively initiated a new ideological tone to poetry and a novel “way of introducing political views into their works” (Carter & McRae, 1996, p. 1992). While in his early poetry, Auden’s “Marxist influence [which] leads to a great feeling of change and destruction” often manifests through his use of “the frontier as an image and a fascinated and loving attachment to what is being destroyed,” his poetry took a new turn in the ‘40s (Stephen, 2000, p. 296). Rather than turning a blind eye to contemporary issues, the poet uses his early works to convey his concerns about the social issues and “political realities” of his time and “felt empowered to produce poems about tyranny” (Arana, 2009, pp. 69, 72). Auden’s early verse “combined deliberate irreverence and sometimes even clowning with a cunning, verbal craftsmanship, [...] to show England now as a nation of neurotic invalids who must learn to ‘throw away their rugs’” (Daiches & Stallworthy, 1993, p. 2261). In that regard, his poetry before the 1940s was more ideological and “much concerned with a diagnosis of the ills of his country” (1993, p. 2261). Auden’s works, in this period, mostly address the modern individual rather than “history, protest or controversy” and embody a collectivist and anti-elitist stance (Arana, 2009, pp. 69, 70). However, his versification after the 1940s took a distinctive turn marked by a “religious view of personal responsibility,” “pellucid clarity, and deep yet unsentimental feeling” (Daiches & Stallworthy, 1993, pp. 2261–2262). Even in his later poetry, Auden “never lost his ear for popular speech” as an “experimenter [...] bringing together high artifice and a colloquial tone” (1993, pp. 2261–2262). Auden, who aspired to be recognised “as a poet of common sense,” insisted on using colloquial diction to bring poetry down to earth and rob its elitist associations as a form cherished by the upper class or intellectuals (Raichura et al., 1975, p. 31):

Auden believed that poetry in the era prior to his own had become a medium for the highbrow few, which he believed was not poetry's original intention, and he wished to disapprove that the common man would appreciate poetry if it were presented in a more colloquial manner. The fact that Auden felt a need to defend poetry indicates the actuality of resistance to it, particularly among the working class and their mistaken association of it as an emblem of the upper class. (Izzo, 2004, p. 26)

In "The Poet and the City," Auden argues that in a capitalist system where labour is depersonalized and stripped of meaning, the poet remains one of the few individuals who still has control over their creation. This creative freedom, however, brings a responsibility; the poet is to engage with and inspire those trapped in monotonous and powerless works. Reflecting this belief, Auden emphasizes that "[the poetry's] characteristic hero is neither the "Great Man" nor the romantic, both doers of extraordinary deeds, but the man or woman in any walk of life who, despite all the impersonal pressures of modern society, manages to acquire and preserve a face of his own" (1948, p. 84). As an expression of the poet's responsibility to inspire and make poetry appreciable to the ordinary person, "The Unknown Citizen" (1939), with its everyday language and conversational tone, conveys Auden's unease about the political wrongs and oppression of his time. Published in his *Another Time* (1940), the poem serves as an epitaph that portrays "'the average man' as a statistic and as the man who goes about his business without fanfare" (Izzo, 2004, p. 265). It critiques the dehumanization of the 'little man' by totalitarian governments and economic systems in the modern world through its nameless hero who is no more than a brick in the wall for bureaucratic officials. As Mendelson also notes, this elegiac poem mirrors how individuality and autonomy are sacrificed for compliance: "[The poem] a neat uncomplicated satire on the corporate state in which freedom and happiness are equated with conformity" (2017, p. 369). Thus, by reclaiming the humanity of everyman in a century marked by jingoism and fanaticism through an "unknown" man reduced to a mere living body, a de-subjectified, dehumanized figure, a "citizen" to be dictated, used and kept in line by governments, "The Unknown Citizen" echoes Auden's claim that "in our age, the mere making of a work of art is itself a political act" (Auden, 1948, p. 88).

Its title, "The Unknown Citizen" alludes to the monuments of the "unknown soldier" erected in many parts of the world, while its hero is introduced as a figure whose only significance and identity lie in his citizenship. From the beginning, Auden's verse

foregrounds the ordinariness and socio-political identities as the modern individual's sole distinctive feature. Furthermore, the numeric identity "JS/07 M 378" carved on the "[m]arble [m]onument" that is "[e]rected by the [s]tate" illuminates the dehumanized self of the citizen whose nameless presence renders him both a casualty of political extremism and an anonymous victim of the oppressive governments and state authority (Auden, 1979, p. 85). Built on reports from a nameless officer serving that omnipotent authority; "The Unknown Citizen," with an unsentimental and mechanic voice, delineates a state hero whose official identity is denied, not to mention his complexion, personal life, traits or character. Nonetheless, the citizen is portrayed as a role model for his nation due to his life-long servile existence, which suggests the enslavement of modern man under oppressive states and his bereft individuality in a century that glorifies sameness and conformity. As a poet who "grew increasingly hostile to the modern world, and sceptical of all the remedies offered for modern ills," Auden in "The Unknown Citizen" expresses his "sceptic[ism]" and distrust of the solutions proposed by hegemonic ideologies (Daiches & Stallworthy, 1993, pp. 2261–2262). With its 'professional' and detached tone, the poem strongly communicates this suspicion and idolizes the citizen for his "proper" life, exemplary conformity, meek attitude and convenient ideas (Auden, 1979, p. 85). Rendered as a statistic rather than a human, individual, husband, father or son, the citizen is defined and glorified as a predictable and controllable part of the modern industrialized world, a cog in the machinery of the so-called perfect society. Thus, Auden mirrors every man of the twentieth century with his nameless citizen who is a "sensible" man "popular with his mates," a "normal" person in "his reactions" and a "saint" in his unquestioning obedience (1979, p. 85). Complying with societal norms and remaining uncritical of dominant ideologies, Auden's twentieth-century man is committed to preserving the status quo. The poet employs religious terminology to underline how modern man idolizes and bows down to a new god—the state or the system—to find meaning after losing his faith due to economic crises, the ravages of industrialism, and the devastation of the two world wars. As both a compelled perpetrator and a victim of this dehumanizing social and political order, the citizen is presented much like a saint who advocates and preserves the status quo: "That, in the modern sense of an old-fashioned word, he was a saint, / For in everything he did, he served the Greater Community" (1979, p. 85). As his sainthood is not a virtue but a manifestation of his submission to dehumanizing political systems, the poem highlights the ironic reverence the "unknown citizen" received from the sovereign state for his servility and self-sacrifice. Through its use of capitalized terms like "Greater Community" and its religious connotations, the poem suggests not only the mystification of society and

the state as modern omnipotent powers but also the transformation of the man-in-the-street from a subject of God into a servant of socio-political forces. In other words, "The Unknown Citizen" reflects humanity's enduring servitude despite the advent of new ideologies and grand-narratives, as everyman is still expected to be a "saint," though now "in the modern sense" (1979, p. 85). A figure never "a scab or odd in his views," but having fully internalized the dominant ideology of the state without holding any oppositional views, the citizen dutifully went to the battlefield when the government declared war and became an advocate of peace during peacetime. Seeking self-validation through unquestioning submission and conformity, the citizen is portrayed as an obedient worker who worked in the same workplace without opposing his employers or union until his retirement, except during times of war. Auden's everycitizen is the representative of the common individual illustrated as a modern slave to the new socio-political order.

The epitaph ironically brings up the corporation where the citizen worked while leaving the identity of the central figure anonymous: "He worked in a factory and never got fired, /But satisfied his employers, Fudge Motors Inc." (Auden, 1979, p. 85). Thus, the poet highlights the modern socioeconomic order that elevates corporations above human life and degrades the man-in-the-street into mere tools that "satisfy employers" with his dutifulness and compliance (1979, p. 85). The imposed consumerist lifestyle is also suggested as a means of building a conformist society marked by its citizens' indifference to the world of politics and compliance with social norms. The citizen bought newspapers daily just to read the advertisements and purchased "everything necessary to the Modern Man" such as "a phonograph, a radio, a car, and a refrigerator," which are the items dictated by the dominant, consumerist culture as symbols of normalcy and bourgeois values (1979, p. 85). As a docile figure who never stood up against his teachers, friends or superiors, the citizen also adhered to the government's eugenicist's advice by "add[ing] five children to the population" (1979, p. 85). The authoritative and bureaucratic tone of the persona further conveys the strict surveillance of modern man by the panoptical, all-seeing government, which is also reflected in the poem's closing lines: "Was he free? Was he happy? The question is absurd: / Had anything been wrong, we should certainly have heard" (1979, p. 86). Here, the poem unveils how happiness and freedom are irrelevant in the ideological language of the state, as the interests and authority of the government take precedence over the citizens' lives (1979, p. 85). Hence, Auden pictures everyman as a modern 'everycitizen,' too docile and indifferent to attribute meaning to his monotonous existence determined

by the omnipotent states that value statistical normality over the individual's existential fulfilment. Dehumanized and pacified since childhood, the citizen in Auden's poem is a sheep within the crowd, never challenging authorial figures or institutions. Like the cold statue erected in his honour, the nameless hero is left to oblivion after an absurd, lifeless and inhuman existence. By portraying a man who never went beyond the boundaries drawn by authorities, "The Unknown Citizen" designates the ordinary man as an inhuman figure stripped of an authentic self and de-individuated by oppressive governments and dominant ideologies.

Orhan Veli Kanık and "Kitabe-i Sengi Mezar"

The early works of W.H. Auden and the Turkish poet Orhan Veli Kanık (1914–1950) share notable similarities in tone and thematic focus. Auden's early poetry reflects a sensibility that resonates with Orhan Veli's "verse forms and pessimistic cynicism" (Roberts & Corporation, 1970, p. 141). Like his Anglo-American counterpart, Orhan Veli addresses the struggles and dreams of the 'little man.' He is one of the three founders of the literary movement "Garip" (Strange), which challenged the old school of Turkish poetry and its decadent, ornate versification. Together with his friends Oktay Rifat and Melih Cevdet Anday, the poet published a literary magazine entitled *Garip* (1941), which revolutionized Turkish Poetry by "put(ing) in the place" [of previous "literatures"] the "poetry of unprecedented directness and simplicity" (Messo, 2016, p. 13). Their efforts to represent the life of "man-in-the-street" using "the rhythms and idioms of colloquial speech" revitalized Turkish Poetry (Halman, 1972, p. 230). Orhan Veli and his friends elaborate on their objectives in The *Preface to Garip* (1941):

... the aesthetics of a new poetry should represent the common laboring man. The laboring classes today have established their right to live after a long tug-of-war. The new poetry is theirs and should appeal to them. This should not mean they have to use the tools of past literatures in order to generate their own. The problem is not about defending the needs of a class; it is about looking for and finding its own aesthetics. (Kanık et al., 1941, p. 200)¹

1 ... yeni şiirin dayanacağı beğeni, artık azınlığı oluşturan o sınıfın beğenisi değildir. Bugünkü dünyayı dolduran insanlar, yaşamak hakkını sürekli bir didişmenin sonunda buluyorlar. Her şey gibi, şiir de onların hakkıdır, onların beğenisine seslenecektir. Bu, söz konusu kitlenin istediklerini eski edebiyatların gereçleriyle anlatmaya çalışmak demek de değildir. Sorun, bir sınıfın gereksinmelerinin savunusunu yapmak olmayıp yalnızca beğenisini aramak, bulmak, sanata onu egemen kılmaktır.

Their claims that “They demolish one tradition and create a new one” and “discover a new system of registers that emerges naturally from within the old one²” echo Auden’s call in “The Poet and the City” to reject “highbrow” poetry (Kanik et al., 2015, p. 201). Like Auden, Orhan Veli, through the Garip Movement, redefines the poet’s role in response to the alienating impact of modernity. Both poets reject elitist poetic traditions, use everyday language and represent common people to make poetry accessible to all. Poetry is not an escape for them, but a socially engaged practice that restores connection and meaning in a depersonalized society. As Auden contends, “a poet ... is concerned with the reality that is common to us all,” Orhan Veli calls for a new poetry that “was primarily aiming at being the poetry for the people,” and “creating a break with traditional” by abandoning “conventional meter, rhyme, language style, and outdated themes” (Raichura et al., 1975, p. 33; Duyan, 2021, p. 8). Both figures, thus, share the idea that poetry should belong to and reflect ordinary people and their tastes rather than serving the powerful.

Through the Garip movement, Orhan Veli, along with his collaborators, challenged earlier poetic conventions that made poetry a domain of the elite and renounced artificiality, pretentiousness, complex symbolism, symbolic meter and aruz prosody “to communicate the common man” and make verse people’s again (Halman, 1972, p. 230). They used “the rhythms and idioms of colloquial speech” and moved away from the elevated styles of earlier traditions to “write not only *about* the common man but also *for* him” (Halman, 2011, p. 95). For a poetry “grounded in proper colloquial language—pure, simple, ordinary, natural and primitive in its words” and “positioned in opposition to the ‘poetic tone,’”³ the poet “abandon the formal language to be appropriate to the taste of the masses” (Konyalı, 2021, p. 432; Duyan, 2021, p. 9). Since, “ordinary language is the only way to integrate poetry into daily life” for Orhan Veli (Duyan, 2021, p. 12). With its humour, clarity and unconventional theme, “Epitaph” (Kitabe-i Sengi Mezar) became the poetic manifesto of these tenets of “Garip” and illustrated the poet’s “idiolect [that] echoed the colloquial rhythms and vocabulary of common man” (Messo, 2016, p. 14). The poem presents Süleyman Efendi⁴ as the representative of the ordinary man and portrays him as a character suffering from his corns and leading a life without existential dilemmas until his death. According to the renowned Turkish poet and

2 “Onlar bir an’aneyi yıkıp yeni bir an’ane kurarlar”

3 Orhan Veli’nin tesis etmeye çalıştığı, Garip önsözünde doğru dürüst konuşma diline yaslanan, saf, basit, alelaide, tabii, iptidai kelimeleriyle anlaşılır kılınmaya çalışılan şiirin –onun yaklaşımıyla sahici şiirin– şairanenin karşısında konumlandığı görülür.

4 The honorific “efendi” in Turkish society alludes to the low status of a man on the social ladder.

literary scholar Ahmet Hamdi Tanpınar, Orhan Veli's hero is a man who "contents himself only with existing like a creature who has cut all kinds of bonds to the transcendental" like "the first human being man born into an absence of idealism or value hierarchy" (1992, p. 115). Tanpınar elaborates further by underlying Süleyman Efendi's central role in Orhan Veli's mission to initiate a renewal in Turkish Verse:

He wanted literature and poetry to change with their languages and purposes. Thus, he sought a figure to revolve around. Süleyman Efendi became the first stage of this search and the look of this figure changed from poem to poem. Instead of a figure confined to his loneliness, he appears as a man heedless of refined ideas and tastes, [...a man] embracing his life too seriously to envision another, a person who is like a man of the people in between Istanbul roughneck and Anatolian efendi. (Tanpınar, 1992, p. 116)

In that regard, Kanık's playful, colloquial, and sometimes absurdist tone represents a linguistic and ideological rebellion. In poems like "Perforated Poem" (Delikli Şiir) and "Tree" (Ağaç), he employs the simple style of nursery rhymes to provide a poetic protest. A similar approach is seen in Auden's "As the Poets Have Mournfully Sung," where a sing-song rhythm and nursery rhyme hide a reflection on the futility of human endeavours in the face of death. Both poets use such strategies not only as formal experiments but also as a way to challenge the traditional aesthetic rules and mock elitist attitudes. They defy "everything that belongs to the past and all outdated notions of "poeticity" in poetry⁵" (Kanık et al., 1941, p. 204).

In one of his interviews, Orhan Veli remarks that he "wanted to talk about the life of a simple man who led a simple life" and that he "believe[s] that corns is significant for one who does not have great spiritual sufferings in his life⁶" (qtd from Sazyek, 1996, p. 280). Rather than focusing on the extraordinary stories of the exceptional people or the poet's sublime feelings and personal grasp of existence, Orhan Veli's work explores the extraordinariness in the ordinary and reframes the usual through its modern hero. Thus, "Epitaph" stands as one of the foremost manifestations of the effort to democratize

5 "eskiye ait olan her şeyin, her şeyden önce de şairanenin aleyhinde bulunmak gerek."

6 "Ben hayatı sadelik içinde geçmiş basit bir adamın hayatından bahsetmek istedim. Hayatında büyük manevi ıstırapları olmayan bir insan için nasırın mühim olduğunu telakki ediyorum." ("Rakı Şişesinde Balık Olmak isteyen Şair", Yedigün, S.726, 2 Şubat 1947, s.4).

Turkish verse, reclaim the human dignity of the ordinary man, and restore poetry to the people. The poem mirrors the experience of the common man through Süleyman Efendi, whose death left no trace behind due to his simple, dull and mediocre life. Furthermore, through its title “Kitabe-i Sengi Mezar” which stands for ‘epitaph’ in Ottoman Turkish, Orhan Veli’s work presents itself as the “Epitaph” of everyman rather than of sultans, pashas or great men whose elegies dominate Ottoman poetry. In other words, “Epitaph” is a commemoration of the man-in-the-street whose epigraph is carved into Turkish poetry by Orhan Veli to honour the memory of ordinary people who have long been undervalued, belittled, caricatured or despised in the poetic tradition. The poem reflects the poet’s attempt to elevate the mundane lives and undermined existences, their silent presences to memorable, visible, significant and meaningful. “Epitaph” makes the ignored visible by representing their simple lives and overlooked experiences and thus, honours every individual’s value. Furthermore, as symbolic as the title itself, the name of the hero alludes to Suleiman the Magnificent, whose life and death were the subject of interest for many Ottoman poets, historians and critics, unlike the ordinary, unremarkable Süleyman Efendi, who sinks into oblivion after his death. Published in 1938, “Epitaph I” portrays the hero as a man who led a routinized, colourless life and suffered from his corns, which illustrates the “sympathetic” treatment of the “ordinary and poor peoples of the Strange Movement” (Sazyek, 1996, p. 119). According to Talat Sait Halman, “Epitaph I” celebrates “the ideal of ‘the little man’ as its hero, the ordinary citizen who asserted his political will with the advent of democracy” (2011, p. 94). As an expression of this “celebration”, the poem pictures him in an affectionate light, delineates his life sincerely and expresses regret for Süleyman Efendi’s evanescing, as if he had never existed (2011, p. 94). The persona also renders the hero an ugly man who does not care about his appearance or the idea of a god, except those times when his corn makes his life unbearable: “He never took the Lord’s name in vain/ Unless his shoes pinched, /But he’d hardly count as a sinner. /It’s a pity about Suleyman Efendi” (Kanık, 2016, p. 38). Although Süleyman Efendi is similarly not devout, he has not committed big sins or gone beyond the rules. Like the Unknown Citizen, where conformity is celebrated as sainthood, he was an ordinary man with an ordinary life and whose death is described as “a pity”.

On the other hand, “Epitaph II” portrays him as a man who does not experience existential crises or contemplate the meaning of his life, which underlines the contrast between the man-in-the-street and intellectual elites: “For him “To be or not to be”/ Wasn’t a question at all./ One night he slept/ And never woke up” (2016, p. 39). By

suggesting that concerns such as appearance or philosophical musings are trivial to the common people who only focus on earning a living, the persona celebrates Süleyman Efendi's simple, unadorned way of life and re-designates his existence as valuable as that of the intellectual elite. The second "Epitaph" published in 1940, highlights the lower-class background of Süleyman Efendi, who is only remembered by his payees, as his debts are the sole reminders of his life: "If his creditors hear of his death/ They're sure to give up any claims." (2016, p. 39). In the final "Epitaph" (1943), the persona emphasizes Süleyman Efendi's "indistinct and dull life he left behind" by referring to his military belongings from the days of his military service (Sazyek, 1996, p. 143). These items, now passed to other men, stand as the symbols of the shared fate of the common man: "They put his rifle in the depot, / Gave his clothes to someone else. / Neither breadcrumbs in his satchel now / Nor lip prints on his can" (Kanık, 2016, p. 40). Just as a noble family might pass down heirlooms, Süleyman Efendi's old rifle, uniform and canteen are transferred to other 'little' men as symbols of civic duty. Nevertheless, unlike the privileged, "[n]ot even his name was left" which suggests the economic disparity and social injustices that dehumanize the underprivileged majority (2016, p. 40). Rather than mystifying or belittling the lives of ordinary people, Orhan Veli in his "Epitaph" mirrors the human condition in post-war Turkey with impartiality and realism. Through his Epitaph, the common man's ignored story is brought to life, to the forefront and immortalized by being recognized in poetry.

W. H. Auden's "Sonnet XVI"

W. H. Auden, like Orhan Veli, challenges the rise of dictatorships and the devastation of World War II by representing the ordinary men sent to the battlefields and sacrificed on the front lines. Auden's "Sonnets from China" as a manifestation of the ferocity of war and suffering of everyman offers a powerful critique of the dehumanization of common people and their wasted lives due to the Second World War. Together with his friend Christopher Isherwood, the poet was commissioned to write a travel book on the East and made a trip to China where they witnessed first-hand the horrors of the Sino-Japanese War. This experience underpinned their *Journey to War* (1939). First published alongside Isherwood's diary and photographs, Auden's profound sonnets entitled "In Time of War" break from traditional sonnet forms to challenge the long-seated poetic conventions in English verse while also responding to the brutalization of people whose lives are regarded as worthless by those in power. Auden later republished the sequence as "Sonnets from China" conveying the poet's anxieties during

the war and his turn from ideological commitment to ethical reflection. "Sonnet XVI," in particular, as a concise and striking reflection of the evils of war, leaving deaths, suffering and destruction behind, offers a lyrical yet dense exploration of personal responsibility. Through short diction and little punctuation, the poem critiques the glorification of war and violence. Unlike the bureaucratic irony in "The Unknown Citizen," its tone is marked by simplicity, which highlights the contrast between the detached logic of state power and the real loss of human lives. The distant voice and mechanical rhythm suggest how modern warfare dehumanizes the individual and erases individuality. Auden also challenges the romanticized view of war, much like World War I poets like Wilfred Owen and Siegfried Sassoon. Yet, unlike the direct mourning of "Dulce et Decorum Est" or the accusatory bitterness and anger of "The General," Auden adopts a tone of cold detachment and offers a modernist critique of the ideological and linguistic systems that reduce people to numbers in the service of political power and ambition.

Opening with a disturbing metaphor in an unnamed military quarter, the sonnet defines war as "simple like a monument," which not only alludes to the signifiers of troops on maps that reduce war to a game or illusion but also challenges the idealisation of war (Auden, 1979, p. 72). The poem, while drawing a parallelism between war and the monument to suggest the mystification of wars by those in power, also highlights the stark contrast between the horrid reality of war and the sterile atmosphere of the base where battle plans are made. This analogy signifies the ideological impositions framing war as an act of heroism designed to convince the masses to march into battle and sacrifice themselves without hesitation, while the decision-makers remain distant from the carnage. The first stanza also conveys this mechanical, senseless life at the base bound by timetables and rigid rules. The apathetic atmosphere in the headquarters is reinforced by a telephone that speaks to a man as if it were human, informing or directing the war. This image points out the heartless, dehumanizing force of technology that serves as a tool for mass destruction and massacres. As another dehumanizing sign of war, the flags that stand for the troops awaiting orders also suggest how human beings are controlled and exploited by the powerful, only to be sacrificed for their cause. The secure and comfortable environment of the commanders contrasts sharply with the brutal and fearful lives of the soldiers on the frontlines. The second quatrain reveals the soldiers' fearful, miserable existence and pictures how the rigid rules turn them into puppets or slaves. While high-ranking officers enjoy fresh milk every day, the soldiers in the trenches endure inhumane conditions and wait until noon. The

persona also suggests that the soldiers may lose their lives for the generals and officers, as is typical in times of war. Rather than being regarded as human beings missing their families, the soldiers are designated as expandable bodies that may “die too soon” “[u]nlike an idea” for which so many lives are sacrificed (Auden, 1979, p. 72). Thus, fighting the enemy “in terror of their lives,” the soldiers, with their plight, mirror the oppression of common people through the stark divide between high-rank officers and low-ranked soldiers, who, as the lower-class, are shepherded into battle via ideological manipulation and lose their lives for the sake of “a lie” (1979, p. 72).

On the other hand, the third stanza highlights how human life is trivialized and deemed worthless by political ideologies that precede a “lie” over human life. In the final stanza, the persona not only underlines the hegemonic discourses that stir antagonisms leading to collective brutality but also criticizes the fact that the masses can easily be manipulated into advocating war and laying down their lives. With the concluding rhymed couplets that refer to the Nanking massacre and the Nazi concentration camps, the poem universalizes the horrors of World War II to evoke a collective conscience and moral responsibility for humanity. The maps illustrate how cities are turned into “evil” and burned down to ashes by bombs on the orders of a few select rulers. Through this dichotomy of ideas versus human beings, death versus life, and abstractions versus reality, the sonnet questions the bigotry of the masses that kill and die in service of “lies” (1979, p. 72). Highlighting that no thought or belief holds greater value than human life, the poem illuminates the countless lives lost to the antagonisms fuelled by the ideological discourses of imperialist and totalitarian regimes. While picturing the devastation caused by bombs that slaughter thousands, as in “Nanking” and “Dachau,” the persona urges the reader to walk in the shoes of war victims and witness the ferocity and barbarity of war without partisanship.

Orhan Veli’s “The Flag”

Unlike Auden, Orhan Veli Kanık did not experience war first-hand. He was very young during the Turkish War of Independence, and as a young and gifted poet during World War II, he followed the global conflict only through newspapers. Nevertheless, Orhan Veli, like his Anglo-American counterpart, addresses the horridness of World War II from a universal and anti-militarist perspective and represents ordinary people who lost their hopes or lives for the future on battlefields, despite playing no role in the outbreak of war. His poem “The Flag” illustrates his humanist approach and suggests the shared

innocence and ignorance of people regarding the perpetrators of war. By presenting a nameless, anonymous hero, the poet sets forth a humanitarian ideology that centralizes equality and fraternity in opposition to the rhetoric of war. Thus, "The Flag" defies the tradition of chauvinist war poetics that divide communities into 'us' and 'them' and perpetuates cycles of violence by challenging the dehumanization of those who have long been otherized. Besides, the title of the poem designates the "flag" not as a nationalist symbol that separates humanity into opposing binaries but as a representation of the bond of humanity, shared victimhood and solidarity among the oppressed. Through its unconventional persona and symbolism, the poem offers a critique of the ideologically constructed enmities that create the epic of the 'good' against 'evil,' glorify war and lead the masses to march into battle to destroy the demonized. Centred on a soldier who has lost his life after a close-range encounter on an unnamed World War II front, "The Flag" portrays humanity as the common denominator of one's existence and as an antidote to the destructiveness of war. Addressing another dead soldier whose "[p]alms filled with [his] blood, / [h]ead under [his] torso / [l]eg slung over [his] arm" that lies beneath him in blood, the persona, without revealing his name, underlines that he does not know the soldier, yet refers to him as his "lifeless, prostrate brother!" (Kanık, 2016, p. 192). Thus, he introduces both himself and his addressee as forlorn everyman soldiers who have lost their lives on battlefields, which signifies the human bond transcending the dehumanizing discourses of hatred and enmity. In other words, by deeming their personal or collective identities insignificant and referring to the dead soldier as "brother" instead of labelling him as a man, soldier or enemy, Orhan Veli's poem erases ideological divisions and exalts the idea of being human through the "lifeless, prostrate" brotherhood of the two soldiers and offers their same, tragic ends as a bond that unites them (2016, p. 192):

I know neither your name
 Nor your crime.
 Maybe we're on the same side,
 Maybe we're enemies.
 Perhaps you know me.
 I'm the one who sings in Istanbul,
 The one gunned down over Hamburg,
 The one wounded on the Maginot Line,
 The one who starved to death in Athens
 The one taken prisoner in Singapore. (Kanık, 2016, p. 192)

Beyond its critique of ideologies that distance and antagonize people, the poem also foregrounds their spilt blood as an attachment bonding them together like two blood brothers. Their victimization becomes a unifying force that binds them together despite the uniforms and politics that separate them. As two martyrs—perhaps from opposing sides—they are ultimately the same as nameless casualties and mere statistics. Furthermore, the poem offers a critique of the general tendency to unjustly convict a particular nation and its soldiers and blame them for deeds in which they had no part, as reflected in the persona's remarks that he does not know his addressee's "crime," name or side in the war. In other words, Orhan Veli's verse frames the universality of the ferocity of war that brutalizes all through his "unknown soldier" who has been killed, tortured, injured, starved and captivated owing to military conflicts and wars he did not choose. The poem echoes Auden's "Sonnet XVI," particularly in its emphasis on the great distance between the ordinary people suffering the horrors of wars and the powerful that perpetuate and sustain those battles. By underlining the fears, joys, hopes and aspirations of the common man against the authorities that view them as less than fully human and undeserving of "the finer things," "The Flag" conveys the persona's reaction to being dehumanized by the rulers that eventually led to his death: "I didn't script my own fate. / But I know all this as much / As the one who wrote that script" (Kanık, 2016, p. 192). Like Auden's "Sonnet" where the course of the battle is determined by a telephone, the poem rejects the glorification of war by revealing its bureaucratic absurdity: the lives of millions are decided by a distant and privileged few. The poem also delineates the wasted lives of many soldiers through the persona's youth: "Twenty years of strife / Weighed against a single bullet" (2016, p. 192). "The Flag" problematizes the idea of fate and suggests that the speaker and his unknown "brother" will not be the only ones to die in the bloom of youth due to wars, forasmuch as commoners are fated to suffer and lose their lives on the front lines: "Fated / To start life in Kharkov; / Forget it" (2016, p. 192). Thus, by referring to Kharkov, a city in Ukraine bombed during World War II, the poem, in its closure, deconstructs warlike rhetoric and redefines the symbol of "the flag," regarded as a token of war signifying military troops on a map: "We brought a flag this far, / Others will carry it further; / In this vast world / There are two million of us, / And well we know ourselves" (2016, p. 192). By picturing common men carrying the flag, only for it to be carried away, Orhan Veli's verse turns this militaristic emblem into a symbol of solidarity of the masses as victims. Flags carried for others do not suggest a hopeful future but rather more deaths and losses. The "two million" common people so alike in their victimization at the hands of rulers "know" each other "well," and they will never be the last to lose their lives and futures for the 'uncommon'

leaders (2016, p. 192). Regardless of their sides or backgrounds, both the persona and his addressee are represented as sons of humanity whose lives are no less valuable than those of those in power perpetuating wars. "The Flag" strongly critiques discourses that otherize people, stir enmities, cost lives, and define self-sacrifice as sacred. Orhan Veli's humanistic perspective, here, echoes Thomas Hardy's "The Man He Killed" (1902), a poem questioning the ideological distance between enemies in wartime: "Yes; quaint and curious war is! / You shoot a fellow down / You'd treat if met where any bar is, / Or help to half-a-crown" (Hardy, 2016, p. 287). While Orhan Veli focuses on collective anonymity with the line "two million of us," and Hardy depicts a personal encounter, both poets convey the shared vulnerability of ordinary people across political divides. Their poems suggest that the real tragedy of war is how it dehumanizes men who, in different circumstances, might have been friends.

Like Auden, Orhan Veli adopts a direct language to convey the sorrow of anonymous deaths. "The Flag," with its short and open-ended form, avoids ideological messages. While Auden critiques systemic violence with irony and complex diction, Orhan Veli turns to simplicity to reveal the power of patriotic symbols. Both poets refute the idea of sacrifice and explore the tension between political symbols and real human lives with a shared mistrust of state rhetoric and historical mythmaking.

Conclusion

By framing the wasted lives of ordinary people, W. H. Auden and Orhan Veli Kanık, in their particular poems, suggest the danger of ignorance and the horrific consequences it brings to the world. As poetic epitaphs marked by their humanistic visions of the common man that highlight the worthiness of his life, "The Unknown Citizen" and "Epitaph" defy oppressive systems that dictate the individual a conformist, mediocre, selfless and dehumanized existence. Both poets tear down poetic monuments, whether it is Auden's marble bureaucrat or Orhan Veli's forgotten Süleyman Efendi, to reclaim the ordinary as extraordinary and worthy of poetic attention. Similarly, "Sonnet XVI" and "The Flag" unveil the atrocities of war and mirror how common men, misled by ideological "lies," are drawn into battle and lose their humanity and lives. Through the portrayal of the ordinary man as the true hero, these works manifest the poets' attempts to dignify and give voice to the man-in-the-street. The poems set forth a democratized, collectivist and humanitarian form of poetry that redefines ordinary people as extraordinary and reinvents itself as people's artistic medium that

cherishes the simple life and dignity of the common man over the splendour of great figures and ideologies.

This article has explored how W. H. Auden and Orhan Veli Kanik, despite their different cultural and linguistic contexts, use shared poetic strategies such as irony, colloquial language, simplicity and an anti-epic tone to build a democratic poetics that resists ideological abstraction. Their innovation lies not only in focusing on ordinary lives but also in formally breaking from tradition: Auden through modernist irony, as seen in the satirical monument of "The Unknown Citizen," and Orhan Veli through the Garip movement's rejection of Ottoman prosody, exemplified by the ordinary hero of "Epitaph." Both poets redefine poetic authority as something accessible, ethically grounded and democratically shared. Rather than romanticizing the "common man," they critique the structures that render him expendable. Their works deconstruct traditional forms like the epitaph, the sonnet, and the nationalist symbols to expose how ideology and aesthetics collaborate to erase individuality. While "The Unknown Citizen" and "Epitaph" challenge the cultural mechanisms that render individuals invisible, "Sonnet XVI" and "The Flag" strip war of its heroic illusion and reveal the bureaucratic system behind mass sacrifice. Thus, both poets defy the aesthetic hierarchies of traditional poetry and the ideological narratives of power.

This study distinguishes itself from previous analyses with its comparative approach that positions Auden and Orhan Veli as global modernists who respond to the crises of the twentieth century with formal experimentation and political urgency. By foregrounding colloquial language, irony and poetic simplicity, both poets reclaim poetry as a medium of dissent and recognition. Their poems offer more than critique; they embody resistance, empathy, and remembrance. In a world marked by alienation, conformity and violence, Auden and Orhan Veli restore poetry's role as an ethical space where the life of 'little man' is not only worthy of poetic remembrance but also of individuality, recognition and dignity.

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Representation of Individual Resistance Against Social Norms: A Comparative Analysis of the Fairy Tales *Anıtı Dikilen Sinek* (The Fly with a Monument) and *Il giovane gambero* (The Young Prawn)

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ABSTRACT

This study comparatively elaborates on the individual resistance against established social norms as portrayed in two distinct fairy tales, *The Fly with a Monument* and *The Young Prawn*. Exploring the narrative elements, characters, and underlying themes in the aforementioned works, this study sheds light on how both stories offer fruitful insights into the challenges and consequences faced by those who dare to challenge the ingrained societal conventions. As genres are intrinsic to cultural lore, fairy tales often reflect society's values, aspirations, and conventions. Thus, the characters and events within these tales can be interpreted as symbolic representations of the personal struggles that individuals experience when confronting established societal norms and conventions. Through a juxtaposition of the narratives and characters in these tales, we gain a deeper understanding of the different ways in which individual resistance is depicted and the broader implications of such resistance within the context of these fascinating fairy tales. This study not only enhances our understanding of these prominent tales but also makes a valuable contribution to the ongoing discussion regarding the influence of social norms on individual decision-making and societal transformation. Exploring the nuances of individual resistance within these narratives, this study aims to deepen our understanding of how resistance is perceived and conveyed in literary and cultural contexts. Ultimately, this study focuses on the perpetual relevance of classic tales in elucidating the intricacies of human conduct and societal systems. By re-examining the importance of individual agency, readers are encouraged to reflect on its impact on the course of events and shaping of history.

Keywords: Gianni Rodari, Aziz Nesin, social norms, resistance, fairy tales



Introduction

The fairy tales *Anıtı Dikilen Sinek*¹ (The Fly with a Monument) by Aziz Nesin and *Il Giovane Gambero* (The Young Prawn) by Gianni Rodari present a remarkable approach to the conflicts between society, family, and individuals from different perspectives. Attracting the reader's attention to the extensive surface of the relations, both tales portray the conflicts through different angles as well as laying an apparent emphasis on some themes such as societal values, family dynamics, and individual freedom.

In order to take a closer look at the human condition, the examination of societal interactions, familial structures, and the individual's battle against dominant conventions often provides a compelling perspective within the framework of literary analysis. Nesin's *The Fly with a Monument* and Rodari's *The Young Prawn* are fictional works that explore the multifaceted nature of human existence in detail. Through their impressive depictions of societal, familial, and individual struggles, these stories provide some original insights into the complicated dynamics of these relationships. The main themes of both narratives are centered on societal values, family dynamics, and the pursuit of individual liberation by illuminating the conflicts and resolutions that influence their interactions. Through their various insightful reflections, they provide valuable lessons on the complex dynamics of relationships in the context of the human condition.

This study aims to examine and compare the contexts according to which these two narratives present and address the sophisticated themes of human affairs within the cultural frameworks of the two distinct societies, underscoring the varied perspectives they provide concerning the multifaceted nature of relationships and challenges.

Two Authors from Italy and Turkey: Gianni Rodari and Aziz Nesin

It is widely acknowledged that Gianni Rodari (1920–1980) holds a prominent and special position in Italian literature both as a writer and an educator. He is particularly considered an indispensable figure in the realm of children's literature and is known for his original and innovative approaches to the field. "Rodari was an intellectual. And if an intellectual is someone capable of making sense of what lies beneath everyone's eyes, shattering the mirror of duplication, keeping the past and future in mind, then Gianni Rodari was a marvelous intellectual" (Roghi, 2020, p. 9).

1 Throughout the paper, all translations from Italian and Turkish are mine unless otherwise stated.

Gianni Rodari, a seminal figure in the field of children's literature, was awarded the esteemed Andersen Award during the XII Congresso dell'International Board on Books for Young People (IBBY) held in Bologna in April 1970. His exceptional literary skills are properly demonstrated through his meticulously crafted narrative style, specifically designed to encourage, stimulate and brighten the imaginative capacities of young readers. Rodari's oeuvre, distinguished by its ability to fascinate and inspire young readers, serves as an emblem of authorship that is actively committed to fostering and promoting the actualization of their imaginative potential. In this sense, the dramatic inclusion of absurd elements, humorous tone, and imaginative fictional worlds in his works has a captivating and charming effect on children, encouraging them to discover their creative capacities. In the introduction to Pietro Greco's work titled *L'universo a dondolo La scienza nell'opera di Gianni Rodari*, Gianni Rodari himself provides authentic insights into his writing process:

I believe that fairy tales, both old and new, can contribute to educating the mind. The fairy tale is a realm of all hypotheses; it can provide us with keys to entering reality through new paths, help a child understand the world, and furnish images for critiquing the world. For this reason, I believe that writing fairy tales is a worthwhile endeavor. I must also say that it is an enjoyable pursuit, and from a certain perspective, it is peculiar that one engages in work that amuses them and, moreover, gets paid for it, and perhaps even rewarded. (2010, p. IX)

Indeed, he creates a spectacular humorous dimension in his works by employing literary techniques such as wordplays and language games that contribute to rendering the text more appealing and entertaining for children while simultaneously enhancing their language skills. It should also be noted that Rodari's works not only serve the purpose of entertainment, but also address societal issues and human relations in general.

Rodari keeps the two realms of writing separate for years: that of the journalist addressing the readers of *Unità* and that of the writer crafting stories for their children (or for the readers themselves, but as parents). However, through a peculiar evolution of purposes, Rodari constructs a new kind of literary figure, unique in the Italian landscape, capable of speaking simultaneously to both adults and children. (Roghi, 2020, p. 76)

It is clear that Rodari's multifaceted contributions to children's literature demonstrate his perpetual commitment to fostering imaginative and inclined young minds. He viewed today's children as "the astronauts of the future" (Greco, 2010, p. 3) and labored tirelessly to cultivate their capacity for liberated thought and expression. It is generally accepted that his legacy comprises a wide range of different progressive measures aimed at creating an atmosphere that promotes free and creative thinking.

In fact, the thematic scope of Rodari's literary endeavors is broad and diverse, as can easily be seen in his works. The subject matter under scrutiny in this study constitutes an integral segment of a broader narrative canvas in the realm of children's literature on which the theme of social justice, along with the values of tolerance and equality, is drawn with a particular focus on the intention of promoting awareness of these issues among young readers. Furthermore, Rodari's artistic creations are characterized in such a way that they reflect the thoughts and perspectives of children, which facilitates children's easy engagement with the stories and enables them to empathize with the multidimensional characters. In other words, his distinct narrative style and intriguing tales captivate young readers and inspire a love for literature. One of the most significant features of his oeuvre is his innovative and unique contribution to the realm of children's literature. By departing from conventional fairy tale forms, he crafted an entirely new collection of stories that haunted the imagination of young readers. Eventually, his seminal works allowed children to get in touch with unique and original storylines that expanded their horizons and sparked their creativity.

Gianni Rodari is a writer who belongs to high literature, deserving a place among the great figures of Italian literature in the 20th century, even though his name may not appear in some renowned narratives of this literature. Gianni Rodari unequivocally belongs to those eminent poets and writers, who represent the deepest essence of Italian literature, weaving continuously the threads of the fabric that binds together literature, philosophy, and science, from Dante to Galileo, from Leopardi to Calvino. (Greco, 2010, p. X)

Gianni Rodari's viewpoint on children's literature is rooted in a method that smoothly integrates enjoyment and educational goals into the creative narrative framework, which augments the imaginative domain of children and fosters the development of their cognitive abilities. Consequently, his literary works generates substantial

contributions that significantly extended the horizons of children's literature, facilitating a deeper and more profound connection between young readers and the world of books.

Aziz Nesin (1915–1995), a prominent figure in Turkish literature, is the writer in focus for this study's Turkish example, whose significant contributions to the field of children's literature are widely respected in the literary world.

Nesin did not merely utilize children's literature to convey entertaining and innocent tales; he also incorporated social commentaries. Through his writing, he addresses inequities, injustices, and societal issues, inspiring children to contemplate these matters. In light of these remarks, before elaborating on his unique narratives in the field of children's literature, I would like to include an excerpt from the book titled *Aziz Nesin Aydınlığı* (Intellectualism of Aziz Nesin) written by his friend Öner Yağcı. This excerpt provides an insight into Nesin's arduous journey as a writer, accentuating his significance to Turkish literature as one of the foremost authors of the Republican era, renowned for his tenacity:

It does not omit anything. I believe I wouldn't be exaggerating if I said he writes about everything related to our lives. However, I should add this: it addresses everything concerning life as understood by individuals who love their homeland deeply, its people and nature, and who, with conscious intent, aspire for their homeland to achieve a contemporary way of life, aligned with its people and nature. It touches upon every current issue relevant to this life with a critical, cautionary, guiding, insistent, pioneering, and bold hand. Some of the hives it dares to stir include the following. Atatürk and Kemalism; Reactionism, Fanaticism, Bigotry, and Fundamentalism; Society, Democracy, State, and the Bourgeoisie; Thinking; Big Capital and the Press; The "Satanic Verses", the "Sivas Events"; Military and Weapons; the Kurdish Issue; Our Deceptions; Shame; Enlightenment... (Yağcı, 1999, p. 41)

While simultaneously addressing the societal implications of national realities and displaying a pronounced dedication to children, whom he held in the highest regard, he authored an array of influential works. Throughout his life, the well-being and development of children have been of great importance to him, and he has dedicated a considerable portion of his time and energy to creating and producing contents that

are suitable for them. In this context, the fundamental reason behind his lifelong efforts lies in the narrative of his own life. Despite all the economic and political challenges, he established the "Nesin Foundation," alias "Children's Paradise," in 1972, which continued to stand strong. Under the umbrella of the foundation, numerous initiatives, projects, and activities have been carried out on subjects such as "children's freedoms and rights," "education for children," and "sustainability and permaculture." These efforts are ongoing to date.² For him, children mean the future itself. In his correspondence³ with his son Ali Nesin, a prominent mathematician who was awarded the prestigious Leelavati Prize and the founder of Maths Village in İzmir, he penned his wish for children: "I wish for all sons and daughters, who will be the mothers and fathers of tomorrow, to experience beauty in better days and not endure the hardships we have faced" (Yağcı, 1999, p. 52).

In the context of his contributions to children's literature, it is pertinent to reiterate that Nesin's literary oeuvre distinguishes itself through the versed utilization of a humorous tone and articulate linguistic approach. The comedic narrative style in his stories not only entertains children but also facilitates a better understanding of contemporary issues. His work focuses on character development and human values.

For him, fairy tales are a tool that directs the mind towards a profound intellectual engagement with the social reality through their intrinsic symbols, situations, and allegories:

In a fairy tale, there exists a state of abstraction, altering the meaning. However, within this abstraction lies a profound reality: Thus, we discover the power to narrate many things, influencing the public... the public employs abstraction and the absurd not as fantasies but as effective means to express realities and their own resistance... whether to escape oppression or to move towards generalization. (Alangu, 1983, p. 310)

Through the characters, he portrays the grounds of values such as honesty, solidarity, and tolerance to the children. Nesin frequently incorporated local motifs and cultural

2 For more detailed information, the foundation's website can be visited at: <https://www.nesinvakfi.org/>

3 Nesin stated that he saw his son Ali Nesin as a close friend since early childhood. In the books titled *Aziz Nesin and Ali Nesin Correspondence*, we read the letters exchanged between Aziz Nesin and his son Ali Nesin, portraying the communications of "two close friends" throughout the years. In these letters, the first of which dates back to 1965 and the last to 1985, we observe the flow of emotions and thoughts over this 20-year period (Yağcı, 1999, p. 50).

elements into his story that enables children to have closer engagement with their cultural heritage. His stories were written with the aim of nourishing children's imagination and enhancing their creativity.

His literary journey began with poetry (Kudret, 1990, s. 310). As a writer who faced numerous trials throughout Turkey's turbulent political history due to his thoughts, he published his writings under various pseudonyms to continue his literary career. Cevdet Kudret provides the following insights into Aziz Nesin's work entitled *Vatan Sağolsun* (May the Homeland Endure, 1968): During those days, he wrote under more than two hundred pseudonyms in various newspapers and magazines. These writings spanned all genres, including editorials, opinion columns, interviews, analyses, detective novels, and stories. Whenever newspaper owners discovered his pseudonyms, he would create new ones. (1990, p. 310)

Categorizing Nesin's literary journey into three distinct phases, Kudret (1990) articulates as follows:

1. These stories depict the social topography of contemporary Turkey. In them, the realities of Turkey are reflected through humor, with people from all classes and layers of society portrayed in both their positive and negative, base and noble aspects. Such stories serve as valuable sources for the social history of Turkey.
2. The tales grouped under the general title "Tales for Adults," although inspired by folk tales, have a contemporary essence, with a strong emphasis on political satire.
3. These stories often times transcend the boundaries of humor and provide a deeper understanding of the human experience. (pp. 315–316)

It is important to note the significant impact of the writer's contributions to children's literature in Turkey, particularly with regard to the use of voice and language in his stories. This aspect of his work has had a lasting impact on the field and serves as a valuable example for others to follow. Engaging in sound plays and a rich vocabulary that captures children's attention contributes to the development of language skills. Moreover, it is pertinent to assert that the diversity of characters in Nesin's literary works promotes the cultivation of children's capacity to empathize with an array of life experiences and emotional contexts.

Nesin's approach to children's literature is underpinned by a perspective that seamlessly combines entertainment and educational objectives, resulting in an enrichment of children's cognitive landscapes and fostering alignment with societal and humanitarian values.

Given the significance of the analysis of the stories *The Fly with a Monument* and *The Young Prawn* in the context of this study, it is crucial to consider their implications in the light of the information gathered about the authors from two neighboring cultures, each with their own unique socio-cultural backgrounds.

A Socio-Cultural Analysis: *The Young Prawn* and *The Fly with a Monument*

From the viewpoint of a socio-cultural analysis, one of the initial topics that requires consideration is the interplay between an individual's experiences, thoughts, emotions, and societal norms. Societal norms refer to the accepted behavioral patterns that are formed by a society's specific values, established norms, and intrinsic expectations. Within this framework, subjectivity is grounded in both personal and societal factors that shape an individual's own experiences and thoughts. To what extent has the theme of [topic] been addressed in the works of literature intended for children, and how is it exemplified in a concise manner?

To find answers to these questions, it is essential to delve into the narrative structures and genres in children's literature. It is a widely acknowledged fact that literary genres are vast and diverse, ranging from fairy tales and biographical narratives to science fiction and detective stories. This broad scope of genres encompasses traditional literary works such as fables, folk tales, myths, legends, heroic stories, and folk epics. When translated into the realm of fantasy literature, children's literature reveals an array of elements, such as the imagination of fictional worlds, fantasy narratives, and science fiction genres. In contemporary literature, which covers various works that take place in modern times, there are several subgenres including mysteries, novels that explore the human experience within the animal kingdom, novels with central problems to be solved, and coming-of-age stories (Lukens, Smith, & Coffel, 2021, p. 88).

Within the framework of this study, it is necessary to drill down the ground of the definition of "Animal Stories" in which the adventures of animal characters that behave,

think, and feel like humans incorporate fantastical elements (2021, p. 89). Using animal characters instead of human beings in educational content can be beneficial for young children as it may allow them to effectively process and understand complex topics. This is because young children may be more likely to identify with and relate to animal characters, which can make the content more engaging and accessible for them (2021, p. 89). Utilizing depictions of actual animal behavior, realistic fiction, enables children to connect with the narrative and form emotional attachments, thereby facilitating the examination and analysis of the story:

Some fiction written for children focuses directly on real animal life: Farley Mowat is a master of animal-centered realistic fiction; *Owls in the Family* offer an enjoyable reading experience for both children and adults. Reading works in this subgenre of realistic fiction can empathize with animals, bear witness to the challenging experiences of humans coexisting with animals, and make difficult decisions. (2021, p. 89) Another genre that needs to be conveyed through the comparative analysis of the tales in the study is undoubtedly "Issue-Centered Children's Literature Narratives." In these narratives, it is possible to address the personal and unique issues that children may face, as well as broader societal issues such as social injustice and human relations in general (2021, p. 92).

In these stories, plot and source of conflict are issues that concern the main character. This issue can be personal or it may involve the character's relationship with society or someone else. In the finest examples of realistic fiction, character and conflict are both well-developed and intricately intertwined. (2021, p. 92)

In a realistic animal adventure story, readers, when they identify themselves with characters who value animals as much as animals deserve to be valued, can freely oscillate between aesthetic and efferent reading, that is, between immersive reading within the story and reading solely for informational purposes. On the one hand, these readers can scrutinize the story more closely while making discoveries about animals and their relationships with humans (2021, p. 88).

It is evident that there are numerous examples of "Problem-Centered Children's Literature Narratives," particularly those focusing on the individual's resistance to societal structures. It would not be incorrect to state that this form of resistance is presented through the conflict created within the plot. "Conflict occurs when the protagonist engages in a struggle against an antagonist, that is, an opposing force" (2021, p. 146).

In the two narratives under discussion, this conflict is presented in the context of the individual's confrontation with society. Without a doubt, the conflicts individuals face with society are present in many children's books (2021, p. 149).

It would be appropriate to emphasize that at the core of the individual's conflict with the norms and rules established by societal life lies the concept of "freedom." While individuals desire to possess free thinking and determine their own way of life, they are subject to restrictions and limitations imposed by society, serving as the source of this conflict. Thus, within social psychology, conflict is often defined as a sort of incompatibility of goals, beliefs, attitudes, and/or behavior (Jussim, Ashmore, & Wilder, 2001, p. 6). Individuals often choose nonconformity over adhering to the norms imposed by society, engaging in a struggle with the belief that conformity is impossible. When we consider the concept of "civilized life," another aspect of societal existence, it becomes evident that it is essentially perceived as a state of unrest stemming from the limitations imposed on individual freedom. In this sense, the emphasis on individual freedom highlights the importance of each person's capability to uphold their own beliefs and lifestyle. Indeed, this perspective is one of the cornerstones of a democratic society, which is a widely accepted notion suggesting that social norms and regulations can, at times, impede the freedoms of individuals within a societal context. Undoubtedly, the justification for societal limitations on individual freedom can be attributed to the establishment of social order and the promotion of a secure environment for all members of society. However, it should not be forgotten that the greater the attachment and solidarity within the ingroup, the greater the hostility and contempt directed toward outgroups (Brewer, 2001, p. 18).

In the light of the foregoing analysis, it can be said that children's literature frequently examines the tensions between individual freedom and thought within the confines of the family and the broader established societal norms. Such works contribute to children's understanding of fundamental moral values, ethical norms, and social relationships, while also helping individuals examine their complex relationships with society more closely. While aiming to emphasize the distinction between good and evil, and right and wrong, these works also provide children with examples of individuals who are capable of adhering to societal norms and freely expressing their thoughts, encouraging open discussions. In this context, introducing a comparative analysis of the two examined tales will contribute to a deeper understanding of the existing viewpoints.

The Young Prawn (1980) from the book *Telephone Tales* and Nesin's collection of 16 tales, including the titular tale *The Fly with a Monument* (1979), are narratives published in two distinct Mediterranean countries with a one-year distance. Although coinciding temporally, these tales diverge significantly in terms of their historical and sociocultural contexts. They provide different examples of "individual resistance against society-imposed norms" to the children of the two countries, which, although sharing the same historical frame, exhibit various contrasts in their respective sociopolitical landscapes.

The Young Prawn possesses a distinct attribute tied to its setting that is specific to Italy. The protagonist of the tale is a prawn dwelling at sea. Conversely, *The Fly with a Monument* narrates an account of a fly trapped within the confines of a mundane study room in a Turkish household. The contrast between the protagonists—a prawn struggling against its biological fate and a fly seeking recognition in an environment that deems it insignificant—reinforces the overarching theme of individual defiance against societal expectations. While Rodari's prawn attempts to reshape its nature as a metaphor for progress and resistance to tradition, Nesin's fly exists within a rigidly structured and decaying system, symbolizing the futility of resistance in an environment defined by political turmoil and authoritarianism.

In Rodari's tale, the young prawn undertakes a task that is far-reaching and more challenging than expected by society. The prawn defies society's expectations and attempts to overcome great dangers by relying on its own abilities. Although it is a prawn capable of walking backwards by its nature, it now desires to change this situation and walk forward.

"One day, a little prawn thought, 'Why is my whole family and I walk backward?' Like frogs, I want to learn to walk forward. If I cannot succeed, let my tail fall off" (Rodari, 2021, p. 6).

The 1970s in Italy were marked by a period of intense sociopolitical transformation, characterized by economic crises, social movements, and political violence. The country faced the consequences of the post-war economic boom, which led to rapid industrialization and urbanization but also exacerbated inequalities between the industrialized North and the agrarian South. This decade was also defined by the rise of left-wing and right-wing extremist groups, culminating in what is historically referred

to as the Years of Lead (*Anni di piombo*), a period of political terrorism and social unrest⁴. Within this context, Gianni Rodari's tale of the young prawn challenging the constraints imposed by nature and tradition can be interpreted as an allegory of Italy's struggles for social change and progress. The prawn's desire to walk forward despite societal expectations echoes the aspirations of youth movements, feminist groups, and labor unions that sought to break free from conservative norms and authoritarian structures. Furthermore, the protagonist's willingness to risk everything for change reflects the broader ideological conflicts of the time, as radical groups on both ends of the political spectrum attempted to redefine Italy's future. Rodari, a committed leftist and advocate for progressive education, subtly critiques the rigidity of societal norms and encourages individual agency and resistance to predetermined roles.

Nesin's narrative transports us to the year preceding Turkey's 1980 coup, at a time when society was grappling with political upheaval. Unlike Italy's Years of Lead, which were marked by radical ideological clashes, late 1970s Turkey was on the brink of military intervention, with escalating violence between leftist and rightist factions. Nesin's choice of a fly as a protagonist—an entity often dismissed as insignificant or bothersome—mirrored the pervasive sense of dehumanization and suppression prevalent in Turkish society during this period. The working-class household in which the narrative unfolds further highlights the economic struggles and political anxieties shaping everyday life. The utilization of an insect as the protagonist of a story for children, penned by an author struggling against the sociopolitical constraints of their environment, may be viewed as repugnant by some. However, this can be justified due to the various challenges faced by the writer in question. The construction of a memorial to a pest, which is consistently endeavored to be removed from our surroundings, serves as the initial captivating feature of the story. The author leads us into the most desolate and decrepit apartment situated within a multi-story building in a neighboring district of a large city. This apartment, where it is impossible for daylight to enter, resides in a nuclear family of three: a working mother, a working father, and their studying son. The narrative exhibits a highly realistic portrayal of the Turkish political and historical context.

4 Paul Ginsborg offers a detailed account of this period, highlighting the escalating political violence and social unrest in Italy during the mid-1970s: "On 28 May 1974, little more than a fortnight after the divorce referendum, a bomb exploded in the main square at Brescia, during the course of an anti-Fascist demonstration. Eight people were killed. That same summer, on 4 August, another bomb exploded on a train travelling between Florence and Bologna. This time there were twelve victims. Street violence escalated in the first months of 1975. First, a Greek student, Giorgio Mantekas, a sympathizer of the MSI, was killed in the course of clashes in Rome between the neo-Fascists and the left groups. Then, in Milan, on 15 April 1975, a neo-Fascist killed Claudio Varalli of the student movement. A day later, during the course of the demonstration called in pretest at Varalli's murder, a police lorry ran down and killed Giannino Zibecchi, of the anti-Fascist committees" (1990, p. 371).

Both narratives, despite emerging from distinct sociopolitical environments, reflect the authors' engagement with issues of autonomy, resistance, and systemic constraints. Rodari's hopeful vision, embedded in the young prawn's perseverance, contrasts with Nesin's more cynical portrayal of a world where even the most basic recognition—a monument for a fly—becomes an absurd and unattainable aspiration. These differences underscore the ways in which children's literature serves as a vehicle for sociopolitical critique, shaping young readers' understanding of justice, conformity, and change within their respective cultural contexts.

Following the spatial description, Nesin provides the reader with encyclopedic information about the main character, and then introduces the protagonist:

It is known that flies cannot fly in darkness. They remain where they are until the weather clears or a light is turned on. Because the inside of the house was semi-dark, the flies were not flying. There was only one young fly who kept flying towards the outside light, but it kept hitting the window pane and staying there. (Nesin, 2022, pp. 11–12)

In this tale, we are presented with the adventure of a fly that defies the behaviors of its own kind in pursuit of freedom. Just as we often witness in our daily lives, there is a fly that repeatedly flies towards the light, repeatedly hitting the window, yet behind this action lies a determined, inquisitive, and even daring fly, willing to risk its life. Like the young prawn in the previous story, it is also thwarted by society.

The remaining flies were elderly, knowledgeable, and experienced. They said to the fly that kept flying into the window repeatedly, "Don't bother, you can't get out...". The young fly replied, "But I cannot stay trapped in this dark place. Looking beyond is light. I want to go to the light." One elderly fly said, 'have not you figured out what the thing you keep hitting every now and then is yet? It's called glass. Glass is transparent. It sees the other side from the other side. Because it shows the other side from one side, young flies like you think it doesn't exist and keep hitting it all the time.' (Nesin, 2022, p. 12)

In light of the emerging signs of resistance to prevailing societal norms in the opening passage, it is imperative to consider Pierre Bourdieu's views on an individual's place

within the broader social structure. According to him, *habitus* confers upon an individual's actions a sense of "regularity, unity, and systematicity." Nonetheless, this systematic unity does not encompass an "intentional meaning" (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 79). Additionally, Brewer states that:

Social identification represents the extent to which the ingroup has been incorporated into the sense of self, and at the same time, that the self is experienced as an integral part of the ingroup. With high levels of social identification, the group's outcomes and welfare become closely connected to one's own sense of well-being. (Brewer, 2001, p. 21)

Both protagonists exhibit a striking defiance towards the very essence of *habitus*, encompassing the notions of habitual regularity, intrinsic unity and systematic structure. At this point, it would be appropriate to briefly address the concept of identification:

Identification implies some motivation to define oneself in terms of that group membership and to achieve and maintain inclusion in the ingroup category. Since identification entails some sacrifice of an autonomous self-concept, the question arises as to why individuals would attach some measure of their self-worth and well-being to the fate of a collective. (2001, p. 21)

In this context, it is imperative that the young prawn adhere to societal norms, despite his growing awareness of the challenges he confronts due to his physical makeup, which is at odds with his deep-seated aspirations:

"He bumped on the left and right sides. It hurt a lot. The shell is left with bruises. His legs were tangled up. However, everything slowly started to fall into place. If you want it, you can learn everything" (Rodari, 2021, p. 8).

A similar behavior was observed in the protagonist of Nesin's tale, as the young fly, in spite of the advice and protestations of his fellow flies, remained resolute in his endeavors to attain liberation. He responds to their concerns with statements like, "What I'm doing is far better than loafing around. Don't interfere with me" (Nesin, 2022, p. 13). He perseveres through injuries and heals, and persists in his attempts as the other flies think of him as "stupid and crazy." He has been marginalized by society.

The individual who defies the conventional norms and expectations imposed by society and perseveres in their pursuits is not solely the fly. The young prawn, who overcame the physical limitations of its body through diligent effort, stands before its immediate kin—the minuscule core of the social order—and exhibits its accomplishments. This progressive action, which is beneficial for itself, has caused great sadness in the family. That the children have deviated from the accustomed order and are perceived as rebellious is a source of regret. “My son,” the mother burst into tears, “Have you lost your mind? Come back to yourself, walk as your father and mother have taught you, walk like your brothers who care so much about you” (Rodari, 2021, p. 12).

His behavior is not accepted by his family, and he is expelled from his home by the family he loves dearly.

His brothers, however, could only snicker. The father looked at him sternly for a while, then said, “That’s enough. If you want to stay with us, walk like the other prawns. If you want to go your own way, the stream is wide: go away and never come back.” (2021, pp. 12–13)

As the narrative unfolds, we follow the exploits of a young prawn who embarks on a journey of exploration and discovery. Despite the excitement of this journey, we cannot escape the fact that he is shunned and isolated by his own community. The frogs, upon seeing him walking forward, claim that “the world has turned upside down.” (2021, p. 18). In fact, they label his effort as disrespect: “There is no more respect, –said another frog. - Oh dear, oh dear, said a third one” (2021, p. 18). At this point, Habermas’s concept of “I-identity,” which emerges as a combination of individual and social identity, comes to mind. Indeed, Habermas analyzes these two forms of identity as the dual dimensions of a balancing “I-identity:”

Individual identity, the vertical dimension, provides connections through a person’s history. Social identity, the horizontal dimension, helps meet the requirements of all role systems, which include a person. To maintain this balance, a person uses different techniques of interaction, demonstrating his or her identity and trying to meet the role expectations of a partner. (Korostelina, 2007, p. 37)

In contrast to Breakwell and Habermas, Tajfel and Turner (1979) view the relationship between social and individual identity as inherently conflictual:

In 1974, Tajfel emphasized the existence of two opposite poles in a person's behavior. On the one end of the continuum (which is ideal and probably cannot be found in society) is the interaction between two or more individuals, whose behavior is completely determined by their interpersonal relations and individual characteristics; it has no impact from groups and other social categories. On the other end of the continuum are the interrelations between two individuals that are totally determined by their membership in different social groups and social categories and are not influenced by their interpersonal relations. (2007, p. 37)

During the young prawn's journey, he encounters an elder prawn who embodies the societal norms that the youth seeks to defy. This encounter serves as a harbinger of the consequences that may arise from the innovative behavior that the young prawn is pursuing and eventually achieving.

What do you think you are doing? Even when I was young, I thought about teaching me prawns to walk forward. And here's what I gained from it: I live all alone, and people would sooner bite their tongues than talk to me. While you still have time, listen to me: resign yourself to doing as the others do, and one day you will thank me for the advice. (Rodari, 2021, pp. 22–24)

Tajfel and Turner's notion of identity conflict, where individuals are caught between the influences of personal characteristics and social group memberships, finds a striking parallel in the young prawn's journey. The elder prawn, representing societal norms, mirrors the societal pressures that often shape an individual's behavior within the boundaries of collective expectations. As the young prawn seeks to challenge these norms, his encounter with the elder serves as a reminder of the inherent tension between individual aspirations and the roles imposed by social groups. This reflects Tajfel's continuum, where the young prawn's defiance symbolizes the shift from social conformity towards personal identity actualization, despite the conflict it may provoke.

The young prawn, hesitating how to respond to the old prawn, thinks to himself: "I am right. I will not turn back to my path. I will walk forward" (Rodari, 2021, p. 24). Nesin depicts the protagonist of his narrative as a "daring and hopeful" (Nesin, 2022, p. 13) individual, likening him to a resilient fly that remains undaunted by despair. A resilient fly that remains

undeterred by despair and a protagonist with an insatiable thirst for exploration and knowledge. The fly, undeterred by despair, alights on an open book on the child's desk and discovers the concept of the "speed of light" by perusing the informative page about light. Thus, he attempts to fly at a faster speed. Having greatly increased his speed, the young fly crashed into the window one last time with the force of his body sticking to the glass, which is now lifeless. "His whole body was crushed, his skin torn and punctured. His blood was splattered on glass. The young fly had finally died..." (2022, p. 17).

The demise of this particular fly caused a profound sense of sadness among his peers that were present during his ordeal. Despite having witnessed the passing of many of their brethren before, the tragic end of this young insect has elicited a distinctive grief that is difficult to ignore. His valiant struggle, even in the face of certain death, serves as a testament to his unwavering determination to not only survive but also protect the lives of his fellow flies: - He was the leader of flies! He sought a way out for us all. He is a symbol of hope. He instilled hope in all of us. - What a great sacrifice... He gave his life for us. - He died to make even the most impossible possible. - We will never forget you! - You will go down in history as a golden page in the history of us flies, and your struggle will be written in golden letters in history. (Nesin, 2022, p. 17)

The narrative then proceeds with the words of the wisest and most aged fly present. This erudite insect proposes that the residue of the deceased fly should be consecrated as a memorial, an idea that is met with unanimous approval from the other flies. Until the homeowners return to their residence, the precautionary measures will remain in place. Upon entering the room, the woman observes a dead fly on the window and promptly removes it using a clean cloth. According to the flies, the monument of the young flies was believed to have endured forever. It is at this juncture that Nesin includes the following observations regarding the perception of eternity in his account:

In the light of the limitations imposed by mortal beings, the concept of infinity is indeed relative. For some, such as the butterfly, the duration of three hours may seem infinite, while for others, such as the human, the span of thirty thousand years may be considered so. Even the brief existence of a fly, in the grand scheme of things, may still be considered infinite in its own right... (Nesin, 2022, p. 18)

Another noteworthy element in these tales is that while the eldest member of the society in the story tries to deter the young prawn from its path, the oldest and wisest member of the fly community, albeit belatedly, comes to appreciate the efforts of the young fly who displayed similar behavior.

Unlike Nesin, Rodari concludes the fable without providing a specific resolution, leaving the conclusion to the reader, or more specifically, to the children. The fate of the prawn is not disclosed, and no further information is given regarding its subsequent events or destiny. He notes with poise that the prawn persisted on its trajectory with unwavering resolve, reminding the reader to offer well-wishes by saying, "May your path be clear" (Rodari, 2021, p. 26).

These two narratives, which consider the attempt to achieve the unattainable, criticize the social class distinctions and the obligatory acceptance of pre-determined roles. The fly's pursuit of freedom through the pursuit of the impossible, and the young prawn's deviation from the typical path to bring about change for society, serve as a testament to the innate right of every individual to release their potential.

Conclusion

In conclusion, *The Fly with a Monument* by Aziz Nesin and *The Young Prawn* by Gianni Rodari offer profound reflections on individual resistance against societal norms, framed within the genre of children's literature. Both narratives employ anthropomorphized characters to depict the inherent tensions between personal autonomy and the rigid frameworks imposed by societal conventions. Through these stories, the authors examine the conflicts that arise when individuals challenge established norms, shedding light on the broader implications of such resistance.

While grounded in distinct cultural and historical contexts, these tales share a universal thematic focus on the struggle for personal liberation in the face of societal conformity. Nesin's "fly" and Rodari's "prawn" serve as powerful allegories for the human condition, highlighting the complexities of defying entrenched social structures. Both stories emphasize the transformative potential of individual agency, illustrating how acts of defiance, even in seemingly insignificant forms, can initiate meaningful change and inspire others.

By examining these tales through a socio-cultural lens, we gain valuable insights into how literature can be a powerful vehicle for social commentary and a tool for nurturing critical thinking in young readers. Both Nesin and Rodari emphasize the resilience of the human spirit, showing that individual acts of defiance, no matter how small or seemingly futile, can inspire broader societal transformation. Thus, their works continue to resonate with contemporary readers, offering lessons in courage, perseverance, and the enduring quest for freedom.

In this regard, the works of Nesin and Rodari remain pertinent to contemporary discussions about the role of literature in shaping social consciousness. By illustrating the consequences of resisting oppressive norms, these stories encourage readers to reflect on the importance of questioning authority and envisioning alternative possibilities for societal organization. Ultimately, the enduring relevance of *The Fly with a Monument* and *The Young Prawn* lies in their capacity to evoke critical engagement with the values and structures that govern human behavior, reinforcing the importance of personal agency in the pursuit of social progress.

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Ancient Greek Myths in Modern Greek Poetry: Angelos Sikelianos and Daedalus as a Symbol of Freedom

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ABSTRACT

Ancient Greek myths, which have emerged as one of the main sources of inspiration in literature throughout history and have been interpreted many times with different meanings by various authors, have become a powerful tool in conveying themes such as human nature and social values. This relationship, a symbol of cultural continuity, has consistently existed in literary works through its outcomes, such as keeping individual and collective memory alive and enriching the aesthetic and intellectual realms of societies. Myths, which stand out not only as narratives of the past but also by their continual reappearance in literature with different meanings and interpretations across eras, are recorded as one of the key parameters in the poetry of Angelos Sikelianos, a figure regarded as one of the foremost poets of Modern Greek Literature. This study focuses on Sikelianos' method of establishing connections among Greek history, mythology, nature, and mystical thought, as well as his method of adapting motifs specific to antiquity to the modern period. In this context, his poem *Daedalus*, analyzed in this study, stands as one of the successful attempts of the poet to build a bridge between the past and the present through poetry, by utilizing mythological characters. It has been determined that Sikelianos portrays the mythological character Daedalus not merely as an architect and inventor, he also depicted him as a figure symbolizing the artistic spirit striving to transcend the boundaries of the world, emphasizing themes such as freedom and creativity.

Keywords: Modern Greek Poetry, Angelos Sikelianos, Ancient Greece, Ancient Greek Myths, *Daedalus*

Introduction

The idea of utilizing mythological symbols and characters to express identity and philosophical quests has been frequently used in Modern Greek Literature, and both direct references to well-known stories and characters and the inclusion of ancient myths into works by adding new dimensions in a modern context have played a significant role in shaping Modern Greek poetry. The use of ancient myths in literature in Greece is generally seen as influenced by literary developments following the



romanticism in the West. This influence evolved in parallel with other movements, such as folklore studies and the movement of the Demotic Greek¹ (Pallis, 1975, p. 14).

We see that the myths we trace in many poets appear in various forms and shed light on contemporary issues. When we look at the Greek poetry of the 19th century, it is observed that references to Homer or various ancient myths are explicitly presented in the works of Dionysios Solomos² (David, 1993, p. 49). In Andreas Kalvos³ work *Odes* (Ὀδές)⁴, mythological references merge with the romantic passion of a patriot. Under the influence of classicism, the poetic use of myths emerges as a national necessity, enabling a comparison between the glorious past and the modern reality of Greece, as it reflects the struggle to uphold the grandeur of the ancestral heritage. From the mid-19th century onwards, ancient Greek myths have been used more intensively, delineating distinct boundaries between the past and the present (Despotidis, 2018, p. 1518).

As the pioneer of the New Athenian School⁵ and one of the most important poets of Modern Greek Literature, Kostis Palamas sought to introduce Western literary movements to Greece while highlighting their connections to the literary heritage of Greece. Palamas, inspired by the symbols of power, virtue, and wisdom found in ancient myths, aimed to highlight ancient glory; through his efforts, Ancient Greece emerged as a profound source of inspiration for modern Greek cultural life (Harmouzos, 1974, p. 81). He perceived the symbols and characters of antiquity through the lens of modern sensibilities, adapting, altering and transforming them according to the needs of the era. The 1880s Generation, pioneered by Palamas, acknowledged the influences of French Parnassism and Symbolism, and although it broke away from Classicism, it continued to be inspired by ancient Greek myths. In some cases, rather than serving merely a decorative purpose or symbolizing the continuity of Hellenism, myths became

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- 1 An intellectual movement that aimed to intervene in the language in the 20th century advocated the idea of purifying Greek from Katharevousa (an artificial language created by combining elements of Ancient and Modern Greek, which was the official language of Greece until 1976) and archaic elements.
 - 2 Dionysios Solomos is one of the most important poets of Modern Greek Literature and the most important representative of the Heptanese School of Literature. He is called the national poet because the national anthem of Greece was written by him.
 - 3 Andreas Kalvos was among the representatives of the Heptanese School of Literature and was a contemporary of the poets Dionysios Solomos and Ugo Foscolo.
 - 4 Ode (Ancient Greek: Ὀδὴ) is a special type of lyric poetry with its origins in Ancient Greece.
 - 5 This school is also known as the 1880s Generation because the first renewal works appeared in 1880. The poets of this generation were young poets that were interested in the establishment of a common language in poetry.

structural components of poetry and were linked to the national perspective as well as the personal vision of the poets (Despotidis, 2018, p. 1518).

At this point, it is seen that Konstantinos Kavafis acted with a similar approach. The Alexandrian poet was inspired by mythology in many of his poems, utilizing mythological themes as background and symbols, particularly referencing Homer's epics and ancient tragedies. By transforming ancient myths or highlighting only certain aspects, he usually transported the people of his own era, along with their issues, into another era (Fylaktou, 2003, p. 31).

Starting from the early 20th century, it is observed that poets began to approach myths with a new understanding while questioning their connections to the past. While in traditional poetry myths were generally handled within a specific narrative framework, modern poets preferred to disrupt this structure and use myths as metaphors. This approach aimed not only to recount mythological stories but also to encourage readers to question their relevance in contemporary life. This modern adaptation of myth, characterized by the intense use of anachronisms, offers the reader a rich and multilayered experience. Myths simultaneously blur the boundaries between the past and the present while situating human experience within a universal context. Ultimately, in Modern Greek poetry, myths function as both a narrative element and a tool for existential inquiry (Vagenas, 1994, p. 61).

This study will provide information about the three main poetic periods of Angelos Sikelianos, focusing on his relationship with Ancient Greece, and will analyze the symbols he attributed to the mythological figure in his poem *Daedalus*, along with his approach to these symbols.

The Life of Angelos Sikelianos

Angelos Sikelianos, who was born in Lefkada in 1884, started to study at the Faculty of Law, but did not complete it and turned to poetry, which he had been inclined to since his early ages. He took on diverse roles in the theatre stage of Konstantinos Hristomanos⁶ "Nea Skini" (New Stage) (Prevelakis, 1990, p. 29). Although he possessed a character that was resistant to systematic instruction, he nevertheless managed to cultivate himself in various aspects. His intellectual pursuits extended beyond classical

6 Founder of the theatre called "Nea Skini," theatre writer and poet, who lived between 1867 and 1911.

Greek literature, encompassing Homer, ancient lyric poetry, pre-Socratic philosophers, and ancient tragedy. He also delved into the fields of history and sociology. Following his marriage to American Eva Palmer and with her encouragement, Sikelianos initiated the Delphic Festivals, a series of events held between 1927 and 1930 that celebrated Greek culture through sports competitions, folk art exhibitions, torch races, and performances of both ancient and modern Greek dances. Sikelianos conceived of Delphi as a global cultural center, where all people could come together regardless of religion, language or nation, and where the main goal was universal brotherhood (Δελφική Ιδέα/The Delphic Idea). To further this aim, he published articles, organized conferences, and invited international intellectuals to Delphi. Despite the significant achievements recorded during the festivals, the organization encountered numerous challenges. In 1933, his wife, Eva, travelled to America in 1933 to seek financial support for the organization. However, as she was denied re-entry to Greece, the couple had to leave, resulting in the cessation of the festivals (Stergiopoulos, 2019, p. 207). Despite the failure of the Delphic Festivals, they played a significant role in revitalizing ancient theatres and elevating Delphi to international prominence (Frangou-Kikilia, 2002, p. 120). Sikelianos, who assumed the presidency of the Greek Literary Association in 1947, passed away in Athens in 1951 and was subsequently interred in Delphi (Stergiopoulos, 2019, p. 207).

From his earliest years, Sikelianos exhibited a profound affinity for art and poetry. His mature, powerful early verses bear the influence of the Romantic, Parnassian, and Symbolist movements, as well as the works of Solomos and German ballads (Prevelakis, 1990, pp. 30–31). Sikelianos initiated his literary career in 1902, publishing his early poems in literary magazines of the period such as *Dionysos*, *Panathinaia*, *Noumas*, *Zoi*, and *Akritas*. His debut poetry collection, *Alafroiskiotos*⁷ (Αλαφροϊσκιωτος), was published in 1907. Subsequently, his works such as *Prologos sti zoi* (Prologue to Life/Πρόλογος στη ζωή), *Mitir Theou* (Mother of God/Μήτηρ Θεού), *Pasha ton Ellinon* (Easter of the Greeks/Πάσχα των Ελλήνων), and *Delfikos Logos* (Delphic Logos/Δελφικός Λόγος) were presented to the readers. His complete poetic works were later compiled and published in three volumes under the title *Lyrikos Vios* (*Lyrical Life/Λυρικός Βίος*). Sikelianos was not only a renowned poet but also a prolific playwright. In addition to his extensive body of poetic work, he penned several tragedies such as *O Dithyramvos tou Rodou* (Dithyramb of the Rose/O Διθύραμβος του Ρόδου), *Sivylla* (Sibyl/Σίβυλλα), *O Daidalos stin Kriti* (Daedalus in Crete/O Δαίδαλος στην Κρήτη), and *O Thanatos tou Digeni* (The

7 The meaning of the word: A person who sees fairies and ghosts. / Light sleeper.

Death of Digenis/O Θάνατος του Διγενή) (Kolektif, 1980, pp. 84-85). Despite their technical shortcomings in terms of dramatic action, these works exhibit a vibrant energy that is essential for theatrical performance. All of the tragedies, most of which have an intensely lyrical character, demonstrate an exceptional mastery of language and poetic form (Dimaras, 2000, p. 569).

In *Alafroiskiotos*, the pivotal moment in his poetic journey, the poet fully embraced his lyrical identity, employing a diverse range of expressive techniques. Drawing inspiration from the joy of sensation and the evocative power of language, he seemingly intertwined with nature and composed his verses. His profound sensitivity to the natural world allowed him to perceive the essence of objects, fostering a mystical connection with them. His works such as *Mitir Theou*, *Pasha ton Ellinon*, and *Delfikos Logos*, which employed mythological, religious, and historical elements as symbolic devices, are distinguished by their intense lyricism and the rich simplicity of expression (Dimaras, 2000, pp. 564–566). While deeply rooted in tradition, Angelos Sikelianos introduced significant innovations to Modern Greek poetry, securing a prominent position among his contemporaries. Alongside notable contemporaries such as Nikos Kazantzakis and Kostas Varnalis, Sikelianos contributed significantly to the literary movement initiated by the 1880s Generation. Together, they infused Greek literature with renewed vitality, aligning it with the evolving cultural landscape of the time. By harmoniously blending traditional elements with innovative techniques, they laid the foundation for the emergence of Modernism in Greek literature (Kapsomenos, 2019, pp. 15–16).

Including elements specific to Greek culture in his poetry did not prevent the poet from turning to the West, where he sought inspiration to refine his art and broaden his perspective. With new techniques drawn from the West, including the surrealism movement, he enriched his poetic language and seamlessly integrated these innovations into Greek cultural traditions. The 1880s Generation of endeavor to synthesize elements of Greek culture with the intellectual achievements of the West found its culmination in the works of Sikelianos (Dimaras, 2000, pp. 567–571).

Angelos Sikelianos and Ancient Greek Motifs in his Poetry

Sikelianos' poetic works extensively reference and reinterpret ancient myths and works of art, thereby conveying visual imagery into textual expression. His poetic rendition of the ancient artwork imbued it with a dynamic presence, as if it were

articulating itself through his words. From this standpoint, his poetry generates a purely iconic image (Ladia, 1983, p. 11). Disappointed by the cultural decline of his time, Sikelianos embarked on a search for a cultural identity in modern Greece, drawing inspiration from ancient Greek myths. Influenced by mystery cults, especially Orphism, the poet sought to revitalize the unifying principles embodied by Ancient Greek centers such as Eleusis, Olympia and Delphi and to apply them to the challenges of modern existence (Politis, 2009, pp. 237–238). This integrative framework, which unites direct and universal poetic awareness, theoretical understanding, and mystical experience, profoundly intrigued the poet. Myths and symbols, encoded within the names of the gods of Ancient Greece, offer profound poetic interpretations of the world and life. In Sikelianos' works, these elements were deployed with a potent and symbolically dense style that engages the reader (Papanoutsos, 2019, p. 78).

Sikelianos' poetry, characterized by lyricism, nature imagery, youth vitality, and Dionysian fervor, reflects his vision of a universal myth that blends elements of primitive matriarchal religions, classical Greek spirituality, Orphism, and Christianity. From his earliest works, the poet sought to revitalize traditional forms through innovation, merging Hellenistic antiquity with modern Greek culture and exploring the interplay between natural landscapes and cultural heritage. While not strictly a romantic poet, he nonetheless exhibited a mystical sensibility (Stergiopoulos, 2019, pp. 207–208).

Sikelianos' engagement with the Greek tradition was profoundly influenced by his direct exposure to the Greek people, ancient ruins, and artifacts, which deepened his understanding of both Greek antiquity and mythology. His orientation towards people is associated with the rise of the movement of Demotic Greek, which is based on the fact that the people are not only the source of the originality and the integrity of the language, but also the foundation of all kinds of national, social and cultural values. The poet's works creatively reflect the enduring influence of ancient Greek mythology on the language and cultural traditions of the Greek people. His connection with the Greek people enabled him to gain in-depth knowledge of the tradition and the rich cultural heritage of the land. Throughout his life, Sikelianos consistently sought to understand the traditions of the people (Fylaktou, 2003, pp. 38–40). Moreover, his intimate and methodical study of ancient ruins enabled him to imaginatively reconstruct the past. The poet's contact with the ancient ruins of Greece not only enriched his knowledge of myths but also created a series of experiences based on myths that have survived to the present day. Living for a long time on his birthplace, Lefkada Island,

and visiting Epirus, Thessaly, Delphi, Sparta, Epidavros and many other places in Greece, provided him with a wealth of firsthand experiences that enriched his understanding of ancient Greek culture (Giofyllis, 1952, p. 15). His interest in Ancient Greek literature, cultivated since his student years, propelled him to translate Homer's epic poems into the common language shortly after completing his secondary education (Savvidis, 2003, p. 25). Sikelianos' acquaintance with ancient Greek myths was enriched not only by classical texts but also by the works of modern Greek and foreign poets/writers who engaged with these myths. Sikelianos' understanding of ancient Greek mythology was significantly shaped by the works of several notable figures, including Edouard Schuré, Gabriele D'Annunzio, Maurice Barrés and Nietzsche (Fylaktou, 2003, p. 42).

Ancient theatre, along with other classical influences, inspired Sikelianos's deep interest in ancient Greek myths. This interest led him to Athens in 1901, where he joined Konstantinos Hristomanos' movement called "Nea Skini" (New Stage). The inaugural production of "Nea Skini" was Euripides' *Alcestis*, in which Sikelianos himself assumed a minor role. This experience with ancient theatre ignited his passion for tragedy, inspiring his subsequent work as a playwright. Many of the tragedies he wrote, such as *Asklepios*, *Daidalos stin Kriti*, and *O Dithyramvos tou Rodou*, draw their themes from ancient myths (Fylaktou, 2003, p. 44). Sikelianos' conception of theatre as a vehicle for social betterment led him to incorporate elements of ancient Greek tragedy and myths into his productions. For example, his work *O Dithyramvos tou Rodou* reflects the Delphic Idea. The prominence of the rose, an Orphic symbol, in this work underscores the poet's concern with the decline of traditional values, such as beauty, love, peace, and virtue (Panselinos, 2019, p. 235).

The poet's innovative reimagining of ancient Greek myths constitutes a significant contribution to the field of literature. This approach is characterized by a comprehensive integration of the myths into the poet's personal worldview. The poet's idiosyncratic interpretation of the myths functions as a distilled representation of his philosophical insights. Moreover, he utilized rhetorical strategies to forcefully impose his own interpretation of the myths upon the reader. In Keeley's words, "his approach presents a mythological teaching in a way that captures both our minds and hearts"⁸ (Keeley, 1987, p. 85).

The first period of Angelos Sikelianos, initiated by *Alafroiskiotos* and reaching its zenith in the *Rapsodies tou Iouniou* (June Rhapsodies/Ραψωδίες του Ιουνίου), extolls the vivacity

8 All translations from Greek to English in this article belong to the author.

of the Homeric world. The mythological sources in these works were largely drawn from the Homeric epics. The pantheon, including Apollo, Athena, and Artemis, and the heroic figures Odysseus and Achilles, are central to these works. The satyrs provide a vehicle for the poet's exploration of Dionysian themes. In this early period, Sikelianos' engagement with ancient myths is characterized by brevity and simplicity (Fylaktou, 2019, p. 315).

The second period begins with the *Delfikos ĩmnos* (Delphic Hymn/Δελφικός Ύμνος), continues with *Epinikoi* (Epinicions/Επίνικοι), reaches its peak with *Syneidisi* (Consciousness/Συνείδηση) and continues until the *Orfika* (*Orphic*/Ορφικά). Ancient Greek myths occupy a prominent place, especially in his work titled *Syneidisi*. Sikelianos' references to the heroic figures of Heracles and the Argonauts function as a literary device to transcend the historical and political turmoil of the Balkan Wars. The heroic deeds and moral values associated with the gods and heroes are proffered as a moral compass for the generation that experienced the Balkan Wars, especially for the youth of Greece. The mythological repertoire of this period, in contrast to the more limited range of the first period, draws upon the full breadth of ancient Greek mythology. The gods Dionysus and Apollo, the goddess Demeter, and especially the hero Heracles, hold a permanent place in his work *Lyrkos Vios* (Fylaktou, 2019, p. 318).

The last period of ancient Greek myths in *Lyrkos Vios* began around 1935 with the work *Orfika* and reached its peak with the *Epinikoi* during World War II and the National Resistance (1940-1946).⁹ Among the gods, Dionysus and Demeter are emphasized, while other mythological characters like Adonis and Daedalus also stand out. The poetic language of this period utilizes metaphors and symbols to convey both transcendent spiritual experiences and specific historical circumstances. It is observed that the poet's enduring optimism persisted even during the tumultuous period of World War II. Ancient myths constitute a fundamental instrument for Sikelianos in both formulating his contemporary identity and envisioning future possibilities (Fylaktou, 2019, p. 318).

Sikelianos, who unwaveringly believed in temporal regeneration, where the sources of the future time are found among the ruins of the past, revived his poetic voice with the idea that gods, nymphs, and all kinds of mythological beings jumped out from the ruins, narrating their stories (Ladia, 1983, p. 14). Perhaps more than any other writer, Sikelianos extolled the inherent nobility of humanity and maintained a steadfast belief in the continued existence of the ancient gods in familiar forms (Keeley, 2019, p. 147).

9 The Greek National Resistance comprised armed and unarmed groups from across the political spectrum, united in their resistance to the Axis occupation of Greece during World War II.

Analysis of the Poem *Daedalus*

Daedalus, a celebrated figure in the ancient world for his skills in architecture, craftsmanship, and invention, possessed a remarkable intelligence and creative flair, especially in the fields of architecture, sculpture, and stonemasonry. His skills were so astonishing that he was said to have learned these arts directly from the Goddess Athena. The sculptures produced by Daedalus, who became famous for perfecting the sculpture technique, were so remarkably realistic that it was rumoured that they possessed the capacity for movement, and even locomotion, if not physically restrained. While previous masters built the statues with their eyes closed and their arms hanging down to their sides, Daedalus stood out as the first person who added eyes to the statues and also dared to separate the legs and move the arms away from the body to make them look like they were moving (Kakridis, 1986, p. 37).

When his nephew Talos, who worked as his apprentice, invented a saw inspired by the snake's jaw, Daedalus became jealous and killed him by throwing him down from the Acropolis. When the murder was revealed, he was exiled from Athens. Daedalus went to Crete, where he became the chief architect for King Minos, and built the Labyrinth, which consisted of winding corridors in which the king imprisoned the Minotaur.¹⁰ Concerned about the life of Theseus, the Athenian hero who had volunteered to confront the Minotaur, Princess Ariadne, daughter of the king, turned to the cunning architect Daedalus for assistance. Upon the advice of Daedalus, Ariadne provided to Theseus a ball of thread, a crucial tool for his perilous quest. Theseus methodically unrolled the thread as he navigated the intricate corridors of the Labyrinth, using the thread as a guide to retrace his path and escape the deadly maze. However, when King Minos learned of Daedalus' role in facilitating Theseus' escape from the Labyrinth, he imprisoned both Daedalus and his son Icarus in the Labyrinth. Utilizing the ingenious design of wings made from feathers and wax, Daedalus and Icarus attached the contraptions to their bodies, enabling them to soar above the Labyrinth and escape their imprisonment. Daedalus, ever mindful of the limitations of their makeshift wings, warned Icarus to maintain a moderate altitude. However, Icarus, filled with youthful exuberance and a desire to touch the heavens, ignored his father's advice and ascended

¹⁰ A mythical creature depicted as having the head and tail of a bull combined with the body of a man. The word Minotaur originates from the Ancient Greek "Μινώταυρος" (Minotauros), a compound of the name "Μίνωας" (Minos) and the noun "ταύρος" (tauros) meaning "bull", thus it is translated as the "Bull of Minos". According to tradition, every nine years, the people of Athens were obliged by King Minos to select fourteen young noble citizens to be sacrificed to the Minotaur as reparation for the death of Minos' son, Androgeos.

towards the sun. The intense heat from the sun softened the wax that secured Icarus' wings to his body. As the adhesive weakened, the wings detached, and Icarus fell into the sea (Grimal, 2022, pp. 134, 317).

Sikelianos, who strived to perceive the ancient myths that reveal universal values as a sacred and mystical source of wisdom, delving into the depths of the human soul, attached particular significance to the mythological character named Daedalus, whose story is given above. It is seen that he elevated this significance to a higher level by also writing a tragedy titled *O Daidalos stin Kriti*, in addition to the poem *Daedalus*.

The poem examined in this study is included in the collection titled *Orfika* and was first published in the magazine *Nea Estia*, dated 15 June 1938 (Politis, 2009, p. 242). In this poem, we observe a new approach to the myths, particularly the ancient Greek myths, enabling the poet to adopt a more assertive and expressive voice. The poet does not merely utilize the mythical material as a framework for personal commentary or experience. Instead, he infuses the myth with deeper significance, offering a unique interpretation and poetic expression of the wisdom inherent within it. Sikelianos elevates the interpretation of myth to a poetic act form, presenting the mythological teachings in a manner that stimulates both cognitive and affective responses.

In this poem, the poet focuses not on Icarus, who, overflowing with youthful exuberance, was driven to an inevitable end, but on Daedalus, the artist dedicated to his work:

Μοίρα στον Ίκαρο ήταν να πετάξει
και να χαθεί... Τι, ως ήβρε σταφνισμένες
τις φοβερές της λευτεριάς φτερούγες
απ' τον τρανό πατέρα του μπροστά του,
η νιότη έριξε μόνη το κορμί του
στον κίνδυνο, κι αν ίσως δεν μπορούσε
το μυστικό, το αγνό τους νά βρει ζύγι!¹¹ (Sikelianos, 2000, lines 1–7)

11 Fate for Icarus was to fly
and to be lost... What, as he found the terrifying
wings of freedom prospering
from his mighty father in front of him,
youth alone cast his body
into danger, and if perhaps he could not
find the balance of their secret, pure essence.

What brought Icarus so close to the sun was the unstoppable sense of youth within him; thus, a different ending could not have been expected for him. The poet sets aside this part of the myth's mystery and turns his attention to the more compelling figure of Daedalus. This part is illuminated from the father's perspective, as it becomes clear from the opening lines of the poem that the father fatally encourages the youthful bravery (Papadaki, 1995, p. 32).

Sikelianos commences with a mythological framework and a presentation of a purportedly real event, yet gradually evolves toward an emotional nucleus that serves as the basis for the poem's subsequent interpretation. The event presented as factual is the lamentable loss of Icarus. The emotional realm surrounding the event is characterized by mourning, especially the mourning of those who have not yet experienced significant suffering. The narrative established in the opening lines also informs the structural framework of the poem. The poet's role as a narrator begins with the emotional outbursts of people who are unable to bear the loss of Icarus. The poet's interpretation stands in contrast to the mourning of those who are unaccustomed to pain. The poet's arguments against mourning are ultimately intended to highlight Daedalus' position as a heroic figure who transcends ordinary human limitations. At this point, the poet's argument is based on particular events from Daedalus' life history. As will be seen in the following lines, the idea that earth and sky could become one and merge, the disintegration of the arms and legs of statues, and the creation of wings to break free from the earth—all these events lead Daedalus to the decision to resist the urge of paternal feelings (Fylaktou, 2003, p. 307).

As can be inferred from the lines above, Icarus, embodying the impulse of youth, fails to achieve a balance between freedom and restraint. Due to his youth, he is driven into danger and destruction, as he lacks the secret of the balance between body and soul, one of the most significant ideals of antiquity. Conversely, Daedalus, a creative genius, dreams of wings on his shoulders, a fighter who rises above the crowd and the boundaries of mourning. Those who mourn for this inevitable fate, along with their untested and weak companions, perceive Daedalus as a cruel, self-centered figure, perhaps even as one chasing the impossible, for he invented the wings that may have led to the tragic loss of his son. However, Sikelianos sees in Daedalus, an artist who, through his unwavering dedication to his craft, seeks to elevate himself and humanity above the mundane constraints of existence and the confines of grief. Here, the poet masterfully anthropomorphizes the mythical teachings

and, more importantly, allows his voice to carry this magnificent style that befits the greatness of his belief (Keeley, 1987, pp. 86–88).

The architect of the Labyrinth, utilizing his own inherent fortitude, discovers the path to freedom entirely on his own. He sees the sky and the earth as a whole, and with this vision, he embarks on a journey of salvation. This section, which also conveys a perspective on a person who views the world in such a manner, adds a philosophical dimension at the point of existence. From the following lines, it is understood that the person perceives life in a holistic manner, seeing the connection between the material and the spiritual, the divine and the worldly. The poet proposes that human consciousness actively shapes the world through the process of perception. Here, the poem embraces a worldview that does not separate matter from spirit, seeing them as interconnected parts of a whole:

Μ' αν άντρας που, απ' την πρώτην ηλικία του,
είπε ουρανός και γη πως ήταν ένα,
και στια του κόσμου η ίδια η συλλογή του.¹² (Sikelianos, 2000, lines 19–21)

Daedalus is regarded as the first master who succeeded in freeing ancient sculptures from immobility and giving them life and movement by spreading their legs and extending their arms alongside them. In the following lines, the poet focuses solely on the aspect of freeing the hands and feet of the sculptures, without making any references to the eyes. At this point, Daedalus becomes the symbol not only of the master who liberated the limbs of the statues from the stasis, but also of the struggle to liberate the human being spiritually and emotionally. By liberating statues and creating mechanical beings that represent humanity, Daedalus assumes the role of a savior for humankind. He becomes the guide not only for craftsmen but also for people who desire freedom (Fylaktou, 2003, pp. 304–305). He aspires to imbue the inanimate with life, give life to the inert, and bring it to the light that symbolizes knowledge, truth, and hope:

αν άντρας
που είδε πως όλα σε ταφής εικόνα
τ' ανθρώπινα είναι, κι οι ψυχές και τα έργα·
κι όπως στ' αγάλματα έλυσε και χέρια
και πόδια, να βαδίζουν μοναχά τους

12 But if a man, from his earliest youth,
said that the sky and earth were one,
and in the focus of the world is his own vision.

στους δρόμους του φωτός, αναλογίστη
και τις καρδιές να λύσει των ανθρώπων.¹³ (Sikelianos, 2000, lines 25–30)

For Sikelianos, Daedalus is also a symbol of the struggle for leadership. He is a visionary leader who makes plans to realize his dreams. Beyond infusing the ancient myth with new content, the poet reshapes it by dramatizing the event, offering the myth in a different form. To emphasize the distinction between Daedalus and immature individuals, the poet depicts a scene in which men and women speak contemptuously about Daedalus' decision to abandon his deceased child and continue flying. (Fylaktou, 2003, p. 305).

Sikelianos adds a different dimension to Daedalus' escape from the Labyrinth. The tomb, intended as a place of confinement, ironically becomes a gateway to immortality. His nature undergoes a radical transformation within death. He flies out of the Labyrinth with the wings woven by his thoughts, and ultimately defeats death and frees himself from the passions that represent the masses and the emotions that dominate the souls of weak people. The poet calls upon Daedalus, the savior of humanity, to help him overcome human values (Fylaktou, 2003, p. 309):

αν άντρας που κλεισμένος
στη φυλακή πόχτισε ο ίδιος —όπως
η κάμπια υφαίνει μόνη της τον τάφο
'πού θα κλειστεί, απ' το θάνατο ζητώντας
ν' αλλάξει φύση σύρριζα— νειρεύτη,
στα βάθη του Λαβύρινθου, φτερούγες
πως φύτρωναν στους ώμους του, κι αγάλι
αγάλι η πλήθια αγρύπνια του μετρήθη
με τ' όνειρο, και βγήκε αυτή νικήτρα.¹⁴ (Sikelianos, 2000, lines 36–44)

13 If a man
who saw that all human things are but an
image of burial, and souls and deeds alike,
and as he released both hands and feet
from statues, to walk on their own along
the paths of light, also contemplated freeing
the hearts of humankind.

14 If a man who, imprisoned in the cell
he himself built —like the caterpillar
that weaves its own tomb to be
confined in, seeking from the death
to change his nature from the root — dreamed,
in the depths of the Labyrinth, wings that
were sprouting from his shoulders, and slowly
his abundant wakefulness was measured against
the dream, and the wakefulness emerged victorious.

The lines above, depicting a symbolic and existential struggle for liberation and rebirth from the self-imposed traps or prisons within, emphasize the limitations and psychological ties in human life. The image of the caterpillar digging up its grave is used as a powerful metaphor for the desire for transformation and rebirth. Moreover, the line "...wings were sprouting from his shoulders..." symbolizes that humans possess wings like Icarus, and this image expresses the deep desire for freedom by escaping the confines of the prison and reaching for freedom.

Despite the misinterpretations of those who label Daedalus a "cruel father," for persisting in his journey to save his own life, the following lines reflect a vision of creation to which this hero clings to (Keeley, 1987, p. 69):

στη γη μεγάλα κύματα απ' αστάχου—
 πιο πάνω κι απ' τον όχλο, κι απ' το κύμα
 που το παιδί του σκέπασε, πιο πάνω
 κι απ' του πένθους τα σύνορα, να σώσει
 με την ψυχή του την ψυχή του κόσμου.¹⁵ (Sikelianos, 2000, lines 55–59)

Although the voice here displays personal characteristics, it possesses qualities markedly distinct from the majority of the poet's early works. In this poem, the poet no longer assumes the role of a prophet delivering a divine message through a sacred rhetoric. By positioning the myth at the core of the poem, the poet enables it to take on a life of its own within the narrative, subsequently immersing himself into the myth and intertwining his personal experience with it. However, to prevent the personal dimension from overshadowing the metaphorical aspect, the poet redirects his focus toward the meaning generated by the myth (Keeley, 1987, p. 71). In the following lines, Daedalus is portrayed as the guardian of those who, by overcoming the fear of death, strive to save the soul of the world through artistic expression (Papadaki, 1995, p. 33). The poet bestows upon Daedalus the title of "father" not only for his role as the progenitor of artisans but also as a symbol of leadership for all who challenge the established order and seek to change it through thought or action (Fylaktou, 2003, p. 307):

15 On the earth, great waves of wheat—
 higher than the crowd, and above the wave
 that covered his child, higher
 even than the borders of grief, to save
 with his soul the soul of the world.

Μα εσύ, τρανέ πατέρα,
 πατέρα όλων εμάς οπού σε εικόνα
 ταφής, από την πρώτην ηλικία μας,
 έχουμε ιδεί τα πάντα και, ή με λόγο
 ή με σμιλάρι, με την πνοή μας όλη
 απάνω απ' το ρυθμό το σαρκοφάγο
 να υψωθούμε αγωνιόμαστε.¹⁶ (Sikelianos, 2000, lines 72–78)

In the final lines seen below, the poet's voice recedes in the background, with the first-person plural employed to represent those who struggle. The poet's admiration for the rebellious character stands out prominently in the poem and reaches its peak in the final line. Daedalus achieves eternal existence, transcending the limitations of the earthly realm and becoming identified with the rebellious figure of Lucifer (Fylaktou, 2003, p. 307). The poet approaches Daedalus with a sense of admiration, recognizing his enduring legacy and his transformative influence on both the material and intellectual dimensions of human existence. Individuals characterized by a lively and honest will perceive Daedalus as an enduring power, a herald of the dawn, perpetually inspiring thoughts of renewed hope and future possibilities:

τις ώρες του όρθρου, που μοχτούμε ακόμα,
 σαν κι οι νεκροί κι οι ζωντανοί πλαγιάζουν
 στον ίδιο ανόνειρο ή βαριόνειρο ύπνο,
 μη σταματάς να υψώνεσαι μπροστά μας
 σκαλώνοντας με αργές, στρωτές φτερούγες
 τον ουρανό της Σκέψης μας ολοένα,
 Δαίδαλε αιώνιε, απόκοσμος Εωσφόρος!¹⁷ (Sikelianos, 2000, lines 91–97)

16 But you, mighty father,
 father of all of us, who in an image of
 burial, from our earliest youth,
 we have seen everything and, either with words
 or with a chisel, with all our breath
 we struggle to rise above the
 thing that prey on our minds.

17 In the hours of dawn, when we still struggle,
 as if both the dead and the living lie down
 in the same dreamless or heavily slumber,
 do not cease to rise in front of us
 climbing with slow, steady wings
 ever higher into the sky of our Thought,
 Daedalus eternal, otherworldly Lucifer!

Sikelianos associates Daedalus with Lucifer, acknowledging not only the hero's skillful and rebellious character but also his capacity to illuminate the poet's thoughts, like the star that shares the same name (Fylaktou, 2003, p. 308). The line "... do not cease to rise in front of us..." highlights the importance of Daedalus as a guide or symbol of human aspiration, illuminating the path toward self-discovery and spiritual enlightenment. The phrase "sky of thought," where he ascends with slow and steady wings, symbolizes the ideal of knowledge and spiritual ascension.

Conclusion

We see that Greek mythology continues to be a reference point for poetic exploration, offering poets a rich source of inspiration and symbolic resonance. Sikelianos, who extensively incorporated elements of the ancient past into his works, amplified these motifs to grand proportions, as demonstrated in many of his poems. He aimed to revive the spirit of the ancient Greeks, constructing all his works on this basis. He created images and symbols in his poetry using the ancient Greek tradition. These elements reflect not only the poet's aesthetic inclination but also underscore the aspiration to achieve cultural revival through the ancient spirit in his poetry. In addition, the famous Delphic Idea, which constitutes the core of Sikelianos' worldview, and the accompanying Delphi Festivals were significant aims for the poet. Through these, he sought to preserve and promote timeless human values such as freedom, peace, justice, and friendship, fostering a harmonious and equitable world.

In the poem analyzed in this study, Daedalus is depicted as a brilliant craftsman and architect, renowned as the father of Icarus. This character symbolizes the spirit of freedom and the boundless potential of the human mind, both as an artist and an innovator. At this point, the poem calls for a life imbued with truth, light, and meaning, emphasizing the importance of transcending the limiting aspects of existence in the pursuit of freedom. It expresses the deep longing for a world characterized by physical and spiritual freedom, liberated from the burdens of mortality. Through the figure of Daedalus, Sikelianos engages with profound human concerns, exploring the intricate interplay of inner conflicts, the creative impulse, and the fundamental questions of existence. By reimagining the figure of Daedalus through a contemporary lens, the poet establishes a bridge between the past and the present, inviting readers to contemplate the enduring relevance of ancient myths in addressing the challenges and aspirations of modern humanity. The story of Daedalus occupies a significant place in Sikelianos'

literary universe, serving as a vehicle for exploring the themes of creativity, freedom, and the transcendence of boundaries. The poet's engagement with this character brings the legacy of the past into the present, illuminating universal themes that resonate with the depths of the human spirit.

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