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## Editor's Preface

**Mustafa Kirca**

Editor-in-Chief

Çankaya University

We are honored to present the 17/2 issue of the *Çankaya University Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences*. As in our earlier volumes, we have received valuable submissions at the intersection of literary studies, comparative literature, linguistics, translation and cultural studies for the current issue, and we are certain that the issue will emphasize opportunities for future research into the topics it encompasses like emotional language processing in bilingualism, underground topography in Wright and Ellison, empire and exception in Kaplan's work, ecocritical analysis of Majundar's poems, emotion in Medieval Anglo-Norman tradition, gendered robotic bodies in McEwan and Newitz, hegemonic subject's revolt against authority in Ravenhill, Hare's memoir of Coronavirus, Collins' framed narrative and its anti-mimetic function, linguistic obscurity in Conrad, and challenging ableism in Belluso. We would like to thank all the authors wholeheartedly for their scholarly contributions and for their collaboration throughout. We would like to extend our sincere gratitude to our referees who have volunteered to help with the process of blind reviewing and devoted their valuable time to evaluating submissions, for their insightful comments and efforts towards improving our manuscripts.

As faculty members of Çankaya University, we are proud to be among the distinguished institutions located in the band of 101–150th of the *Times Higher Education (THE) Young University Rankings 2023*, and 401-500th of *World University Rankings 2023*.\* *Times Higher Education*, which creates university rankings to assess university performance on the global stage depending on the three main missions of university activity, namely, research, teaching, and impact, features Çankaya University among the top universities for the fourth consecutive year. Trusted worldwide by students, teachers, governments and industry experts, *Times Higher Education (THE)* rankings are the very proof of Çankaya University's increasing investment in research to ensure a welcoming environment for international students, and to foster good relationships with industries and international institutions for the last twenty-six years. *Çankaya University Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences* has also benefitted from this success since it was first issued in 2004. We, as the editors of the *Çankaya University Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences*, would like to thank the Board of Trustees and the Presidency of Çankaya University, and the Dean's Office of the Faculty of Arts and Sciences for their continuous support.

\* <https://www.timeshighereducation.com/world-university-rankings>



# A Critical Analysis of Mark Ravenhill's *The Cane*: Hegemonic Subjects' Revolt against Authority

Mark Ravenhill'in *Sopa* Adlı Oyununun Eleştirel Analizi:  
Hegemonik Öznelerin Otoriteye Başkaldırısı

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## Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to analyse the hegemonic approach taken toward students in the British education system in the past from the perspectives of both the students and the teachers within the framework of structure and superstructure and to search for the erroneous disciplinary beliefs prevalent then. Mark Ravenhill chooses *The Cane* for the title of his play ironically, a choice which draws attention to the cane as a punishment tool employed by the authority to exercise its hegemony, and to the deficiencies of the previous educational system. Turning into a display of hegemonic power and authority, this punishment act will be analysed through the term hegemony, believed to have been given its final meaning by Antonio Gramsci, a Marxist theorist. To Gramsci, this term is defined as the sovereign demonstrating its supremacy through ideological devices/techniques in institutions such as schools and churches, where large numbers of members present in civil society. *The Cane* (2019) by Mark Ravenhill, a pioneer of In-yer-face movement in British theatre, is the product of a flawed discipline-based hegemonic practice England used in the past when ideologies produced theses and antitheses, based on a chain of events revolving around a chain of mistakes.

**Keywords:** hegemony, education, *Cane*, punishment, power

## Öz

Bu makalenin amacı, geçmiş yıllarda İngiltere'nin eğitim sisteminde öğrenciler üzerinde gerçekleştirilen hegemonik yaklaşımı öğrenci-öğretmen açısından yapı-üst yapı bağlamında ele almak ve o dönemin disiplin anlayışındaki yanlışlıkları irdelemektir. Oyununun başlığını ironik şekilde *Sopa (The Cane)* olarak seçen Mark Ravenhill, iktidarın hegemonyasını uygulama aracı olarak kullandığı bir cezalandırma aracı olan sopa üzerinden geçmiş dönem eğitim sistemindeki yanlışlıklara dikkat çeker. Bir hegemonik güç ve otorite gösterisine dönüşen bu cezalandırma eylemi, Marksist düşünür Antonio Gramsci'nin nihai anlamını kazandırdığı hegemonya terimi üzerinden değerlendirilecektir. Bu terim, Gramsci'ye göre, egemen olanın, güç göstergesi olarak kendi üstünlüğünü ideolojik aygıtlar/yaklaşımlar kullanarak, sivil toplumun kitleler halinde bulunduğu okul, kilise gibi kurumlarda uygulamaya koyması olarak tanımlanabilir. İngiliz tiyatrosunda In-yer-face akımının da öncülerinden biri olan oyun yazarı Ravenhill'in *Sopa* (2019) oyunu, ideolojilerin kendi içerisinde tez ve antitezler ürettiği bir zaman aralığında İngiltere'nin geçmiş zaman diliminde uygulamaya konulan disiplin temelli yanlış bir hegemonya pratiğinin sonucunda meydana gelen bir dizi hatanın merkeze alındığı olaylar dizisini temel alır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** hegemonya, eğitim, *Sopa*, ceza, güç

## Introduction: The Idea of Hegemony and its Historical Manifestations

As a means of securing unity and togetherness within any community, hegemony has been applied in a variety of ways throughout history. The term hegemony is defined in

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*Cambridge Dictionary* as “the position of being the strongest and most powerful and therefore able to control others” (Hegemony, 2023). The root of this word derives from the Greek *hēgemonia*, a noun formed from the verb *hēgeisthai*, meaning ‘to lead’ in English. Thus, hegemony can be described as a general expression of the superiority intended to be applied over the civil society formed by people coming together in masses. The term civil society, as such, is accepted to have come, in western society, to the forefront with the ideas of thinkers such as Thomas Hobbes, John Locke, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, and Jean-Jacques Rousseau from the mid-17th to the late 18th century. Being one of these figures, Hegel defines civil society as follows:

The creation of civil society is the achievement of the modern world which has for the first time given all determinations of the idea their due. It is, moreover, indeed the case that civil society is a realm of appearance where particularity and egoism lead to measureless excess and ethical life, which is essentially social, that seems to be lost in a riot of self-seeking. (Kumar, 2001, p. 145)

Hegel extends his reflections on civil society with the ethical order he calls *sittlichkeit*, which is structured around “family, civil society and state” (Kervegan, 2018, p. 108). This doctrine is designed as a hierarchical triangle to include the state, which is positioned atop civil society and family, following the state, respectively. The idea is the possible outcome following the non-existence of the state, which would drive both civil society and family into chaos.

Hegel’s moral philosophy is, however, criticized by Karl Marx. This critique is expressed by Fontana, who suggests that “[w]hat Hegel had achieved in thought, Marx asserted, could only be achieved socially and materially through an understanding of social forces in history and through the political and ideological organization made possible by such an understanding” (1993, p. 17). Marx and Engels argue in *The German Ideology* that the state and civil society are inextricably linked, particularly economically and that the former may influence the latter. Marx offers his understanding of the logic of the issue as follows:

The ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas, i.e. the class, which is the ruling material force of society, is at the same time its ruling intellectual force. The class which has the means of material production at its disposal has the control at the same time over the means of mental production, so that thereby, generally speaking, the ideas of those who lack the means of mental production are subject to it. (1998, p. 67)

Another important figure of the above list, Gramsci considers the theories of Marx and Friedrich Engels about sovereignty in the framework of civil and political society. Structure and superstructure are the lenses through which he examines the ideas of political society and civil society. The links the sovereign sets up with the structure to guarantee output are likewise a part of the superstructure. Since capitalism plays such a central role in superstructure interactions, bourgeois notions inevitably permeate the underlying framework. Because of capitalism’s pre-eminence in superstructure interactions, bourgeois notions have seeped into the foundation. Gramsci, who sees this as a cultural problem, therefore attacks the bourgeois culture that seeks to impose itself on the proletariat’s social order. If the people inside the system embrace the values of the bourgeoisie before they have a chance to develop their own, they will be exploited. In this context, Gramsci shows his understanding of the working class and the importance of adult education by highlighting the need for the proletariat to create its own culture:

To the extent that the masses are educated, they will create an independent culture and an independent view of the world in opposition to the existing ones and thus



be able eventually to replace the *alta cultura* of the established intellectuals by a new and different one. (Fontana, 1993, p. 26)

Gramsci considers education the most essential factor in achieving it and argues that it is intellectuals that will provide such an excellent education, so he places a premium on intellectuals who take on the task of transporting information between the structure and the superstructure. Another argument he stresses is related to academics and thinkers. He classifies intellectuals into two camps: the conventional and the organic. As Fontana also emphasizes, the traditional intellectual is related to a certain social construction while organic ones provide help to the advocating the dominant ideology (Fontana, 1993, p. 27).

To explain the constraints imposed by political society and its superstructure on civil society and its structure, Gramsci ultimately adopts Lenin's idea of hegemony. In his definition of hegemony, Lenin means "the leadership of the proletarian forces" which "had to be developed independently" (Howson, 2008, p. 35). Not surprisingly, Gramsci accepts Lenin as "the principal contemporary architect of the modern theory of hegemony" (Howson, 2008, p. 35).

On the other hand, Gramsci considers hegemony to be a kind of repression used by politicians to propagate their beliefs. However, this oppression is not visible to the naked eye and will be accomplished via the pre-eminence of consent. In his view, hegemony is made possible through consent, which enables the system to advance further. Also important is the production and exertion of ideologies on "schools, churches, clubs, journals, and parties – which contribute in molecular fashion to the formation of social consciousness", related to the civil society, by the actions of "the government, courts, police, and army" that "exercise direct domination", all of which belong to the means of political society (Bates, 1975, p. 353). As Manokha also stresses, for Gramsci "a hegemony necessarily requires a moral dimension, that is, a set of universalizable moral values that a ruling group or class adheres to in the exercise of its leadership" (Manokha, 2008, p. 23).

### **Gramsci, Hegemony and Education**

Between the years 1905 and 1908, Antonio Gramsci (1891-1937) was acquainted with Marxism, which had a profound impact on his thinking. His education at the University of Turin included studies in a variety of disciplines, including Philosophy and Literature. He aimed to conduct a comprehensive analysis of society based on Marx's ideas and come up with concepts that could lead to the emancipation of the working class. However, he was forced to leave his university education unfinished owing to the political events in his country and the financial and economic hardships during his school life, which compelled him to consider the importance of education-based struggle in the freedom of less privileged classes (Borg et al., 2002, p. 4). Of the conviction that the existence of a more prosperous and wider mass in his country and the world is dependent upon the education of the working class, he turned his thoughts into a political, revolution-oriented direction and gained a certain amount of prestige within the Italian Communist Party. However, he became a frequent target of criticism for his revolutionary ideals once the fascists came to power in 1922. This criticism centred on the rise of fascism. Although he was entitled to immunity, he was arrested in 1926. Gramsci's time in prison was a demanding experience for him; however, he never lost his ability to observe others and tried to assist those incarcerated. He did so because he believed that even within the confines of a prison, adult education was necessary for the proletarian class to maintain its independence; he is also of the conviction that the subordinate classes needed to free themselves from their dependence on bourgeois intellectuals to develop and disseminate their own culture, as Gramsci often preferred to say and to elaborate their conception of the world and life (Borg et al., 2002, pp. 4-5).

Imprisoned for his belief that individuals should be taught to establish their impressions of the world, Gramsci read voraciously during his confinement, thereby examining society, politics, and the individual as an impartial person. Gramsci, being a versatile thinker, was in a position to examine numerous elements that had proved successful in reaching the inner and outer sections of society, basing his analysis on a particular chain of causes and effects. His work, *Prison Notebooks* (1947), which he authored when imprisoned, has numerous political themes on the issues of a cultural problem, the connection between structure and superstructure, worker dilemma, state, and education. These notebooks also include Gramsci's study and interpretation of the term hegemony. As suggested by Wolfreys, "Antonio Gramsci refers to the cultural or intellectual domination of one school of thought, social or cultural or ideology over another" (Wolfreys, 2001, p. 49). Gramsci's interpretation of the sphere of influence occupied by hegemony functions as "the dominant social group maintains its hegemonic control over subordinate or subaltern social groups not only through the non-coercive assertion of its cultural values and beliefs but also through the coercive potential of its political institutions, such as education and the church" (Wolfreys, 2001, pp. 49-50). He places so much emphasis on the issue that one of the most significant spheres in which hegemony is practiced is education. Borg et al. delve into this by summarising Gramsci's views on modern civilization and the role of institutions, saying:

Modern bourgeois civilization, in Gramsci's view, perpetuates itself through the operation of hegemony- i.e., through the activities and initiatives of a vast network of cultural organization, political movements and educational institutes that instill its conception of the world and its values in every capillary of society. (2002, p. 8)

As a result of Gramsci's research and investigations, the idea that the bourgeoisie views education as a control mechanism and uses even the curriculum as a tool to establish its hegemony over the working class more easily comes to the forefront as a factor that accelerates the spread of bourgeois ideology. This idea becomes clearer since the bourgeoisie sees education as a tool to establish its hegemony on the working class, for the institutions that provide education have the quality of being the cornerstone of an arrangement where the structure and superstructure are linked to one another via intellectuals. Borg et al. focus on this relationship regarding the inclusion of education:

Educational relationships constitute the very core of hegemony, that any analysis of hegemony necessarily entails a careful study of educational activities and institutions, and that neither the complexities of hegemony nor the significance of education can be understood as long as one thinks of education exclusively in terms of the "scholastic" relationship. (2002, p. 9)

Gramsci brings up the impact of hegemony not only on students but also on instructors, in the context of a discourse on the link between school and education as well as the student-teacher dynamic. Since teachers are required to carry out the tasks assigned to them, they are thrust into the spotlight as hegemonic subjects of the sovereign system in which they play the role of implementers.

### **Mark Ravenhill as a Playwright with Questions to Ask**

Mark Ravenhill is renowned as a writer who can effectively capture the realities of his day and translate them into his plays. He brings all of the inconsistencies that exist within society to the stage with the aggressive plays he writes. He describes what inspires him to write and how he manages to compose his plays:

To capture the truth of this new world we live in is an exciting ambition. To write about the virtual markets of images and information spinning around us and

threatening to drag us into perpetual postmodern giddiness. To write about the hypocrisy of our calls for universal freedom and democracy as we destroy the world for profit. (2003, p. 45)

Peter Billingham contends that the moral sensibility shown in Ravenhill's plays is what sets them apart from the works of other playwrights: His is "a contemporary political and moral sensibility that is often in active resistance to what he perceives as the listless vacuity of many postmodern narratives" (Billingham, 2007, p. 135). Although Ravenhill is most often associated with the play *Shopping and Fucking*, which deals with sexuality, consumerism, and commodification, the social and political issues of society are also the elements that guide his understanding of art.

Dan Rebellato, on the other hand, places emphasis on the moral component of Ravenhill's plays and how they throw light on society. He also argues that the playwright is adept at highlighting the challenges faced by the current society:

He has a reputation among some critics as a theatrical enfant terrible purveying sexually explicit, sensationalist, shack-loaded dram. And there is stuff in the plays one could point to, but Ravenhill is profoundly moral in his portraiture of contemporary society. His vision is elliptically but recognizably social, even socialist. He addresses not the fragments but the whole, offering us not just some explicit Polaroids, but the bigger picture. (2001, p. x)

Ravenhill creates plays that go beyond the bounds of authority and morality by avoiding the scenes that would push the limitations of the audience, which is the distinguishing trait of plays known as In-Yer-Face (Svich, 2003, p. 89). *The Cane*, on the other hand, is about the impasse in which Edward finds himself because of his use of the 'cane' as a means of discipline in the past, though it was outlawed during the period when the play is set. As can be understood from Ravenhill's phrase "the sum of their actions" for the characters he created, Edward comes to a dead end, which is the sum of the dominant ideology he used to practice (Sierz, 2001, p. 131).

In writing his play *The Cane*, Ravenhill's attention seems to be drawn both to the use of physical punishment in English schools before 1986 and to the impact of this policy on students of younger generations. There is no overt act of onstage violence; rather, we find male students beaten in the past. This information is conveyed via dialogues. It is likely that Ravenhill has purposefully minimized the number of violent elements in the story and provided a restricted image for the audience to evaluate their own lives according to what they see.

### ***The Cane* through the Lens of Hegemonic Theory**

The cane as a notorious tool for punishment in previous decades, after which Ravenhill's play is named, is a palpable object and a potent metaphor (Billington, 2018). The play's central character is Edward, a deputy head close to retirement after 45 years at work. He, however, finds his home surrounded by his pupils demonstrating against his momentous role in institutionalized corporal punishment. He lives in his home with his wife, Maureen, who deviates between being a devoted ally and a bullied victim. A third character is his daughter, Anna, long rejected by his father. She is away from home but shows up that morning in an attempt to tranquilize the situation.

The students stoning Edward's house are his previous students beaten by him with canes in line with the system. Trying to learn the underlying reason for the now-emerging courage or daring of the former students to use the stones, Anna learns from her mother that the system no longer uses the cane because of a shift in ideology. His former students,

who are now adults, are after an answer to their question of why the cane is no longer used today though they experienced severe punishments with it. They take it as an act of inequality on them. Edward is accused of the violent act during his post as a deputy principal and a father figure. Dealing with competing ideologies and a societal issue generated by these generational inconsistencies, Ravenhill “offers up a metaphor for a distorted society” (Clapp, 2018, p. 76).

In the play, those who throw stones and bricks are hegemonic subjects of today though victims of the old system. That these subjects have chosen to stage their revolt near their former instructor Edward’s home is a direct result of his being the primary architect of the intellectual hegemony that existed under the previous system. This view of the students can be seen from the perspective of Gramsci, who considers the interaction that exists between instructors and students, as well as the ideological importance of this relationship:

Every relationship of hegemony of necessarily an educational relationship and every educational relationship is a political relationship; the relationship is political and hegemonic not simply because the teacher-student relationship is reciprocal and mutually interacting, but also because each emerges from, and gives rise to, the other, because each is informed by the interests and culture of the other. (Fontana, 1993, p. 26)

A teacher is the one who most effectively transmits the prevailing culture. At this point, the dominant class consistently transmits its own culture as the dominant culture, which is directly proportionate to the interests of the culture to be transmitted. Instructors fall under the category of intellectuals that Gramsci identifies as organic and traditional, and it is required that teachers should be able to readily adapt to the shifting concepts of ideology. If that is not the case, the system will deactivate them. Education has a well-deserved reputation for favouring the prevalent ideology of periodic inequalities that are seen as systematic. It never fails to prepare the way for the emergence of a competing ideology to compete with the existing one. Ravenhill, who adopts a dialectical understanding of theatre in which opposing ideologies can be clearly seen and confronted, illustrates the collision of opposing views through Edward and his daughter Anna. As Hartl states, Ravenhill’s is “[n]ot a theatre of relativism and consensus but a genuinely dialectical theatre where opposing ideas, forces, energies can be fully experienced, embodied and examined and the most difficult even insoluble problems can be witnessed and confronted” (Hartl, 2020, p. 73) This is why in the play Edward’s daughter Anna rejects her father’s influence and works in Academy Schools where, in her opinion, student interaction is handled more civilly than violently.

Anna: Academy schools are not the opposition.  
 Maureen: Oh they are.  
 Anna: I joined the Academy schools movement because it’s the best model to turn around failing schools.  
 Maureen: Marketisation.  
 Anna: To save young people who have been failed by their schools.

(2019, p. 10)

Anna’s willful preference for the Academy Schools is closely related to Gramsci’s concept of individuals: “historically people gained independence from the laws and social hierarchies imposed upon them by ruling minorities only after they attained a greater level of awareness, a higher consciousness” (Borg, et al, 2002, p. 6). Anna is much aware of her father’s attitude, so she tries to create the future she wants for herself and for future generations instead of the one her family wants for her. This shows that she has reached

the level of awareness and consciousness she needs. At this point, the institution that shapes the individual as the source of the production centre of ideas is her choice of school, which serves as the state's ideological apparatus. It is worth considering the ideas of Louis Althusser in this regard:

I believe that the ideological state apparatus which has been installed in the dominant position in mature capitalist social formations as a result of a violent political and ideological class struggle against the old dominant ideological state apparatus, is the educational ideological apparatus. (2014, p. 249)

Education is one of the simplest methods to captivate minds since it allows ideas and concepts to be transmitted along to future generations. The system establishes an ideology to avoid any unforeseen event in the process of producing obedient bodies, considering the potential that there would be people who violate the system. What stands out as the ideological device in Ravenhill's play is the thing that is traditionally known as 'cane'. Anna discusses Maureen's interpretation of the children's rebellion in-depth as "because of the cane" (Ravenhill, 2019, p. 47). When the cane is seen as an ideological instrument, it indicates that they are attempting to address some of the system's faults through violence:

Anna: Where did he cane boys?  
 Maureen: Well at the school of course. Where else would you cane boys?  
 Anna: When?  
 Maureen: When it was legal to cane boys.  
 Anna: That was  
 Maureen: Over thirty years ago. The Head-not this Head, a much older-didn't want it as part of his duties so he made it the duty of the deputy to cane boys. You don't remember. You were a child.  
 (2019, p. 47)

### **Changing Ideological Approaches and Shifting the System Perception**

Althusser claims that this situation is "the reproduction of the condition of production" (2014, p. 148). The previous system's problematic practices, which Maureen also refers to as "a generally recognized practice", are replaced, as the situation evolves, by new ideological practices (Ravenhill, 2019, p. 15). Hegemony is used to form ideas in the manner they are applied because schools are one of the most evident places in which the sovereign's hegemony is implemented, according to Gramsci. Not only does hegemony promote the expansion of the dominant culture but it also detects people who find it difficult to function within it and provides solutions. In the previous system, the hegemony handed the duty of the administrator to the instructor, which indicates that the sovereign would not accept responsibility for their actions once they discover their mistake. Likewise, in his study on *The War Plays* by Edward Bond, Çelik concludes with Bond's intention of condemning "the schools as he sees them as part of the strategy of the governments in shaping the individuals to their taste and approval" (2010, p. 161). When children are raised in an environment characterized by violence and fear, such behaviours are more likely to be repeated when they become adults as evidenced by Anna's statement: "a man who is teaching you every day was, in fact, a beater of children" (2019, p. 49).

Zizek claims that this kind of violence, which he refers to as systemic violence, is "the often-catastrophic consequences of the smooth functioning of our economy and politic system" (2008, p. 2). The system's inefficiencies as a consequence of erroneous ideological decisions contribute to the tendency of caned students to react to violence by using

violence. The moment Edward says “these things happen. Schools are volatile communities. Things blow up and then blow again”, he appears to be referring to the methodical process of his shifting philosophy (2019, p. 53). The system’s inner contradictions are what leads the inspectors to identify Edward as the prime suspect when they visit the school. The new system affirms that Edward is responsible for the erroneous practices that he accepts under the previous system, even though he obtains the position of school administrator by doing the tasks required of him.

Anna: The inspectors’ findings that your school is-?  
 Maureen: Stop that now.  
 Anna: The inspectors were very damning of your school. The inspectors found poor management, weak discipline, inadequate implementation of pupil voice, terrible results.  
 (2019, p. 54)

A majority is harmed by systematic methods in every century, and the ideological ways that the sovereign has the authority to select vary continuously with the effects of the globalizing world. By stating “school inspections are a major political weapon”, Edward knows who is responsible for the tendency to cane the students (2019, p. 55). This is especially crucial since “if popular thought and mass culture are inherently “political” and ideological, then the thought of the intellectuals and the culture of the “educated” are similarly political and ideological” (Fontana, 1993, p. 15). Edward, however, is afraid to speak up against the hegemonic reality he feels as the system has the potential to disable Edward as well in the event of any opposition. Knowing this, Edward claims that he did not cane the kids alone; rather, the families gave their consent when he realized that Anna was well aware of the situation:

Anna: You never canded without parental permission?  
 Edward: That’s the way it worked. A phone call to the father or mother to give the go ahead.  
 Anna: And if the parents withheld permission?  
 Edward: They very rarely did. I can recall I think only two or three instances in which parental permission was refused.  
 Anna: Hundreds of parents allowed.  
 (2019, p. 66)

The fact that families allow their children to be canded is the most obvious indicator of the manufacturing of consent. The idea of establishing hegemony over the person by verifying one’s consent rather than using force is the key component of Gramsci’s theory of hegemony. This consent can sometimes be caused by fear or sometimes by desperation. Making the consent of the people permanent eliminates obstacles to hegemony’s implementation:

Ideological hegemony exists when there is widespread acceptance throughout society of explanations or narratives about why things are the way they are. In other words, dominating ideologies help to create ideological hegemony. Gramsci termed this idea “consent.” However, Gramsci’s use of consent does not imply an active choice but rather an accumulation of belief built up over time as we participate in social institutions like schools and families and perpetuated through day-to-day experiences such as reading the newspaper, watching films, and talking with friends. (Schiff, 2003, p. 23)

With the permission of families in the play, individual violence becomes institutionalized. While all of this is happening, Edward, who wants to carry on writing the report as if

nothing had happened, becomes alarmed when Maureen informs him that his students have gone to the attic for the school show and taken his clothes because, in accordance with the shifting ideologies, Edward is still hiding the cane on the attic that he must destroy. In the event that the kids find the cane and use it, Edward will be in trouble.

Anna: What's in the attic?  
 Edward: Work to be done.  
 Anna: Is there something in the attic you didn't want?  
 Edward: All forgotten now.  
 Anna: Something you're worried that the kids could have discovered in the attic?  
 Edward: I'm very much a systems man. When I feel my systems have been disrupted then I have a tendency to overreact. Apologies to all concerned.

(2019, p. 78)

After a heated verbal argument, Edward finally admits that the cane—the actual physical evidence of violence—was in the attic. Edward is identified with the system, which is why he is unable to get rid of the cane. Edward feels the need to hide the cane even though the system has changed because his devotion to the existence of the cane—in other words, the hegemonic authority granted to him, makes him feel stronger and holy and leads him to difficult and dangerous paths.

Scene two begins with Edward explaining some of his reasons for hiding the cane, saying that “the cane became part of the almost I suppose part of the furniture” (2019, p. 82). The fact that Edward is used to seeing the cane as an ordinary object indicates that he has placed the power of the sovereign at the centre of his subconscious since “the realization of a hegemonic apparatus, in so far as it creates a new ideological terrain, determines a reform of consciousness and of methods of knowledge” (Porgacs, 2000, p. 192). Edward's mind becomes one with the hegemonic power he can wield as well as the cane.

Anna asks Edward if anyone bled when he abused his students with a cane. The spots on the cane, according to Edward, are not blood, simply a little detail that should be overlooked:

Edward: There were marks. Red marks which in a day or so were gone.  
 Anna: Ah well if it was only marks.  
 Edward: The whole thing was by and large a ritual.  
 Anna: Very painful.

(2019, p. 82)

It is clear from the stains, which Edward described as merely red spots, that he truly felt compelled to protect the system because every defect in the system, rather than being a product of the system itself, arises from a fault in the person who implements it. However, it is hardly possible to ignore the obvious fact of violence. Though aware of everything, Edward is unwilling to remove the cane despite Maureen and Anna's demands that it should be destroyed since it is “disrespectful”:

Edward: Yes, actually disrespectful to the generations of teachers and of boys, the cane which had left its mark on so many lives. I stood with it in my hands and bin below- ready to break but I decided no.

(2019, p. 84)

A hegemonic instrument that once gave Edward the power of expertise is now the one that does Edward the greatest damage. The notion of hegemony, in the sense above, “has a

purely instrumental strategic significance” (Femia, 1981, p. 25). Edward tries to explain everything, but he cannot hide the truth which he knows is in his heart. He finally tells them that he could not throw the cane, but he wrapped it in a blanket and put it in the attic. Maureen is shocked that the cane still exists and is in the attic of the house. Anna and Maureen eventually understand each other, and Anna tells Maureen about their children for the first time. Maureen’s brief emotional outburst is due to a decline in her love for her husband, who, during their marriage, put hegemonic pressure on her both at home and school as Maureen was expected to manage and even obey her husband for years. Maureen responded to the hegemonic pressure she faced by confirming all of Edward’s claims. She is, however, disturbed by the cane’s existence in the house. She had never seen the cane, even though she has known about it for some time. The cane that Edward tried to normalize by saying “it’s only a cane” affected Maureen for years:

Maureen: I would sometimes you know I’d be making your breakfast and I’d wonder is he going to be called upon to cane boy today? Or at the supermarket: I wonder if right now there’s a boy with his hand held out and the cane is being beaten into his palm? Or getting into the bed with you at night: perhaps this is a man who has today caned.

(2019, p. 97)

### **Visible and Invisible Marks of Violence**

While the cane left visible effects on Edward’s students, it also left invisible marks on the minds of a generation on a massive scale. Edward also established the hegemonic power given to him at school over Maureen at home. When Maureen tries to assist Edward, he often treats her poorly as a response. The male hegemony Edward seeks to build is linked to his perception of himself as a powerful force over women. However, this sovereign authority’s strength has weakened as a result of its previous actions, placing it in a vulnerable position. The masculine crisis that arises in several of Ravenhill’s plays also appears in this play. Rebellato suggests, for instance, that “the long line of the surrogate and absent fathers in Ravenhill’s work is indicative of the ‘disappearing paternalism’ of the welfare state in the post-Thatcher era” (Ravenhill, 2001, p. xiii). Maureen does not even have the right to ask questions in this relationship, so she is quite surprised when she sees the cane because the cane is smaller than what she envisioned. And Maureen now begins to realize Edward’s mistakes, culminating in questions on her mind too. She asks whether the cane ever broke in half and Anna wonders if Edward has felt any remorse. Anna pours coffee on Edward’s computer to stop him from preparing the papers because she realizes that Edward attempts to justify himself rather than feeling regretful. Edward has a small anger problem after the coffee spills. Anna tells Edward about the system of the academy schools where she works to make him see that Edward’s system is full of mistakes. However, what Anna is not aware of is the fact that academy schools are also under the influence of a different hegemony. This is because “the moment of hegemony,” a dynamic process that is continuously built and analysed via “various class conflicts or “counter” hegemonic activities, develops by creating dialectics (Morton, 2007, p. 78). The hegemonic system practiced in Anna’s school is not founded on violence, but essentially on consent, on which the easier possession of minds is based:

Anna: All of our Academy schools operate an eyes-forward policy. Students must keep their eyes to the front of the class at all times. At all times, staff must be able to see into student’s eyes. The students must seek permission if at any time they want to turn their head or turn their back upon a teacher. Permission is of course never unreasonably withheld. It’s difficult often for students whose school has only recently acquired Academy status. Where



before there has been only chaos the transition to order can be very challenging. But after a few weeks- I've seen it happen time and time again- eyes forward becomes second nature and a great calmness falls upon the child and spreads through the school.

Edward: Acquiescence.

(2019, pp. 104-105)

While Anna is talking about the characteristics of Academy schools, the fact that students are not even allowed to turn their heads without permission is an example of a fear hegemony established in the school, and again the teacher oversees this. This is in line with the hegemonic power's shifting attitude whereby the form by which power is exerted can be altered (Kiely, 2005, p. 4). Anna believes that her father's approach is wrong, but she is unable to realize that her strategy is also questionable since "she has also inherited her father's inflexible belief in systems" (Billington, 2018). She tells her father that she will take over his school as "mass training has standardized individuals both psychologically and in terms of individual qualification and has produced the same phenomena as with other standardized masses: competition" (Forgacs, 2000, p. 308). Anna has created a hegemony opposed to the hegemony imposed by her father, and she is so preoccupied with her father's mistakes that she has no time to deal with her own hegemony.

Anna's first visit to Edward's house, where she tries to help him get things in order, shows that she also meets the intellectual criteria. However, "Gramsci is concerned both with the analysis of those intellectuals who function directly or indirectly on behalf of a dominant social group to organize coercion and consent and with the problem of how to form intellectuals of the subaltern social groups who will be capable of opposing and transforming the existing social order" (Forgacs, 2000, p. 308). Anna is almost against Edward's use of hegemony because of the extent to which he was dominant at school in the past. Hence, she wants to know everything about how Edward felt when he used the cane. However, after the coffee spilled on his computer, Edward realized it was too late for reports and remembered things he should have done on time but did not:

Edward: I suppose I would have spoken softly and calmly to the boy, I would have reassured the boy that there would be pain but the pain would pass and it was there for reasons of justice and learning.

(2019, p. 108)

In a way, Edward's conversation with Anna forces him to accept his errors. Anna says that the system is right every time she asks about Edward's school from the moment she arrives, but Edward is finally able to face his truth. When a counter-hegemony arises, the fact that teachers who act as implementers of the dominant's periodical ideology have no control over the system they implement shows that the dominant is a victim he can blame for his mistakes. While this sense of dominance once made Edward feel powerful thanks to the cane, now it gives him the role of being a victim of the system, just like children:

Edward: Tell them: there's hundreds of men. Tell them: they'll be in their sixties now, seventies, eighties. Tell them: if a man was a head or a deputy head of school, then the chances are that they gave the cane. Tell them: those men are too proud to ask for your forgiveness. Tell them: those men would be insulted-yes insulted and diminished by your forgiveness. Tell them: if you check the records, you'll be able to locate those men. And if the records have been lost or destroyed tell them to ask every man over sixty who has been a head or deputy head: how many boys did you cane? Tell them: on the whole these men aren't liars and they'll tell you honestly-as best as their memory allows-how many boys they've caned.

Tell them: if you feel it's necessary, set up tribunals, the schools hall, and the town hall, television or web cam. And bring those men-force them from their villas in Spain or their retirement homes, force them from the garden centres and the local history groups-and stand them before the tribunals. And let all the fat bald men who were once boys who were caned accuse those men and let the caned decide what the punishment for those old men should be. And do it so before all of us old men lose our memories and escape to our graves.

(2019, pp. 111-112)

This remarkable confession by Edward demonstrates that he is not the only victim of the system, but that there are many others like him. This situation, which at first does not bother Edward, turns into a nightmare for him. Levin points out regarding such a system's underlying nature of shifts and turns: "whereas, in the beginning, this hegemony brought forth glorious visions as well as visions of violence, it has, in modernity, turned increasingly nihilistic" (1993, p. 5). Edward tried to establish the hegemony of the dominant group over the other students at school. This was not his hegemony, but rather the hegemony of the dominant. Edward agreed to execute duties, showing consent. Edward rarely blamed the system for his consent unawares, and frequently blamed himself. His awareness indicates that he has formed invisible bonds with other victims because "developing a conception of social relations that goes beyond a 'theory of the state-as-force'" (Morton, 2007, p. 77). Although Edward is an intellectual, his behaviour is highly predictable and directable by the dominant. As such, "in the modern world the category of intellectuals, understood in this sense, has undergone an unprecedented expansion" (Gramsci, 2000, p. 307). Therefore, there are conventional intellectual and organic intellectual conceptions when Gramsci categorizes intellectuals. Edward is then included in the organic intellectual category "because he is, precisely, an 'organ' of the people that is in intimate and practical contact with the people." (Fontana, 1993, p. 34).

## Conclusion

Ravenhill's *The Cane* is a drama on the failure of the hegemonic method imposed by the dominant centre in the context of Gramsci's idea of hegemony, and it focuses on the relationship between a teacher and his students. Education is one of the most publicized contexts in which hegemony is exercised. Teachers' responsibility for propagating the ideology of the ruling class is central to Gramsci's theory of education. Ideological methods, however, may vary in step with changes in context and need. The play's central conflict arises when the cane, an instrument of hegemony in the previous system, is now abolished in the new system owing to a shift in philosophy, prompting a student uprising on behalf of those already oppressed by the old methods. The students' decision to react to aggression with violence played a huge role in their decision to stone the home of their former instructor Edward. In the old system, this systemic violence was justified because it maintained dominance, but in the new system, it is condemned. At this point, it may be concluded that hegemony is the pursuit of the most effective domination system by the strategic placement of the opposing power and that the hegemony relationship itself follows a dialectical process. Anna, Edward's daughter, attends an Academy school that has a hegemonic stance in opposition to her father's. Silent politics at academic institutions are understood to place primary emphasis on student agreement, yet the predominance of fear maintains their smooth operation. The reality of unseen psychological violence is shown by this school's policy of punishing children even for glancing in a different direction without permission.

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# Underground Topography of the Political Unconscious in Richard Wright and Ralph Ellison

Richard Wright ve Ralph Ellison'da Politik Bilinçdışının Yeraltı Topografyası

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## Abstract

Coming from different socio-economic backgrounds but sharing the experience of being black intellectuals in the US before the Civil Rights movement, Richard Wright and Ralph Ellison met in New York in 1937. Although they eventually grew distant, their friendship generated some of the most important political writings of African-American literature. They were interested in the ideas of Sigmund Freud and Karl Marx for possible solutions to the "Negro question." They argued for a Freudo-Marxist synthesis as a remedy for the broken black psyche under white supremacist pressure. With its dimension on American racism, the synthesis they proposed offers a distinct and important contribution to the dominantly European canon of the theory. This article investigates the political psychoanalysis of Wright and Ellison as represented in their ideationally interlinked novels, Ellison's *Invisible Man* (1952) and Wright's *The Man Who Lived Underground* (2021). It analyses how their novelistic writing emerges as a dynamic space to elaborate upon a political psychoanalysis through their own race-based version of a theoretical synthesis. Moreover, the study also offers a new approach to new material, as Richard Wright's *The Man Who Lived Underground* remained unpublished until it was recently rediscovered and printed for the first time in 2021.

**Keywords:** Political psychoanalysis, Freudo-Marxism, Richard Wright, Ralph Ellison, *The Man Who Lived Underground*, *Invisible Man*

## Öz

Farklı sosyoekonomik kökenlerden gelen, fakat Sivil Haklar hareketi öncesi ABD'de siyah entelektüel olma deneyimini paylaşan Richard Wright ve Ralph Ellison 1937'de New York'ta tanıştı. Zamanla araları açılmış olsa da dostlukları Afro-Amerikan edebiyatın bazı çok önemli metinlerine ön ayak oldu. İki yazar da "Zenci meselesi"ne olası çözümler için Sigmund Freud ve Karl Marx'ın fikirleriyle ilgileniyorlardı. Freudo-Marksist bir sentezin beyaz üstünlükçü baskı altında hasar gören siyah ruhuna çare olma potansiyelini savunuyorlardı. Yazarların önerdikleri Freudo-Marksist sentez Amerikan ırkçılığına dair boyutuyla teorinin baskın Avrupa kanonuna da farklı bir katkı sunmaktadır. Bu makale düşünsel anlamda birbiriyle ilişkili olan Ralph Ellison'ın *Invisible Man* (Görünmez Adam, 1952) ve Richard Wright'ın *The Man Who Lived Underground* (Yeraltında Yaşayan Adam, 2021) romanlarındaki politik psikanaliz temsillerini incelemektedir. Yazarların bahsi geçen romanlar üzerinden nasıl kendilerine özgü ırk temelli bir teorik sentez sunduklarını tartışmaktadır. Ayrıca, Richard Wright'ın *The Man Who Lived Underground* romanı daha önceden basılmadığı ve yakın zamanda yeniden keşfedilerek ilk defa 2021'de yayımlandığı için çalışma yeni malzemelerle yeni bir yaklaşım da sunmaktadır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Politik psikanaliz, Freudo-Marksizm, Richard Wright, Ralph Ellison, *The Man Who Lived Underground*, *Invisible Man*

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## Introduction

This article examines the political role psychoanalysis plays in the works of Richard Wright (1908-1960) and Ralph Ellison (1914-1994) both of whom utilise psychoanalysis as a key component in their left-aligned anti-racist politics as well as their literature. It focuses on two novels, Ellison's *Invisible Man* (1952) and Wright's *The Man Who Lived Underground* (2021) with a particular emphasis on their "underground" depictions in order to present the distinctive Freudo-Marxism that emerges from the writers' dialogic relationship as it becomes manifest in these two comparable texts. The article argues that the political psychoanalysis as maintained by Wright and Ellison establishes a unique Freudo-Marxism that emphasises the significance of blackness in the formation of the individual as a political subject within the mid-twentieth century US American context. Not only their active engagement with psychoanalysis and communism on issues concerning race and class is a significant aspect of their literary intellectual position, but also their positionality as intellectuals both within the broader black movement and outside it as they shift out of its institutional structures renders their stance distinctive. Accordingly, their writing, fiction and non-fiction, contribute to the debates on the agency and the subjectivity of the individual in Freudo-Marxist thought.

Inspired by a real-life criminal incident about a (white) man who took to hiding in the city's underground sewer system and committed petty crimes, Richard Wright published a short story titled "The Man Who Lived Underground" (Gounard, 1978, p. 381). This story, which first came out in 1944, later turned into a novel with the same title. However, the novel was rejected by the publisher, and it was not until recently that it was rediscovered in the archives and finally published in full as a novel.<sup>1</sup> The story of a black man who is accused of a crime he has not committed and who has been persecuted until he withdraws into the sewer system is of course reminiscent of Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*, which similarly tells the story of a black man who is forced into hiding in the underground tunnels of the city. Given the friendship between Wright and Ellison, it is possible to trace the links between Wright's short story (and the novel) and Ellison's text (Dietze, 1982).<sup>2</sup>

In 1936, Ralph Ellison moved to New York in order to work and save the funds to continue his music education at the Tuskegee Institute in Alabama. While initially fraught with

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<sup>1</sup> Richard Wright's daughter Julia Wright came across the full manuscript of the novel "more than a decade ago" at Yale University's Beinecke Rare Book & Manuscript Library, where his father's manuscripts are held. She brought it to the attention of the Library of America and the text was published unabridged, along with his essay "Memories of my Grandmother," in 2021. The ongoing police brutality in the USA (marked by the shooting of George Floyd in 2020 and its aftermath) seems to have created an urgent and "eerie" sense of timeliness for Julia Wright to eventually pursue the novel's publication, see "Unearthing 'The Man Who Lived Underground,'" *The Harvard Gazette*. Although there are plenty of discussions on the short story version of the text, given its very recent publication, there has not been many scholarly studies focusing specifically on the novel, yet. This article is among the first few that explore the full novel analytically, alongside those of Robin E. Preiss and Douglas A. Jones, Jr.

<sup>2</sup> Ellison had read "The Man Who Lived Underground" in 1944 (Ellison, 1964, pp. 139-140) and he was probably inspired by it. However, although there are obvious similarities between the two works, there are no direct acknowledgments in regard to the connections between them. Rudolf F. Dietze notes that from Wells to Dostoyevsky, Ellison had many literary influences as he was determined to improve his craft (1982, pp. 32-33). While Wright's effect on Ellison's writing at this period in his life is undeniable, his desire to separate himself from Wright is also widely known (Ellison, 1964, pp. 139-140; Lawrence, 2000, pp. 359-352).

misadventures and despite the fact that it essentially ended his music career, this move was fortuitous for Ellison's intellectual education and emergence as a talented writer. He met Langston Hughes in New York who introduced him to Richard Wright. The young Ellison thus embarked upon his literary career imbued with politics, aesthetics, and a strong sense of self-awareness as a black intellectual. As Wright's friendship turned into a mentorship, Ellison grew more and more dedicated to improving his writing and creating a new aesthetic, a powerful voice for the black people before the Civil Rights movement. Although Wright and Ellison grew apart later, their friendship and dialogue were highly influential in Ellison's writing both through and against Wright's presence (Jackson, 2000).

Wright and Ellison shared interests in utilising psychoanalytical theory as a pathway to understanding the black psyche and its socioeconomic constituents and seeking out remedies for the mental health of the black people under racist pressure and segregation. Especially during and after the Second World War with the arrival of Jewish intellectuals from Europe, Freud's ideas (and those of other psychoanalysts) became a point of discussion within their anti-racist struggle. Ellison also met Frederic Wertham through Wright and the three men collaborated in the foundation of the first mental health clinic for black people, Lafargue Mental Hygiene Clinic (active in 1946-1958), in the heart of New York, at the basement of an Episcopal Church (Mendes, 2015). They were interested in the political possibilities of psychoanalysis not only against racism but also as a remedy for the broken black soul under the social injustices of the racially segregated American society. As Badia Sahar Ahad maintains, although they were "less convinced" of its "curative effects" under an "uneven U.S. democracy," Ellison and Wright were integral to the "discursive formation of American psychoanalysis" as a part of the social psychiatry trends prevalent at the time (2010, p. 83).

Moreover, Wright was a member of the Communist Party, and he was also actively involved with the various leftist and black social networks. It was through his introduction that Ellison was also able to get involved with such circles and gain access to valuable social, intellectual, and financial opportunities. In the 1930s and the 1940s, mainstream intellectual resources and channels were white-controlled and black writers had to carve out their own space for public engagement. The Communist Party and its organs were among the very few institutions where opportunities for black writers to showcase their works were present. They were, what Jerry Gafio Watts calls, "social marginality facilitators," the sole aim of which was "to increase, protect, and nurture the individual's artistic and intellectual space" (1994, p. 16) and to alleviate the social marginality of black writers and artists. Consequently, with the help of Wright, Ellison got a job with the Federal Writers' Project and wrote for communist and leftist journals such as *New Challenge*, *New Masses*, *Negro Quarterly* and the like. Even though both writers separated from their Communist Party alliances later on, their intellectual interests in Marx and Freud continued to manifest in their literary and critical writings. Throughout their career, they endeavoured to bring psychoanalysis and Marxism together for a comprehensive engagement with issues concerning the social, economic, and psychological implications of racism in the US.

### **Charting Freud-Marxism: Theorising a Political Psychoanalysis**

"It is not the consciousness of men that determines their existence but their social existence that determines their consciousness" (1859, no pag.), Karl Marx writes in his preface to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, firmly securing the foundations of a political philosophy based on materialism. In earlier Marxist thought the individual has been defined in relation to their role in the revolutionary praxis as an agent of social change. Yet, their

subjecthood as the manifestation of their psychological constitution has been neglected. The initial attempts at Freudo-Marxist syntheses thus focused on the compatibility of Marxism and psychoanalysis at this fundamental level (Lichtman, 1999; Sunat, 2021; Whitebook, 2004). In his *Sex-Pol* essays, for instance, Wilhelm Reich discusses the foundations of both theories to show their points of convergence and divergence as he demonstrates psychoanalysis to be “the germ from which a dialectical-materialist psychology can be developed” (1972, p. 59). He also underlines the materialism and dialectics within psychoanalytical theory (pp. 27-48).

With the trauma of two world wars and totalitarian destruction in the middle of the twentieth century, both psychoanalytical and Marxist theorists were compelled to rethink their fundamental ideas. Sigmund Freud developed his instinct theory further by elaborating upon the “death” instinct after World War I, while the shocking outcome of Enlightenment rationality in the form of the Nazi ideology and World War II drove the Marxists of the Frankfurt School to engage with psychoanalytical concepts along the lines of agency, subjecthood, and autonomy. In *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer argue for the Enlightenment’s need for self-examination at the “intertwinement of rationality and social reality” and against its self-destructive nature (2002, p. xviii). Enlightenment has become akin to what it had criticised and sought to unravel. The inequality of the old order has been replaced by a repressive equality, the triumph of which was the “Hitler Youth” as “the unity of the manipulated collective consists in the negation of each individual” (p. 9). As Joan Alway notes, the modern subject “has become a pseudo-individual, an automaton” (1995, p. 41).

Through their reading of Odysseus’s journey as an allegory of the dialectic of Enlightenment, Adorno and Horkheimer incorporate Freud’s theories of the instincts and the psychic apparatus into their Marxist critique of Enlightenment as self-examination. They argue that Odysseus and his men are labourers who have renounced their subjecthood –both master and slave– in their resistance against the sirens. For the sake of efficiency and practicality, they are alienated from their sense of individuality and thus they have regressed (Adorno and Horkheimer, 2002, pp. 27-28). Their reading equates the labour-subject relationship to one of repression as represented by the psychic negotiation between the id and the ego. Between self-preservation and self-destruction, the temptation of the sirens is sublimated. For Adorno and Horkheimer, Odysseus’s narrative becomes the narrative of the failure of Enlightenment (Sherratt, 1999, p. 39).

While Adorno and Horkheimer chose one of the most canonical texts of western literature for their Freudo-Marxist critique, at the margins of the European theoretical canon other distinctive attempts at incorporating psychoanalysis and Marxism were undertaken. As literary intellectuals, Richard Wright and Ralph Ellison depict their own versions of and alternative engagements with Freudo-Marxism across the Atlantic. The alienated black subjecthood in the heart of the US as depicted by Wright and Ellison establish and contribute to a distinct kind of intellectual liminality that is both within and the other at the same time. The writers’ presentations of Freudo-Marxism reveal a thorough knowledge of and an active engagement with the theories, while still maintaining a distinct critical stance in regard to their possibilities and limitations. The writers elaborate upon the implications of both psychoanalytical and Marxist theories, challenge their canonical presumptions, and propose their own versions. Their writings are platforms for contemplation, elaboration, and critique whereby theories of Marx and Freud, of revolution and subjecthood, of the political and the personal are reconsidered in the liberating space of narrative. Furthermore, both writers



complement their novelistic writing with their non-fiction texts, contributing to the development of the broader theoretical framework through their distinct positionalities.

Adorno and Horkheimer's critique of Enlightenment charts a map for the discussion of this article, as the inherent dichotomies in racial, Marxist, and psychoanalytical discourses are all products of Enlightenment thinking. While Marx's economic philosophy and historical materialism requires reason and scientific methodology to understand the world and to change it (Nielsen, 1988), Freud's psychoanalytical theory is driven by medical science and reason in the affirmation of rationality against irrationality (Altman, 2000). Marx and Freud are a part of Enlightenment's discursive continuum that promoted reason as the basis for what was deemed maturity and civilisation. This basis was the ideological fault line that was exploited to establish the hegemony of the Europeans over the indigenous populations in the colonised lands and to dehumanise black people and justify slavery in the US. Read in relation to this discursive continuum, Freudo-Marxism in the works of Wright and Ellison stand out as a dialogic ideal proposed through and against Enlightenment thinking.

### **Writers in Dialogue**

Born to emancipated grandparents and raised in the deep racism and poverty of the American South, Richard Wright grew up with a strong sense of resistance to the injustices of his circumstances (Wallach, 2010). However, it was not until he migrated to Chicago that he was introduced to organised political thought. Once he became a member of the Communist Party, he sought to express the voices of the oppressed black people. Yet, his desire for a life of the written word later led to his disillusionment with its internal politics. In "I tried to be a communist," he writes,

It was not the economics of Communism, nor the great power of trade unions, nor the excitement of underground politics that claimed me; my attention was caught by the similarity of the experiences of workers in other lands, by the possibility of uniting scattered but kindred peoples into a whole. (1944, no pag.)

The dehumanising experience of slavery, the constant threat to life following emancipation, and the stark poverty that oppressed black lives motivated Wright to pursue questions of agency, autonomy, and collective action. Naturalism with its harsh but powerful form provided Wright with the platform to explore the experiences of the dispossessed.

Sigmund Freud's theories inform the psychic world of Wright's naturalism. "Yes; these days everybody was talking about 'complexes' and the 'unconscious'; and a man called Freud" (Wright, 1965, p. 61): with the shock of a freak accident resulting in the death of a little boy, *Savage Holiday's* (white) protagonist is overwhelmed with guilt and panic. Through his noir story of suppressed sexuality and violence, Wright portrays an elemental version of the repressed and the unconscious. In "Psychiatry Comes to Harlem," he argues that psychologically, repressed need goes underground, gropes for an unguarded outlet in the dark and, once finding it, sneaks out, experimentally tasting the new freedom, then at last gushing forth in a wild torrent, frantic lest a new taboo deprive it of the right to exist" (1946, p. 49). Wright advocated psychological support for the black people whose poverty and disenfranchisement under a brutalising racism destroyed any sense of selfhood. With his friend, the German psychiatrist Fredric Wertham, he founded the Lafargue Mental Hygiene Clinic for the poor, the black, and the marginalised. As Gabriel N. Mendes shows, the clinic held "a distinctly radical confrontation of the psychic costs of anti-black oppression" (2015, p. 9) and became "an underground extension of democracy" (Ellison, 1995b, p. 320). Wright

portrays his opinions as such in his novel *The Man Who Lived Underground*, in which he depicts the effects of white supremacist violence on the black psyche. As the protagonist Fred Daniels escapes his unjust prosecution and hides in the sewer system, the duality between the city and the underworld reflects the topography of the un/conscious psyche.

Probably inspired by and in some ways emulating Wright's "the man who lived underground," Ralph Ellison portrays a black protagonist finding himself a life underneath the city in his *Invisible Man*. At the end of his narrative the protagonist says, "I'm an invisible man and it placed me in a hole -or showed me the hole I was in, if you will" (Ellison, 1995a, p. 432). As the novel presents, he is not forced into this "hole" just as a black subject under the gaze of the white supremacist. He is also invisible to the black gaze that invests his subjecthood with roles and meanings that befits tightly defined parameters and denies him agency otherwise. His invisibility, therefore, provides him with an ontological freedom, a liberation through non-being. His subterranean excursion suggests multiple readings, one of which naturally follows the psychic torment experienced by black people in the segregated American society. The ghosts of the collective unconscious haunt black subjecthood both in contrast to whiteness and relationally within blackness. Very much like the labyrinths of Wright's *The Man Who Lived Underground*, the underground world of Ellison's *Invisible Man* offers an experiment in regression and psychic exploration. Ellison's unnamed narrator survives the experience with a new sense of duty, as "even an invisible man has a socially responsible role to play" (Ellison, 1995a, p. 439).

Unlike Wright, Ellison had a strong familial support and a good formal education despite the hardships of poverty and racism. He had a cursory reading of both Marx and Freud as early as his college years and their theories "had given Ellison new conceptual language" for a critical perspective (Jackson, 2007, p. 133). However, once he moved to New York and met Langston Hughes and Richard Wright, he was introduced to organised black communism. Wright in particular was fundamental in the initial development of his politics and literature. Ellison came to believe that communism was the answer to racism (Jackson, 2007, p. 186). His friendship with Wright introduced him to the political, psychological, and aesthetic possibilities of "negro writing." In "Remembering Richard Wright," he writes that he was "very curious as to how one could put Marx and Freud together" and although such a synthesis was a problem for "Communist intellectuals," he "could discuss such matters" with Wright (Ellison, 1987, p. 192). In his essays, he positions his literary engagement in terms of "the great social clashes of history" and "the painful experience of the individual" (Ellison, 1995b, p. 189), emphasising his interest in the integration of Marxist and Freudian ideas to discuss "the Negro question." Moreover, he got to engage with psychoanalysis further with the arrival of Jewish intellectuals from Europe and he was involved with the Lafargue Mental Hygiene Clinic alongside Wright and Wertham. Accordingly, with its depictions of unionised black workers and "negro revolts," alongside the utilisation of the incest taboo and the unconscious, Ellison's *Invisible Man* is a critical testimony to his Freudo-Marxist approach as an African-American intellectual.

### **Texts in Dialogue**

Having done a full day's work at the Wootens' house, the protagonist of Richard Wright's *The Man Who Lived Underground*, Fred Daniels heads home to his pregnant wife Rachel. On the way, he is stopped by the police, and after a brief questioning, he is taken into custody. He is accused of murder and robbery. Despite his refusal of guilt and attempts at defending himself with an alibi and character references from the respectable members of the community, he is

unable to convince the police. He is beaten and tortured and made to sign a false confession. Dizzy with how fast his life has taken a turn for the disastrous and probably a concussion, Fred is confused and lost, but keeps it together until he can see his pregnant wife again. The evening that the police take him to his home, his wife is rushed into the hospital for delivery. In an impulsive moment behind a mental fog, Fred jumps out of the window and runs off into the darkness. As he is pursued by the police, he sees the manhole covers providing an opening and slips down one of them.

Between his arrest after work and his disappearing into the underground, the narrative presents the gradual unravelling of Fred's psyche under pressure. As the foundations that hold his life together, i.e., his job, his family, his belief, and his reputation, are rapidly reduced to null, he is lost to himself and to the world as he knows it. The whirlwind of events contrasted by the slow-motion fog settling on his mind is a powerful introductory depiction to the protagonist's story. With this dramatic beginning, *The Man Who Lived Underground* becomes a story about being lost and being found to oneself, a psychic journey with serious ramifications.

Employing a different narrative structure, Ralph Ellison presents the story of *Invisible Man* in reverse, as the novel opens with the unnamed narrator having already established himself an underground life. The "Prologue," in which he explains his "invisibility" to an implied audience, is the end of his story and he enigmatically says, "the end is in the beginning" (Ellison, 1995a, p. 5), hinting at both the structure and the subject matter of the work. However, Ellison's novel also opens up with a highly dramatic scene in which the "invisible man," in the process of announcing his invisibility, randomly beats up a white man on the street. As is seen later in the novel, this act of violence is a response to as well as a reversal of the brutality experienced by the narrator in particular and the black people in general.

Similar to Wright, Ellison initially published a section of his novel, i.e., "The Battle Royal" scene, in a journal (*Horizon*) to great acclaim.<sup>3</sup> "The Battle Royal" scene is one of the most powerful moments of the text in terms of both the narrative storyline and the dramatic stylistics of Ellison. It is the first time that the posed appearances of race slip and the reality (literally) hits the young narrator hard and fast. Being an academically successful, exemplary student, the narrator is offered the chance to give his graduation speech in front of a group of wealthy, influential men with the hope that he might be granted a scholarship to go to college. Yet, he is also expected to "entertain" these men with some other black boys. They are first sexually humiliated, then forced to fight one another blindfolded on a ring, and finally made to pick up coins on an electrocuted carpet. The sweat and blood that chokes the narrator as he proceeds to give his speech, which parallels the state Fred was in at police custody, sets the tone of chaos and violence in the novel early on. In the end, the narrator does receive his scholarship alongside a fancy briefcase.

Physical and psychological brutalisation is key to *The Man Who Lived Underground* and *Invisible Man* and the journeys their characters have to embark upon in order to see the true face of their racial reality. It thrusts them out of their comfort zones, causes psychic destruction, and leads to self-awareness and reconstruction, even if it is a broken one. In both novels, the black protagonists must survive this dehumanising process and come through as a

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<sup>3</sup> In his review of the novel after having read the section published earlier, Saul Bellow writes, "This episode, I thought, might well be the high point of an excellent novel. It has turned out to be not *the* high point but rather one of the many peaks of a book of the very first order, a superb book" (1974, p. 27).

new man, pointing to a death-rebirth cycle which is already implied in the idea of the underground. The depictions of the violence inflicted upon the protagonists in the texts does not just epitomise white supremacist brutality. These portrayals also function at the level of allegory through which how the “soul” of the black people is broken and how the cruel hegemony of the white men still reigns underneath its progressive façade are rendered visible in a jarring and intense representation.

It is in and through the dialogue between the individual cases of these depictions and their parallels in the broader black reality that Wright and Ellison propose their distinctive intellectual positions. The universal suffering of the oppressed, in their case based on race and poverty, is where the left-aligned politics of Marxism intervene, while the impact of racial brutalisation on the individual and the collective psyche opens debates for necessities beyond economic survival. Although primarily defined through physical parameters, race, and therefore, racism are constructs. As such, the prevalent racist hegemonic structures and discursive practices can and need to be dismantled. *The Man Who Lived Underground* and *Invisible Man*, as well as the other works of Wright and Ellison, are products of such an intellectual drive. Their Freud-Marxism interpose the question of race into the discourses of psychoanalysis and Marxism in a way that has not been pursued in their European canonical foundations before.

### **Underground Topographies**

In literature, underground landscapes are generally part of a tripartite topographical structure whereby humanity’s existence on earth at ground level is matched by a world underneath and one above. In this tripartite structure, underworld is archetypically where death resides and nature sleeps. However, most narratives of death and the underworld are complemented by the idea of a second coming, or a transference/transcendence to a different state of existence, i.e., rebirth. Carl G. Jung proposes five different manifestations of rebirth in his *Four Archetypes*. Among them, “Rebirth (Renovatio)” occurs in the lifetime of an individual and instigates a psychic transformation. Rebirth in this context refers to a healing process whereby “the personality which is renewed is not changed in its essential nature, but only its functions, or parts of the personality, are subjected to healing, strengthening, or improvement” (Jung, 2010, p. 48). Rebirth in such significations underlines a transformation of the self and a renewed sense of existence. The racial self-awareness and its psychic costs that Wright and Ellison emphasise in their works bear existential questions within such parameters of rebirth.

At the beginning of *The Man Who Lived Underground*, when Fred Daniels finds himself in the sewers, he is greeted by the rushing surges of water and quickly realises its dangers. It is a perilous journey that he has embarked upon, reminiscent of the mythical river of Styx: the river of death. He must engage with the underworld on its own terms if he is to achieve a rebirth. Water has the potential to take life, but it is also what gives life. It is the spring and the flood; it is the mother’s womb and unfathomable death. In the novel, the duality of the symbolism of water in Fred’s initiation to his new world is epitomised in the body of the dead baby that floats away in the underground water (Wright, 2021, p. 65).

In Fred’s depiction, life and death is juxtaposed in a dynamic relationship that is established through the contrast between the underground and the aboveground, i.e., life as it is and life as it used to be, as he shuttles back and forth between the two worlds. His search for water to drink and tools to function in the underground, in a fashion that is reminiscent of survival narratives like “cast away” stories, is complemented by glimpses of life through the openings

to the world aboveground. For instance, he hears and sees the singing of a basement church choir, which briefly connects him to his past life as a believer. He wants to “observe the church service without being seen, without being a part of it” (Wright, 2021, p. 62). His remembrance of himself as once one of the faithful is contrasted by his desire to “awaken” them. His recently acquired “terrifying knowledge” of their “tormentors” and “oppressors” (2021, p. 63) has put a distance between him and them; him and his old life; him and his old self. He is dead to that life and that life is dead to him.

However, his desire to warn the members of the congregation is not necessarily suggestive of a loss of belief in God. His is a loss of faith in the black community’s having a place within the greater social structure shaped by white oppression. Against what he had once believed, his arrest has proven that being a good person (“a good negro”) who leads an ordinary life has no currency within an unjust and racist society. Death of the -what now seems a naïve- concept of belief is what Fred first needs to shed towards his rebirth. For him, openly facing the illusions of his life as a black person in the hegemonic white society is the first step towards a self-aware new subjectivity.

The basement church scene is one of the key instances that Wright’s Freudo-Marxist synthesis stands out in the work. The individual’s achievement of self-awareness and the momentum toward a new subjectivity is indeed central to the novel, but it is not enough. The existential renewal process needs to be followed by a drive towards collective transformation and the new self needs to take action for the welfare of others to fulfil his self-realisation. It is in this context that Fred’s awakening is supplemented by a desire to awaken others. In his review of the initial short story, “The Man Who Lived Underground,” Ronald Ridenour argues that

Wright’s didacticism involves the invisibility of not just the black man to the white man or of man to man but, significantly, of man to himself. Particularly does Wright, in this lengthy short story, transcend the now common theme of the lack of identity of Negroes to embrace that of the struggle to find meaning and worth for all mankind, that is, to discover truth for one’s self and then to communicate this knowledge to one’s fellow men. (1970, p. 55)

He thus asserts that the existential concerns prevalent in the short story point to Wright’s gradual separation from the Communist Party. However, what he delineates as a contrast between “existential choice” and “existential commitment” (1970, p. 55), that is, the individual and the social are not as antagonistic as he posits. Despite his discontent with the party line, Wright does not stray far away from his left-aligned stance since Fred’s depiction supports both individual and collective awakening. The character’s solitary self-discovery and psychic transformation is not complete until he chooses to take action and reach out to others. Ridenour recognises this dynamic as the new level of complexity Wright achieves in his writing with “The Man Who Lived Underground” (1970, p. 55). Perhaps it is because he is working only with the short story edition of the text that he has a limited view of Wright’s broader perspective. The complexity he underlines is in essence the manifestation of the novelist’s Freudo-Marxism.

Unlike Fred’s “escape” to the sewers, *Invisible Man*’s unnamed protagonist falls into the underground tunnels by mistake as he is escaping violence during the chaotic night of the “negro revolts.” However, in addition to the similarities that bring about the necessity of escape in both cases, the latter is equally lost and confused, which is what leads him to fall (in multiple senses of the word) in the first place. As the white men -the narrator thinks they are “cops in

plain clothes" (Ellison, 1995a, p. 427)- close the cover of the manhole, the protagonist is forced into the darkness of the underground world.

This depiction combines being buried alive with the archetypal underworld of the dead for a multi-layered symbolisation and the rebirth narrative is constructed through the Manichean dualism of light and dark. In the darkness that the protagonist is forced to face literally and metaphorically, the light of rebirth comes in the form of the symbolic torch that he must build by burning the documents and the objects in his briefcase. The contents of his briefcase, which was gifted to him after the "Battle Royal" humiliation, represent the betrayals he has experienced in a world run by white men. The fire thus destroys the possessions of the old self and therefore the old self itself and cleanses him for what he will become, that is, the "invisible man." Like Fred, the casting away of illusions for the "invisible man" comes in the form of an "awakening." The character falls asleep and when he wakes up "in the blackness," he realises that he cannot return to any part of his "old life" (Ellison, 1995a, p. 431). Following his disillusionments and disappointments with the world aboveground, his journey towards a new self will have to be through finding a new light in the darkness, eventual result of which is "1,369 bulbs" lighting up his home in the underground (1995a, p. 10).

Through darkness and fire, through death and destruction, which is matched by the previous chaotic night, the psychic rebirth of the "invisible man" begins. He smells the "stench of death" in the air, but he hopes for "spring" (Ellison, 1995a, p. 438). From the chaos and darkness of death comes forth the spring and the light of life. As he says in the Epilogue, he must now leave the underground and recreate himself and his life anew in the knowledge of racial invisibility to both the white and the black gaze. In his newfound agency, he accepts his responsibility to take action and his first action is to tell his story. In storytelling, in the act of self-narration, a self-aware individual subject gives birth to himself against the racial constructs on both sides of the colour bar.

In terms of the formation of consciousness being determined by social existence, as Marx proposed, the case of the black people is a complicated one and the black self within a racist society requires an approach beyond the base of economics. In fact, the intersection of race and class is the main point of entry for Ellison to intervene with his Freudo-Marxism.<sup>4</sup> For the "invisible man," burning of the contents of his briefcase is an act of both psychic and collective liberation. It is an assertion of his individual agency against a racist society and its "baggage," as well as an acknowledgement of the fictionality of the middle-class American Dream. He burns his high school diploma, which is where the illusion of the Dream begins. The briefcase, the scholarship, and his diploma are all given to him as symbols of a promised life, which is essentially a fiction to keep the black man in line: "Keep This Nigger Boy Running" (Ellison, 1995a, p. 26). He burns the sambo doll that represents the image of the black slave inherently embedded in the racist American society. He also burns the piece of paper with his Brotherhood (Party) code name on it, rejecting the identity imposed on him by a movement that has failed its ideals. In addition to these pieces, there is also a pair of shackles that belonged to a former slave and a broken money bank that presents the black man grovelling for small change, alluding to the electrocuted coin competition in the "Battle Royal" scene. For Ellison,

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<sup>4</sup> Ralph Ellison's friendship with Kenneth Burke is vital in the shaping of his Freudo-Marxism. As Barbara Foley notes, Burke's interests in the "amalgam of sociology, psychology, Marxism, and literary criticism" provided him with the kind of ideational fusion Ellison needed (2010, p. 92). See *Ralph Ellison and Kenneth Burke: at the roots of the racial divide* (2012) by Bryan Crable for more on their intellectual friendship.

in such a loaded context, a Freudo-Marxist approach is not just helpful to understand the black psyche under racist pressure. It is also exigent to adopt for true individual and collective transformation.

### **The Im/possibility of Life After the Underground**

Although the underground journeys of the characters are promoted as self-discovery in *Invisible Man* and *The Man Who Lived Underground*, the novelists do not necessarily draw a picture of success in their journey, or more specifically, the success of the journey of self-discovery does not necessarily promise the expected outcome. The previous lives of the characters have shown that what they had known as real had been merely a façade. They had illusions about their lives in a seemingly progressive society which was in truth still being run by white supremacist hegemony. As they are forced to the underground, they shed what they consciously know, or thought they knew. Travelling through the underground as a metaphor for the unconscious in this sense is almost literal, whereby they were essentially “unconscious” of their racial reality. To put it more precisely, their death-rebirth cycle is a process for the realisation of their own false consciousness.

In Marxist thought, false consciousness refers to one’s inability to see the true nature of their socio-economic circumstances due to certain ideological illusions. In the case of the black protagonists of Wright and Ellison, the reality of racism and racial inequality adds another layer to this deceptive perception. While the belief in the possibility of achieving the American Dream, that is believing that one can acquire the economic comforts of a middle-class life through honest hard work is in itself a product of false consciousness, the possibility of the blacks to also have a chance at “the pursuit of Happiness”<sup>5</sup> is often depicted as an outright untruth. As portrayed by Wright and Ellison, black life, at least before the Civil Rights movement, is built on the misleading ideals of a collective false consciousness. Accordingly, the underground journeys of the protagonists are promoted as being vital for the dismantling of such a prominent false consciousness so that change can be possible. However, the conclusions of the narratives do not quite suggest success.

In the case of the “invisible man,” the blows that break apart his false consciousness come through a lifetime of humiliation and brutalisation, which comprises the majority of the novel. The longer he resists to see, the more extended his suffering is. It is not until he falls into the (blinding) pitch-black darkness of the underground that he truly sees the deceptive nature of his upbringing, his expectations, and the baggage he takes over from his predecessors. As for “the man who lived underground,” his distance from the world as he knows it forces him to recognise another perspective and realise the nature of his illusions. Once he steps away from the manipulative social reality, he reaches a clarity regarding his personal circumstances and his place in the broader collective. His consequent existential crisis leads him to seek change.

At the beginning of the *Invisible Man*, the narrator explains his invisibility along the lines of perception rather than science fiction. He is invisible because “people simply refuse to see” him (Ellison, 1995a, p. 3). His emphasis on other people’s refusal to see him highlights the real problem as being that of the perception of the looker. He is not *invisible* per se; he is invisible *to them*. This depiction reverses the prevailing discourse by underlining the so-called “negro

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<sup>5</sup> From the *Declaration of Independence* (1776): “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness” (*U.S. National Archives*, no pag.).

problem” as being a “racism problem.” The issues are not really about the ontology of blackness but are embedded in the post-slavery meanings and significations invested on the black people regardless of emancipation. The narrator says, “when they approach me they see only my surroundings, themselves, or figments of their imagination – indeed, everything and anything except me” (Ellison, 1995a, p. 3). Before his invisibility, which is a manifestation of the cracks in his false consciousness, the narrator is merely a “token negro” helping in the production of a deceptive sense of progress that validates the fundamental racism of the American society. Contrary to the initial wishful thinking of the narrator (the idealised college life and the promises of the Brotherhood), the white hegemony (of the Nortons) is even more affirmed through the black folks (the Bledsoes) and the so-called friendly progressive whites (Brother Jacks) who merely perpetuate the conditions that serve to reproduce the white hegemonic structure.

In a dialectical juxtaposition, the invisibility of the narrator is, in essence, instigated by his hypervisibility. His blackness is such a determining factor in how he is perceived that nothing else is seen beyond the colour of his skin, and thus, the meanings invested on it. The invisibility of “the invisible man” is deeply entangled with the “hypervisibility” of his racialised bodily existence. In *Black Skin, White Masks*, Frantz Fanon dissects the psychic costs of such racial hypervisibility in the European colonial context. He writes that the “consciousness of the body,” physical visibility of which is inescapable, “is solely a negating activity” (2008, p. 83). A “negro” is “overdetermined from without,” he is a slave of his “own appearance” (2008, p. 87). In a way that echoes Fanon’s critique, Ellison presents the psychic breakdown of his protagonist under the pressure of the negation of his selfhood as a result of the consistently reinforced “invisibility through hypervisibility.” The selfhood of the narrator (the black subject) is so overdetermined by the colour of his skin and its baggage (the collective past and the invested present) that everything else beyond it is impenetrable, and thus, he becomes “invisible.”

This traumatic breakdown of the sense of self maintains the im/possibilities of life aboveground for the character. Nathan A. Scott Jr. defines the character’s transformation along the lines of a liminality between detachment and reintegration. Adapting Arnold van Gennep’s “liminars” theory, he argues that once the character completes his transition, he becomes a member of the broader “communitas,” a social space, a community, in which “all the impulses and the affections that are normally bound by social structure are liberated” (2004, pp. 115-117). However, the character’s portrayal does not quite present a successful reintegration into society as Scott Jr. proposes. He rids himself of all the different selves and decides to come out of his “hibernation” as a self-aware active agent: “I am nobody but myself” (Ellison, 1995a, p. 13). He narrates his story and mentions returning to the world above with a desire for action. However, when he is aboveground, his perception is erratic and somewhat unstable. In a way, the invisibility of the narrator manifests itself as a form of madness and his expression of his invisibility borders at ranting despite its transformational undercurrent. Despite his powerful rhetoric, his unreliability as a narrator sheds doubts over what his actions might be.

A similar but somewhat reversed play with vision is portrayed in *The Man Who Lived Underground*, whereby the protagonist sees what has been previously occluded by his false consciousness. Yet, Fred is overwhelmed with the new self-knowledge he achieves through his journey in the underground. He realises that he is “all people” and “they were he” (Wright, 2021, p. 196), stressing a sense of community. His individual psychic journey joins him with a collective. He is one of the many and he is not alone, and “all is one.” This new realisation banishes “all fear and doubt and loss” and he sees that he is important and that he must “assert



himself" (2021, p. 107). This moment is significant in that it underlines a new realisation of his agency, pointing to a move away from passive suffering and towards active agency. He arrives at the same state with the protagonist of *Invisible Man* in that he decides "to devise means of action by and through which he could convince those who lived aboveground of the death-like quality of their lives" (2021, p. 107).

Fred goes back up, ready to intermingle with the life aboveground. He seeks to face his tormentors in order to complete his rebirth cycle. Similar to *Invisible Man's* protagonist, he wishes to narrate his story and demands to be listened. However, in an allusion to "Plato's Cave," his driven words come across as ravings of a delirious mind. Here lies the irony of Wright's text. Fred is the man who left the cave and became aware of the lifelessness of the shadows against the reality of life, the one who has achieved a new language to express it all but is not understood by those who have not seen the truth themselves. Furthermore, the transformation of his selfhood culminates in a loss of identity that he will not get the chance to recreate. Patricia D. Watkins argues that in the loss of his identity (and in that he does not care), he "acquires a godlike identity" as he is freed from his life aboveground (1989, p. 775). Watkins, also analysing the short story rather than the novel, goes on to elaborate upon this godlike quality of the protagonist. However, it seems to be rather too positive a reading of Fred's behaviour aboveground. Not only most of the examples of this "divinity" can also be interpreted along the lines of the phases in his psychic breakdown, but also his consequent inability to communicate says something entirely different. Being godlike seems to be dangerously close to madness in the case of Fred Daniels.

Fred's self-discovery, although significant at an individual level, falls to deaf ears in a society that is not ready for it. Gounard points out how the reader learns Fred's name only by chance (he is "boy" to the patronising white) and how no one aboveground (especially the cops) recognises him. He writes, "the white characters are blinded by racial prejudice that prevents them from knowing Daniels as a man." However, while his condition is "symbolic of all black man," his insignificance is also "a result of human apathy" (1978, pp. 383-384). Essentially, the new possibilities for the transformed self are still impossibilities in a social context that has not achieved an equivalent transformation. This impossibility of possibility is Wright's Freudo-Marxist critical intervention into the "negro question." The "negro problem" cannot be fixed by fixing the negro who is still embroiled in the broken system imbued with racism and where black life does not matter. In the end, Fred does complete the death-rebirth cycle in full circle as he is shot dead by one of the cops.

Both *Invisible Man* and *The Man Who Lived Underground* utilise ideological false consciousness and the lack of self-awareness to underline the entanglements of the personal and the societal ramifications of racism in the American society. The writers do not just try to bring together ideas of Marx and Freud for a theoretical synthesis. They show that the "negro problem," or more appropriately, the problem of American racism is the embodiment of the exigency of such a synthesis, as racism is a psycho-socio-economic construct that necessitates an equally complex and integrated model for understanding and remedying it. The distinctive integration of race to Freudo-Marxism is the black American contribution of Richard Wright and Ralph Ellison to what has previously been a primarily European theory.

## Conclusion

In the context of the writers' cosmology, the underground landscapes through which rebirth takes place is multi-layered. The death-rebirth archetype does not only maintain the journey

in the underground as an act of transformation with its relevance to the existential conceptualisations of selfhood, subjectivity, and agency. This archetypal representation is also entangled with the psychic world of the unconscious as presented in the typical topography established by psychoanalysis. Sigmund Freud detailed out his tripartite topography of the mental apparatus in his *Interpretation of Dreams*, whereby he draws a dynamic relationship among the conscious, preconscious, and the unconscious (2010, pp. 542-543). He proposes this spatial structure as a systematic way to understand how the mind functions at different levels of consciousness.

Read in this light, the underground journeys of the characters also refer to the psychic processes of the formation and the maintenance of the self as a mediation between the conscious and the unconscious in the self's engagement with itself and the outside world. The relationship between the under- and the aboveground parallels the one between the conscious and the unconscious. From a Jungian perspective, the characters need to shed illusions and older selves and dig deep into their consciousness to reach a primordial sense of humanity in a brutally dehumanising society and rebuild from there upwards and outwards.

Moreover, a third topographical layer is added to the narrative through the collective conceptualisation of the un/conscious, in which the necessity for a political psychoanalysis is the most prominent. The individual experiences of the characters are representative of those of many others in the larger black community. Their journeys of self-discovery do not only reveal the brutality of racism and the systematic problems of the white hegemonic society. They also show the way for the greater transformation of the black collective. As depicted in the two novels, the black community needs such a journey of self-discovery as a whole to recognise illusions and shed former selves in the path towards a renewed sense of identity, one that is based on dignity.

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# David Hare's Memoir of Coronavirus and His Political Rage in *Beat the Devil: A Covid Monologue*

*Beat the Devil: A Covid Monologue* Adlı Oyunda  
David Hare'in Koronavirüs Anıları ve Siyasi Öfkesi

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## Abstract

In *Beat the Devil: A Covid Monologue* (2020), David Hare gives a personal account of his illness period during the early stage of the Covid-19 pandemic, from the middle of March 2020 to the first week of April. In this monologue play, Hare deals with the decay of his body under the attack of the coronavirus and then dwells on his recovery process. On the one hand, this play appears to be a personal chronicle of the playwright's experience with the Covid-19 virus. On the other hand, Hare's narration of the news about the virus from the United Kingdom and the world serves to reveal national and collective memory of the crisis. As a playwright who frequently works on political realities and topical issues, Hare intermingles his personal memory and the collective record of the pandemic to censure the leaders incapable of coping with ambiguous circumstances. Thus, his memoir unveils not only Hare's political commentary but also his political rage as his tone is tinged with anger and disappointment when it comes to the Conservative Party's failure to protect people against the virus in the country. This paper intervenes in Hare's monologue play, *Beat the Devil*, to investigate the playwright's use of autobiographical and collective memory and evaluates Hare's expression of political rage in his exploration of the coronavirus.

**Keywords:** David Hare, *Beat the Devil: A Covid Monologue*, memory, political rage, coronavirus

## Öz

*Beat the Devil: A Covid Monologue* (2020) adlı oyununda David Hare, Mart 2020'nin ortasından Nisan ayının ilk haftasına Covid-19 pandemisinin erken dönemi boyunca devam eden hastalık döneminde kişisel olarak yaşadıklarını anlatır. Bu monolog oyunda Hare, koronavirüs saldırısına uğramış bedeninin çöküşünü ele alır ve sonra iyileşme sürecinin üzerinde durur. Bir yandan bu oyun, oyun yazarının Covid-19 virüs deneyiminin bireysel bir kaydı gibi görünür. Öte yandan, Hare'in Birleşik Krallık ve dünyadan virüsle ilgili haberleri anlatımı krizin ulusal ve kolektif belleğini ortaya çıkarmasını sağlar. Çoğunlukla siyasi gerçeklikler ve güncel konular hakkında çalışan bir oyun yazarı olan Hare, belirsiz durumlarla baş edemeyen liderleri eleştirmek üzere bireysel hafızasını ve pandeminin kolektif kaydını birbirinin içine geçirir. Böylece, Hare'in anıları siyasi yorumunun yanı sıra, ülkede insanları virüse karşı korumada başarısız olan Muhafazakar Parti'nin konusu geldiğinde, yazarın tonu öfke ve hayal kırıklığıyla dolu olduğundan aynı zamanda siyasi öfkesini ortaya çıkarır. Bu çalışma Hare'in *Beat the Devil* isimli monolog oyununda oyun yazarının otobiyografik ve kolektif belleği kullanımını analiz eder ve Hare'in koronavirüsü ele alışındaki siyasi öfkeyi ifade etmesini değerlendirir.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** David Hare, *Beat the Devil: A Covid Monologue*, bellek, siyasi öfke, koronavirüs

David Hare (1947- ) has already established himself as an eminent political playwright of British drama. Since the early 1970s, Hare has embedded his observations about contemporary politics into his dramatic art so that his *oeuvre* always includes the political

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realities of British history from his left-wing political stance. The playwright's keen interest in recording significant moments of history makes him known for his timely plays. One of his latest plays, *Beat the Devil: A Covid Monologue* (2020), is illustrative of Hare's prompt reply to the contemporary pandemic crisis. Because of the rapid spread of the Covid-19 virus, theatres were immediately closed down in March 2020 after the outbreak of the pandemic all around the world. Following a series of lockdowns in the United Kingdom, the Bridge Theatre in London reopened its stage with a repertoire of one-person monologue plays for the autumn season of 2020. David Hare's *Beat the Devil: A Covid Monologue* was the first play to be performed by Ralph Fiennes who also acted in the film version of the play directed by the playwright, available online on *Showtime*. Hare's monologue play or, monodrama, in other words, narrates what happened to Hare from the middle of March 2020 to the first week of April. The play recounts how Hare was infected with the coronavirus and how the virus affected his body day by day. In this personal chronicle, the playwright tries to depict the decay of his body in detail by relating the influence of the coronavirus on his body to the images of violence such as a bomb attack and the devil's possession of the body. More interestingly, Hare's memoir is not only about his recent memory but also delves into the current news about the pandemic and the government's response to the spread of coronavirus as he quotes from the news at that time. Therefore, the monologue play puts a political spin to ensure the failure of the Conservative Party in the UK in fighting against the coronavirus. This paper sets out to analyse Hare's monologue play in which he records and responds to the current pandemic crisis by enmeshing autobiographical and collective memory to express his political rage. Eventually, it reaches a conclusion in the exploration of the efficacy of Hare's expression of anger in this play.

In understanding Hare's approach to personal and collective memory, it is initially useful to note that most of the critics credit the playwright with his integration of personal and public experiences. As a case in point, drawing on Hare's interest in the influence of history on personal memory, Hersh Zeifman argues that "the public and the private constantly commingle in his plays, so closely interwoven that the threads finally become inextricable" (1994, p. xii). Likewise, Scott Fraser emphasises the presence of "private dissent [. . .] placed within the contextual frame of public history" as can be observed in Hare's different plays such as *Fanshen* (1976) and *Saigon* (1983) (1996, p. 198). In another instance, Finlay Donesky notes the playwright's concurrent use of individual and global viewpoints in terms of his moral ethics as a postwar British dramatist (1996, p. 9). Taken together, there is agreement on Hare's investigation of personal memory in tune with his political and historical observations. Mingling personal and public memory, Hare sheds light on contemporary happenings and constructs personal stories to create a kind of historical record on stage. That is the reason why Michael Billington includes Hare's works in his analysis of state-of-the-nation plays in which political realities are intermingled with personal stories to record contemporary British history in the postwar period (2007, pp. 215-220; 258-262; 329-334). Hare himself affirms the interplay between public memory and individual storytelling in his plays. For the composition of his works, he makes research on his topic and uses his imagination by oscillating between factual memory and personal interpretation. As for Hare's Iraq play, *Stuff Happens* (2004), Steve Nicholson argues that "Hare again has no compunction about mixing research with imagination, stating that the private scenes between leading public figures are 'based on what I believe to have happened'" (2007, p. 184). Drawing on the link between the personal memory and the public memory established by the playwright, it is also possible to define Hare as a historian or a chronicler. Hare's statement that "history has a great effect on who you are and how you think" (1993, p. 218) indicates that his works are the

product of collective historical memory. What prevails here is that Hare's personal memory or private accounts from his life make their appearance in his account of collective memory or, in other words, the public recollection of events.

By focusing on the use of memory in Hare's plays, it is possible to claim that the playwright draws on autobiographical memory and reports collective memory. Bruce M. Ross defines autobiographical memory as "the possible or actual descriptions of past happenings that would be considered by most people as 'part of one's personal history'" (1991, p. 4). Despite the individual perspective on the past, the remembering self not only registers personal stories but also stores historical moments. There emerges a narrative to zoom in on collective memory through the capture of historical moments in an individual account. Regarding that "history may be considered as an art of memory" (Favorini, 2008, p. 91), the stock of individual memory resides in collective memory. Here, collective memory can be defined as the collection of national and historical stories which enable to bring social, historical and political past together. Although Hare's works are not purely based on autobiographical elements, he embarks on his personal memory to narrate this kind of collective historical memory from time to time. In these cases, Hare tends to incorporate autobiographical memory into monologue form while bringing the historical self into light. To illustrate, Hare wrote his first monodrama, *Via Dolorosa* (1998), after visiting Israel and Palestine in 1997 (Megson and Rebellato, 2007, p. 243). Based on his own experience of the Middle East, *Via Dolorosa* turned into a one-man play in which Hare appeared on stage. The monologue form and Hare's performance made the play part of Hare's collection of "intimate pieces" in Richard Boon's terms (2007, p. 4). Concerning the monologue-play experience, Hare comments that "one of the effects of one-man shows is that you feel that at the end of the play you know the person on the stage terribly well" (Boon, 2003, p. 157). As it is known that his personal experience is the source of his monologue play, the character on stage is directly associated with Hare to the extent that the audience "felt very close to me [Hare], and responded much more intimately than they had with certain of my [his] plays" (Boon, 2003, p. 163). This sense of intimacy can be regarded as functional on the ground that the personal becomes political, and the play preserves historical memory stemming from personal experience.

Likewise, *Beat the Devil* yields a similar experience at the intersection of personal, national and collective memories. In this case, the use of monologue play is out of necessity considering the pandemic circumstances. One actor on stage, maintaining a distance from the audience, made it possible for all to return to the theatre in a safe environment. Thus, in the production of the play, there is only one character speaking alone on stage. Although the character is unnamed both in the play's text and on stage, the reader/audience easily realises that Ralph Fiennes narrates what happened to Hare from March 16th, 2020 to the first week of April. The setting reminds a kind of study room or an office place, and it is decorated with simple functional objects such as a table, a chair and, as for the actor's props, a suitcase and a diary which are quite practical materials in this account of personal memory. Because of health concerns, the Bridge Theatre hosted only 250 people who had to watch the play with their masks and in distant seats (Hare, 2020b, n.p.). The time that the monologue play was performed accords well with Richard Eyre's significant remark about Hare. "He's really, really smart about," the Artistic Director of the National Theatre says, "the particular time to do a particular play, and at what sort of theatre" (Boon, 2003, p. 221). *Beat the Devil* lays bare that Hare timely works on the contemporary context to reflect his personal and political perspective in the best way that the pandemic circumstances allow him during the global crisis. Establishing direct communication with the reader/audience, Hare sets out his very personal memory about the early days of the Covid-19 virus and his experience of the pandemic. In this

context, he launches a political debate about the failure of the British government and other leading figures during contemporary times of crisis. In the rest of this study, the analysis of the play maps out Hare's autobiographical story and then deals with his expression of political rage through his use of personal memory.

About Hare's monologue play, it is very telling to start with Quentin Letts's description of the play as "Hare's medical and political fevers" (2020, p. 17). At the heart of "medical fevers" lies Hare's personal story evolving into a collective record. As a matter of fact, the play is thoroughly about our current daily life during the Covid-19 crisis. After the outbreak of the pandemic in March 2020, Hare, like all of us, could not comprehend the necessity of taking measures to avoid infection. Considering the pre-pandemic times, Hare at first depicted his "ordinary" day. In early March, he was busy editing the episodes of his television series, *Roadkill*: "The three of us – director, editor and I – squeeze into the attic space and do an honourable day's work. At some point the director, Michael Keillor, a strong, rangy young man from Dundee, with Billy Connolly hair, makes us all a welcome cup of tea. We share a plate of biscuits" (Hare, 2020a, p. 3). Yet the simple moments of communication inflamed the disastrous period in Hare's life. After Keillor informed Hare that he got the virus, Hare needed to isolate himself at home. Instead of staying at home in quarantine, however, Hare preferred going to the studio to bring his work home, and notwithstanding the symptoms of the Covid-19 virus that he had, he was trying to continue his daily routine and even taking photos while cooking Chinese food for himself and his wife. Even though Hare initially denied the virus, it attacked his body and decayed his health day by day.

After Hare's infection, the depiction of the medical record is one key issue in understanding the combination of autobiographical notes and collective experience. Hare's monodrama displays that the playwright feels the ambiguity, vulnerability and the sense of in-betweenness during the liminal period of the pandemic. Hare is at pains to understand what is happening to his body. The first thing that he realises is his breathing problems. In Hare's account of his medical problems, the play documents a universal record of medical incompetence during the global crisis. Following the narration of Hare's breathing trouble, his medical account of the oxygen rate in blood brings a clearer focus on the collective vulnerability:

Doctors normally feel compelled to resort to ventilators when patients have oxygen saturation counts in the 80s, because by then they're gasping for air. Only with this disease, they're not. One doctor in New York has taken a picture of a woman lying on her belly with oxygen saturation of 54, and she's chattering away on her mobile phone. What the hell is going on? [...] Another doctor is quoted as saying: 'The question is whether this vital sign we've been relying on for decades has been lying to us.' He adds: 'It's very humbling in the twenty-first century with all the scientific advances we've made, and we just don't really know the answer.' (Hare, 2020a, p. 5)

Hare's personal story suddenly turns into a vein of collective memory since he draws attention to factual accounts by documenting the news. His daily physical decay weakens him by giving him an odd sense of fragility. Hare expresses that "Covid-19 seems to be a sort of dirty bomb, thrown into the body to cause havoc" (Hare, 2020a, p. 6). Apparently, what he experiences traumatises him to the extent that he evokes different associations and correlations to express the devastation on his body. For instance, he humorously depicts his high fever which illustrates his vulnerability in times of ambiguity. Checking the thermometer, Hare and his wife believe that the thermometer is not working because it shows 40 degrees. When he finds himself "in a lake of sweat," they understand that he is



suffering from fever, but his body shifts to “Arctic cold” (Hare, 2020a, pp. 8,9). Although Hare employs medical details and notes by quoting from the news, he unfolds personal memory by providing comic relief to the reader/audience:

Nicole has thus far defied medical advice. We're meant to sleep in separate rooms, but we don't. We share a bathroom too. Nicole's convinced she'll never get ill. Her mother lived to a hundred and two. Towards dawn, my fever has headed dramatically in the opposite direction and I start to shake with Arctic cold. Not even extra bedclothes, two thick pullovers and a hot-water bottle are doing anything to help. But I can't help feeling maybe Nicole's pushing her luck with her own immunity to this virus when she climbs on top of me, stretches her whole body against mine and says, 'Don't worry, I'll get you warm.' My wife doesn't seem to have grasped the notion of social distancing. (Hare, 2020a, p. 9)

After this humorous story, Hare peers into the period of eleven days that he calls the “mad phase” of his illness (Hare, 2020a, p. 9). This is the time when the virus attacks his body so violently that various symptoms of the coronavirus hurt him. One sees the density of his suffering in Hare's question: “But, again, am I dying?” (Hare, 2020a, p. 13). In addition to the image of a bomb destroying the body, Hare also offers another striking example to amply illustrate the physical damage in the play. In his conversation with Howard Brenton, Hare's contemporary playwright and a close friend, Brenton tells him that “the disease departs ‘like a demon leaving your body’” (Hare, 2020a, p. 18). Acknowledging the inefficacy of science and medicine in 2020, Hare reminds the reader/audience of the plague in the Middle Ages. Thus, he compares the contemporary crisis with the medieval one in that he offers a medieval understanding of the disease. The impingement of the coronavirus is inexplicable to the contemporary medical world so it is depicted most simply in terms of the medieval mindset. A professor from King's College London, Beverley Hunt, also affirms the situation as Hare cites in the play: “Professor Hunt uses an unexpected phrase: ‘It's almost medieval in what we're seeing’” (Hare, 2020a, p. 7). This impression increases the physical and emotional vulnerabilities as can be observed in Hare's personal account.

Furthermore, the detailed explanation of Hare's bodily damage takes on a special significance in this monodrama. Hare's graphic description of the illness can be deemed relevant to the concept of body memory. Edward S. Casey delineates body memory as “memory that is intrinsic to the body, to its own ways of remembering: how we remember in and by and through the body” (1987, p. 147). In the case of this play, it is mostly about traumatic body memory since Hare gives an account of the pandemic period through its effect on his body. Therefore, it is the body that experiences the coronavirus, and Hare remembers and narrates the pandemic period through the effects on his body. In this respect, the reader/audience is faced with a traumatic event. While the narration of the infected body bridges recent past and current moments in the play, Fiennes's performance makes the audience realise how body memory works on stage. Clive Davis reports that “Fiennes enters with a briefcase and, after hanging his jacket on his chair, embarks on his story. His body language, slightly stooped, gives us a sense of Hare's frailty” (2020, p. 7). That is to say, the performance both uses the storyline and the actor to transmit body memory. The mad phase of the illness is riddled with high fever, coughing, vomiting, sweating, loss of weight and psychological deterioration. The individual experience of bodily trauma explicitly manifests itself throughout the play. Moreover, it seems fair to suggest that Hare's embodiment of memory through his body thrives on the record of collective memory. To put it simply, Hare's experience of the virus brings forth how people from different parts of the world go through the pandemic.

More significantly, Hare's monologue play extends from a personal account to a collective experience when he remembers the early phase of the pandemic by highlighting the political context. To begin with, his infection becomes particularly important for Hare to reveal his political agenda. During the first ambiguous phase of Hare's sickness, his country, as in the case of the rest of the world, cannot comprehend the spread of the disease and conceptualises the Covid-19 virus as a disease of the social, racial and economic other. However, as Hare himself is infected, he comments on the transgression of the disease: "Apparently, I've crossed class lines by carelessly catching a disease which generally attacks manual workers and ethnic minorities. After all, it's already becoming clear that you're twice as likely to die if you're poor. Diseases follow the social gradient. And skin colour. In England and Wales, you're four times as likely to die if you're black" (Hare, 2020a, p. 13). His statement reveals more about the existence of social injustice and inequality among classes and races. In the world order where leaders like Donald Trump call ill people "losers" (Hare, 2020a, p. 13), the Covid-19, like the Black Death, makes them all equally "losers": "Can't think why, but for some reason it's no longer a disease for losers. Suddenly Covid is for men – in particular, blond white men – who have extraordinary resources of character with which to fight. Our prime minister turns out to be one of these" (Hare, 2020a, p. 17). What emerges here is that Hare's discussion of Covid-19 becomes convoluted as the monologue play draws on his personal experience and encapsulates the collective encounter. His monologue offers a discussion on the social injustice and inequalities that hinder underprivileged communities from having medical treatment.

In the flow of the monologue play, Hare's comments about his illness and his criticism of the government go hand in hand. Lying in his bed and watching the news, Hare observes that "just as my [his] illness enters its mad phase, so does the Conservative government" (Hare, 2020a, p. 9). This is to say that the phase of his sickness is parallel to the emergence of more problems in the UK. In effect, the play from its opening sentences presents a recurrent image to materialise the sense of political discontent and disgust. The bitter taste of sewage, repeated six times in the play (Hare, 2020a, pp. 3,7,14,18), not only alludes to a symptom of Hare's illness but also is intended as a commentary on political corruption. The play opens with Hare's complaint that he has a terrible taste of sewage. Then, when he grumbles about the same taste in his mouth, the narration points to the national news about Boris Johnson's first decision about the lockdown (Hare, 2020a, pp. 7-8). In a similar fashion, the next reference to sewage precedes Hare's note about his despair and his report of the current news in the country. Responding to the news, Hare discloses:

My mood is aggravated by the dense blizzard of cliché which is fogging up my television. You would think, given that by the second week of May more people will have died in the UK than in any other country in Europe, a note of contrition might begin to be heard in the public realm. But no, the preferred route through the crisis is bullshit. Government ministers must now, every man and woman, toil their way doggedly down the centre of the bullshit highway. (Hare, 2020a, p. 14)

It appears that the playwright alludes to political corruption by representing his feelings of aversion and discontent in a concrete image of waste. In this light, Hare seeks to criticise the Conservative government by referring to the taste of sewage and subsequently commenting on their incompetence. The fact that this taste is not a common symptom of Covid-19 allows us to regard his repetitive use of sewage as a means of Hare's severe censure.

In the play, Hare records his autobiographical memory of sickness until the first week of April. Thanks to his doctor's medication, on April 6th 2020, the special date that his first full-length play was staged 50 years ago, Hare eventually recovers. After the liminal period of sickness, Hare is aware of the fact that he has changed. He believes that he is a different person now. He feels the joy of life, cries for still feeling alive and thanks the universe every morning now. In addition to these, however, Hare senses the growth of another strong feeling, which is anger. He clearly announces that "I don't [he does not] have survivor's guilt. I have [he has] survivor's rage" (Hare, 2020a, p. 18). This expression is a key moment to comprehend the playwright's political tone in his work. Having established Hare's document of the illness period, it is possible to consider how he entangles political rage into his autobiographical account. Probably because of his similar views on the government in a radio programme on BBC 4, the play is regarded as "a performed essay" (Ball, 2020, p. 878). However, Hare's political commentary and his expression of rage in this monologue play may recall the postwar dramatist John Osborne's style in *Look Back in Anger*. Lanre Bakare reports Hare's interest in the postwar playwright as follows: "British theatre must take inspiration from John Osborne and make itself essential to a mass audience if it is to thrive in a post-Covid world, according to David Hare, who says the art-form is in need of a 'revolution'" (2021, n.p.). Although Hare's play cannot be glossed over as revolutionary, his angry tone in the form of a monologue seems to resonate with Jimmy's iconic speeches, but Hare's expression of political rage is debatable in the contemporary period.

By focusing on Hare's anger in more detail, it is possible to trace the play's amalgamation of the personal with the political. Precisely, the analysis of Hare's critique of the policies during the pandemic is functional to pinpoint the playwright's account of collective memory. The play lays bare that Hare accuses the Conservative Party and their lack of judgment and control in a time of crisis. While the virus attacks him like a bomb or possesses his body like a demon, the news that he is watching makes him angrier. For him, the wrong policies are the storm centre of chaos and vulnerability in the UK: "In this emergency, if you're looking for the government, you'll always be sure to find them running along five miles behind the public" (Hare, 2020a, p. 10). Oscillating between the account of his physical deterioration and the news about the government's failure, Hare declares that the Tories under the leadership of Johnson make more mistakes and tell more lies to the public. He is highly critical of the prime minister's concern about the public. Johnson's long winter holiday and the news about his personal life make Hare question Johnson's competence and responsibility as a leader. Therefore, the playwright claims that Johnson's inability to fully understand the danger awaiting his country worsens the crisis. Likewise, the whole government is not unlike Johnson:

The country remains mysteriously open to visitors from viral centres like Italy and Spain, who pour in at airports unchecked and unquarantined. At a COBRA meeting, also on March 12<sup>th</sup>, the government are still indulging their more fanciful advisers. They have been flirting with a policy of herd immunity – the happy-go-lucky notion that if the most vulnerable among us sheltered and hid indefinitely, it might be possible for everyone else to carry on and take their chances. Not until the very day, March 16<sup>th</sup>, that I contract the disease – now this is a happy chance – do our rulers realise that although the theory of herd immunity is conveniently allowing them to let mass gatherings like the Cheltenham Races go ahead, it may unfortunately one day lead to 250,000 deaths. The government immediately throw themselves into a desperate U-turn by opting instead for a conspicuously late lockdown. No wonder I'm feeling that I didn't need to get this bloody thing. It's somebody's fault. And I can tell you exactly whose. (Hare, 2020a, p. 10)

As noted above, Hare accuses the government of letting people from the viral centres travel to the UK, causing people to die because of their policy of herd immunity and threatening their lives by imposing a lockdown quite late. His ironic remarks and aggressive tone are clear enough to unfold his political rage. What is more, his chronological account of the events comes closer to a record of public memory. The detailed description of factual notes indicates the play's intersection of the personal and the political. Arifa Akbar is correct in the following contention: "The personal segues into the political and slightly overshadows the tender, first-person story. [...] There are dates, statistics and medical science, [a]n initial poetry in the language is lost to a flatter, more muscular polemic when [the play] launches full-throttle into political diatribe" (2020, n.p.). In this regard, Hare piles the news into a kind of national memory by dwelling on his personal story.

Hare's recollection of the recent past not only manifests his condemnation of the government. The monologue play culminates in the presentation of the major reason for the failure during the pandemic circumstances. This is demonstrably the case in Hare's comment on the national health system. Going back to the national policies and practices a decade earlier, Hare shows the decline of investment in health services. Since the beginning of the 2010s, the government has gradually reduced the funding of the National Health Service and derogated the profession of doctors and nurses. Finally, the wrong policies of the state have led a great number of doctors and nurses to die as they were left unprotected in the fight against the coronavirus. More than these failures, what forces Hare to vent his rage is the state of neglect that defines the current government. The home secretary of the UK Priti Patel's reply to the questions about the death of people from health services that "I'm sorry that people feel that way" (Hare, 2020a, p. 16) embodies the lack of connection between the government and the public. This attitude displays that the public is left alone in the middle of the pandemic. As Hare maps out each wrong step, his play critically encompasses the country's recent political and medical histories.

With regard to Hare's personal account of the sickness, it is telling that his story is tinged with universal experience. Specifically, the sense of insecurity, ambiguity and the feeling of vulnerability define the collective experience of the pandemic all around the world. By the same token, Hare's political criticism is not limited to domestic issues but extends to international affairs. The play deals with the approach of other leaders to the global crisis. Hare demonstrates that the ignorance of political leaders contaminates the world. Like Johnson, Donald Trump, for instance, denies the high risk of coronavirus in the early days of the pandemic. He attempts to make people believe in the illusion that only "few Americans are at risk" (Hare, 2020a, p. 12). Yet death equalises all people disregarding the boundaries based on race, class and other types of otherness. In contrast to the impotence of male leaders, however, Hare praises the policies of female politicians during the pandemic. In the Brexit transition period, Hare regards Angela Merkel as a heroine and also compares Jacinda Ardern from New Zealand to the British politicians:

Surely, looking abroad to the examples of Angela Merkel in Germany or Jacinda Ardern in New Zealand, something must have stirred inside the head of at least one thinker in Downing Street. Given how well those two leaders were doing, and how badly we were doing, did it really never occur to anyone in power that possibly following their example and levelling with the public might be a more fruitful political tactic? (Hare, 2020a, p. 19)

The comparison and ironic commentary cite the political agenda in the traumatic moment of the century. What occupies Hare's mind is the fact that people are simply governed by incompetent leaders. The pandemic circumstances unveil this truth when the world

leaders cannot cope with the emergent situation and cannot avoid the deaths of many. Evidently, this declaration is the gist of Hare's critical response to the political history during the pandemic period.

Eventually, Hare gets his political rage under control by emphasising the act of telling the truth. Thinking about his career as a dramatist since the 1970s, Hare believes that he has always been interested in the exposition of lies told to the public. For this purpose, he highlights the power of theatre. Boon alludes to Hare's emphasis on "the theatre's unique political power and its power to tell the truth. It does stand for that" (2003, p. 111). Fittingly, *Beat the Devil* highlights this function of the theatre that Hare supports. After recounting the recent past, Hare reaches a simple conclusion in the play. He directly demands the truth like a child: "I'm tired of reading that people want to be spoken to like adults. In my experience, it's adults who lie. I want to be spoken to like a child. It's to children all decent people tell the truth" (Hare, 2020a, p. 21). Calling all the members of the government "incompetents" (even worse than mediocrity) (Hare, 2020a, p. 15), Hare asks the people in charge to be honest to confess their lack of ability to govern and control the situation. As stated previously, Hare depicts the virus in the image of the devil. At the end of the play, he alternatively associates the devil with the present government. In his personal life, to "beat the devil," Hare decides to do simple things right like making tea and enjoying his survival each day. The monologue play concludes with Hare's to-do list in his new life after beating the virus: "I make tea. Right now I can only do the simple things. By doing simple things right, my plan is to beat the devil" (Hare, 2020a, p. 22). At issue here is Hare's decision to survive despite the devastating pandemic and the corrupt government. It is also necessary to refer to the taste of sewage as representing the rotten state. The end of the play implicitly replaces the bitter taste with the taste of tea. In this light, the play relocates Hare's angry tone with an optimistic remark. As for the political realm, Hare proposes that there will never be a chance for the public and the government to build a reciprocal relationship following the pandemic period. On the contrary, the personal statement concludes with Hare's hopeful resistance against the destructive forces.

As can be observed from his political criticism, Hare denounces the Conservative government, and unqualified politicians and blames them for the current situation at home and in the world. Hare rightfully censures the policies, defames incompetent politicians and exposes social injustice and inequality dominating the society. His listing of the lies told to the public and wrong acts that have risked people's lives are just narrated on time as Hare is known to be a dramatist who deals with contemporary political issues. His personal memoir's expansion to the social and political observations in the framework of a monologue play can be acceptable considering the circumstances of Covid-19. Therefore, the play enmeshes the personal state with the political through the use of autobiographical memory and the narration of the collective memory as well. It can be a matter of discussion to argue about whether Hare updates himself as a playwright, but more significantly, albeit his political criticism, his position can be problematic to make a claim on his objective attitude. Letts is right to observe that

[w]e are meant to laugh at Hare's predictable denunciations of Boris Johnson, Donald Trump and Priti Patel, but perhaps not at the portrait of a chi-chi London intellectualism; signature gastronomic dishes, a narrow corridor of arts-world friends, a doctor who plays violin in the London Gay Symphony Orchestra and Hare's characteristic mini-lectures [. . .] on things such as cytokine storms. When the devilish virus finally abates on day 16, our hero announces to Lady Hare that his appetite has returned. He wishes her to bring him a croissant. (2020, p. 17)

That is to say, even though Hare attempts to voice social injustice concerning health issues, he remains part of an elite group. While he does not provide his reader/audience with a new theatrical form or a new language, a close reading of his angry tone also poses a problem for some critics. Davis argues that Hare states what is obvious to all of us because “Hare’s views on the politics of the pandemic will only sound revelatory to members of the audience who have somehow managed to get through lockdown without reading a single newspaper” (Davis, 2020, p. 7). Moreover, although Hare highly esteems John Osborne’s revolutionary angry tone, Jonathan Maitland does not find Hare in the same league: “British theatre is not in a good place today. Where are the revolutionaries? The new, angry young men and women, the new John Osbornes? We don’t need to Look Back in Anger: it’s all in front of us, now” (2021, p. 82). To a certain extent, Hare might be reflecting not only his personal memory and political rage but also echoing the memories of British theatre. However, compared to the influence of playwrights such as Osborne, Hare’s personal and political accounts of Covid-19 do not express anger enough to mirror the depth of individual and collective rage experienced during the pandemic in this play.

To conclude, the account of Hare’s autobiographical memory becomes entangled with his response to the news at home and around the world. Precisely, his memoir puts a political spin to ensure the failure of the Conservative Party in fighting against the coronavirus. He indeed uses his personal story to make his political rage heard, and the playwright still acts as a chronicler to record the contemporary troubles and politics. However, his perspective is limited considering the circumstances he depicts when we contemplate the inequalities that have become clearer once again since most people from different classes, races and backgrounds become vulnerable since the beginning of the pandemic. It appears that the reader/audience’s laugh at Hare’s critical comments on the leader figures or his list of wrongdoings does not adequately incorporate a strong political perspective into his argument in this play.

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# Emotional Language Processing in Bilingualism: Subjective Affect and Prosodic Markers in Simultaneous Interpreting

İki Dillilikte Duygusal Dil İşleme:  
Andaş Çeviride Öznel Duygulanım ve Bürünsel Belirteçler

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## Abstract

Emotion, as part of the overall sensorimotor, introspective, and affective system, is an essential part of language comprehension within the framework of embodied semantics. As emotional state influences semantic and syntactic processing, emotional language processing has been shown to modulate mood as well. The reciprocal relationship between language and emotion has also been informative in bilingualism. Here we take a relatively underresearched type of bilingual processing, simultaneous interpreting, as a case of extreme bilingualism and investigate the effect of emotional language rendering in the L1 on subjective affect and prosodic markers of L2 output. 18 trainee interpreters were asked to simultaneously interpret three speeches in Turkish that varied in emotionality, valence (negative, neutral, and positive), and difficulty in English. Responses to emotional language processing were analysed based on participants' self-reported positive and negative affect using the Positive and Negative Affect Schedule (PANAS) and three prosodic parameters (intensity, pitch, and fluency). Results showed that interpreting emotionally negative speech increased negative affect, whereas interpreting emotionally positive speech did not modify positive affect. Intensity generally reflected cognitive load. Pitch and fluency, in particular, were more sensitive to changes in the valence of the source speech.

**Keywords:** emotional language, emotional load, cognitive load, valence, bilingualism, simultaneous interpreting, prosodic parameters

## Öz

Duygu; genel duyumotor, içgörü ve duygulanım sisteminin bir parçası olarak, bedenlenmiş anlambilim çerçevesinde dil anlamının temel bir parçasıdır. Çalışmalar duygudurumun anlamsal ve sözdizimsel işlemeyi etkilediği gibi, duygusal dil işleme de duygudurumu etkilediğini göstermiştir. Dil ve duygu arasındaki karşılıklı ilişki, iki dillilik açısından da açıklayıcıdır. Bu çalışma, görece az çalışılan bir iki dillilik türü olan andaş çeviriyi bir tür "uç iki dillilik" olarak ele almakta ve ana dilde (L1) duygusal dil işleme öznel duygulanım ve ikinci dilde (L2) bürünsel belirteçler üzerindeki etkisini ortaya koymaktadır. Çalışmada 18 katılımcıdan duygusal, duygusal değer (olumsuz, nötr ve olumlu) ve zorluk açısından farklılık gösteren üç Türkçe konuşmayı eş zamanlı olarak İngilizceye çevirmeleri istenmiştir. Duygusal dil işleme, katılımcıların Olumlu ve Olumsuz Duygulanım Ölçeği (PANAS) ile bildirdikleri olumlu ve olumsuz duygulanım puanları ile üç bürünsel parametre (yoğunluk, tizlik ve akıcılık) temelinde analiz edilmiştir. Sonuçlar, duygusal açıdan olumsuz konuşmanın çevirisinden sonra olumsuz duygulanımın arttığını ancak duygusal açıdan olumlu konuşmanın olumlu duygulanımı etkilemediğini göstermiştir. Seste yoğunluk genel olarak bilişsel yükü yansıtırken tizlik ve özellikle akıcılık kaynak konuşmanın duygusal değerindeki değişikliklere karşı daha hassastır.

**Anahtar sözcükler:** duygusal dil, duygusal yük, bilişsel yük, duygusal değer, iki dillilik, andaş çeviri, bürünsel parametreler

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## Introduction

Previous research has shown that the relationship between language and emotions is much more intertwined than previously thought. That is, the role of language in the experience of emotions goes beyond simply describing feelings with words. Not only does language categorise and construct emotional experiences (Lindquist et al., 2015), but several empirical studies have shown that language can also evoke rather strong emotions (Habermas, 2018). Moreover, emotions evoked by language are simulated as part of comprehension and in turn, can influence judgements and understanding (Bohn-Gettler, 2019; Havas et al., 2007; Johnson & Tversky, 1983). How emotional language, which is language typically composed of emotion-laden words, sentences and text or language that communicates emotions, is processed has also shed much light on bilingual processing. It is generally assumed that emotionality is attenuated in L2, leading to so-called “disembodied” language processing (Pavlenko, 2012). There is indeed much empirical evidence to support this claim, showing reduced physiological responses to emotionally charged words when presented in the non-native second language (L2) compared to the native language (L1) (Harris, 2004; Harris et al., 2003; Heyrani et al., 2022). However, there is also counter-evidence showing similar patterns of emotional activation in both L1 and L2 (e.g., Conrad et al., 2011).

That said, comparatively little attention has been paid to emotional language processing in language-based performative tasks such as simultaneous interpreting (SI), where the language user processes L1 and L2 almost simultaneously with the comprehension and production dimensions. SI is a form of interpreting where the interpreter listens to the speakers’ source speech in one language (L1 or L2) and renders it into another language (L1 or L2) in real time. Compared to other language tasks and interpreting modalities, SI is usually described as “extreme bilingualism” (e.g., Nour et al., 2020), because SI has very high parallel processing and executive control demands. Interpreters perform along with the accumulating cognitive load against limited internal resources and under building time pressure (Korpala, 2021; Mellinger & Hanson, 2019). In this regard, SI has been regarded as a window into bilingual processing (see Dong & Li, 2020). Moreover, it is fair to argue that SI is an emotionally taxing activity even without emotional language. Previous studies have identified several external stressors in SI, ranging from speaking rate (Korpala, 2016) to prolonged turns (Klonowicz, 1990; Moser-Mercer et al., 1998), from textual complexity to lexical search under time pressure (Gumul, 2021), from challenging techno-social work environments (Korpala, 2021; Kumcu, 2020; Kurz, 2002) to booth discomfort (Mackintosh, 2003).

### ***Effect of emotional and cognitive load on voice***

When an individual is exposed to a stressor, i.e., an upsetting external stimulus or event, the body reacts quickly by gearing up for action and initiating physical responses such as increased muscle tension, increased heart and respiratory rates, or perceived changes in temperature, among others (Selye, 1956). Changes in the vocal output are one of these physiological changes observed during shifting emotional states. Although anger and happiness are relatively more recognizable (Filippa et al., 2022), several studies have repeatedly shown that a wide range of emotions are systematically embodied in the human voice, allowing individuals to communicate and/or recognize emotional experiences.

Measures of vocal intensity, fundamental frequency (F0) and pauses are the most commonly used cues to study emotional prosody (Scherer, 1986a). F0 is derived from the rate of vibration of the speaker's vocal cords and is calculated as the average number of vibrations per second

in Hertz (Hz.). F0, in turn, is perceived by listeners as pitch. The F0 of an average male voice is 80-150 Hz and that of an average female voice is 150-300 Hz. Intensity, on the other hand, is the rate at which vocal energy is transmitted by the voice wave and is defined in decibels (dB). A normal adult voice intensity is between 60 and 70 dB.

Overall, higher arousal emotions such as happiness or joy are associated with higher mean intensity, higher mean F0 and shorter pauses, whereas lower arousal emotions such as sadness are associated with lower mean intensity, lower mean F0 and longer pauses compared to neutral speech (Juslin & Laukka, 2003; Tisljár-Szabó & Pléh, 2014). However, subtle differences between languages and individual differences due to voice type (i.e., lax/tense voice type) have been documented (Tamuri, 2014). In the context of emotional prosody studies, there is also evidence that vocal cues are reliable indicators of psychiatric disorders. For example, adults with elevated depressive symptoms showed longer total pause duration and shorter total speech duration (Albuquerque et al., 2021), while depressed patients showed greater pitch variability, fewer pauses, and faster speech rate as they responded to treatment (Mundt et al., 2007). Similarly, schizophrenic patients have been shown to speak with less pitch variability (i.e., flat speech) and more pauses compared to healthy controls (Martínez-Sánchez et al., 2015). On the other hand, increased F0 has been reported as an indicator of social anxiety disorder, but only in males (Weeks et al., 2012).

In addition to emotionality and emotional load, difficulty and cognitive load are also reflected in voice (Van Puyvelde et al., 2018). Overall, higher F0 and higher intensity have been evidenced as a result of increased task complexity and thus, difficulty. However, it is important to note that there are large methodological differences between the studies showing the effect of cognitive load on prosody. For example, in Griffin and Williams (1987), participants were asked to perform psychomotor and dichotic listening tasks in an aviation environment. Similarly, Huttunen et al. (2011) conducted a flight simulation study and showed that mean F0 increased by 12 Hz and mean intensity by 1.5 dB during the most cognitively intensive phases of simulator flight. In Rothkrantz et al. (2004), on the other hand, intensity and F0 increased as a function of Stroop test difficulty.

Finally, some studies compare emotional and cognitive load in the same paradigm. When presented with tasks that induce cognitive and emotional stress, males showed higher F0 values under cognitive rather than emotional load (Tolkmitt & Scherer, 1986). However, in another study (Scherer et al., 2002), participants speaking German, English and French showed an increased F0 as a result of emotional rather than cognitive load during several computer-based tasks.

In summary, studies show that the mood of language users leaves its mark on their production, but the direction of the effect is not straightforward due to the different languages and tasks involved.

### ***Emotionality and stress in interpreting***

Emotional processing in interpreting has been investigated through a wide array of indicators and measures (see Gieshoff, Lehr, and Hunziker Heeb 2021) from the self-reports (Gumul, 2021) to galvanic skin conductance (Korpál & Jasielska, 2019; Kurz, 2002), from heart rate (Klonowicz, 1994) to blood pressure (Roziner & Shlesinger, 2010) and cortisol levels (Moser-Mercer, 2005).

In one important study combining galvanic skin response and self-reported affect measures (Korpál & Jasielska, 2019), a group of interpreters were asked to simultaneously interpret a speech with negative valence and an emotionally neutral speech from L1 (Polish) to L2 (English) while their galvanic skin responses, as a marker of emotional arousal, were measured. Participants also reported their momentary emotional states through the Positive and Negative Affect Schedule (PANAS) before the first interpretation (as baseline) and immediately after the interpretation of neutral and negative-valence recordings. Results showed that the mean number of galvanic skin responses consistently increased across conditions from baseline to negative-valence speech. Further, participants reported higher negative affect scores immediately after interpreting negative-valence speech compared to neutral speech and the baseline. Results suggested that interpreters indeed empathise with the speaker experiencing negative emotional states by emotionally mimicking her/him which is reflected in both objective and subjective responses. Results also suggest that stress response to the emotional material in SI is activated more or less automatically and that the interpreter has almost no control over it, which makes the negative speech as a stressor particularly challenging compared to other, work-related factors.

It is no surprise that examination of emotional processing and stress response in interpreting based on acoustic markers is rare (see Rojo López et al. 2021) given that phonological studies, in general, are underrepresented in interpreting studies with few exceptions (Ahrens, 2005a, 2005b; Darò, 1990) in contrast to the potential they provide. In one example, Rojo López et al. (2021) showed that phonological variables showing speech rhythm (e.g., the average duration of syllabic intervals) in consecutive interpreting output are correlated with self-reported state anxiety as opposed to trait anxiety but only when interpreting from L1 to L2, suggesting that acoustic measures can reflect emotional states in interpreting.

Indeed, as Scherer (1986) pointed out the vocal-auditory mode of communication is crucial for expressing and conveying emotional and motivational states. Consequently, vocalisations and vocal characteristics have great potential as a means of identifying positive and negative emotional states in interpreting (see also Pisanski & Sorokowski, 2021; Rothkrantz et al., 2004; Sondhi et al., 2015; van den Broek, 2004).

### ***Current Study***

The current study aims to investigate the effect of bilingual processing of emotional language on the subjective affect and prosodic markers of emotionality. SI was chosen to capture bilingual processing as an extreme case with very high bilingual processing demands (Hervais-Adelman & Babcock, 2020; Van Der Linden et al., 2018). The study partially follows the procedures in Korpál and Jasielska (2019) and Rojo López et al. (2021) and employs both subjective (i.e., positive and negative affect scores) and objective measures of emotionality response (i.e., prosodic parameters based on pitch, intensity, and fluency), as detailed below. In line with this, we have two main research questions:

(1) Does the simultaneous interpreting of emotional speeches of different valence modulate subjective affect? As discussed above, there is evidence that simultaneous interpretation of negative speeches of low valence leads to an increase in negative affect scores on the PANAS compared to baseline (Korpál & Jasielska, 2019). Thus, we predict that the effect in the current study will be in the same direction, which would replicate the findings. More importantly, however, as the authors themselves point out, it is currently unclear whether the simultaneous interpretation of a positive speech also increases positive affect.

(2) Does the simultaneous interpreting of emotional speeches of different valence modulate prosodic parameters in the auditory output? Emotionality and stress have reliable effects on auditory parameters as discussed above. Overall, the results show that sadness associated with negative valence decreases F0 and intensity but leads to more frequent pauses, and happiness/joy leads to an opposite pattern. With this in mind, we predict that participants will produce higher intensity, higher F0 and lower pause percentage when interpreting a speech with positive valence and lower intensity, lower F0 and higher pause percentage when interpreting a negative-valence speech compared to a neutral speech.

Finally, the present study has an additional research question as a follow-up to Kumcu and Öztürk (2023): (3) Do individual differences in mental imagery, short-term memory (STM) or working memory (WM) have a mediating influence on the predictive relationship between emotionality and subjective affect/prosody parameters? We expect that individuals with better (more vivid) mental imagery will report higher affect scores regardless of the valence since better imagery (especially vividness) functions as an “emotional amplifier” and usually leads to better memory and more emotional involvement (e.g., Holmes & Mathews, 2010).

## **Methods**

### ***Participants***

The study was carried out with 18 4<sup>th</sup>-year undergraduate translation and interpreting students at Hacettepe University (8 males;  $M_{age} = 22.61$ ,  $SD = 0.78$ , range: 21 – 24). All participants were native speakers of Turkish (speaking/learning only Turkish from birth and currently using Turkish as their primary language) with English as the foreign language. In interpreting terms, participants' A language (L1) was Turkish and B language (L2) was English. The pre-test questionnaire documented that all participants had taken undergraduate-level courses in SI where they had practised SI in both directions to the same extent, the main task in the current study. The mean current grade point average (CGPA) of the sample was 3.42 out of 4.00 ( $SD = 0.27$ , range = 2.85 – 3.76). Participants reported normal or corrected-to-normal vision, no voice, speech or hearing difficulties and no history of any neurological disorder. All participants were fully informed about the details of the procedure and gave online consent. Post-test debriefing revealed that all participants were naïve to the purpose of the study. Larger sample sizes are preferable to increase statistical power and generalizability. However, the present study was conducted with a relatively small number of participants because it focused on a highly specialised population within the general pool of bilinguals, i.e. (student) interpreters with a certain level of experience and expertise in simultaneous interpreting, while coming from similar demographic, linguistic and academic backgrounds, in order to control for extraneous variables. Nevertheless, it is important to emphasise that follow-up studies using the same paradigm but with larger sample sizes are highly recommended for consistent and comparable results.

### ***Stimuli***

Three speeches in Turkish (emotionally negative, emotionally neutral, and emotionally positive) were selected to be simultaneously interpreted (see Table 1). The speeches were developed based on the normed speech examples in Korpál and Jasielska (2019). Accordingly, the negative-valence speech was about the experiences of a mother who lost her daughter following an assault and the neutral speech was on telephone etiquette as in Korpál and Jasielska (2019). In addition, a positive-valence speech on memories of a wedding day was included. Speeches were recorded in a sound-attenuated room by a female native speaker of

Turkish. Audio files and full transcripts of the speeches can be accessed at <https://osf.io/4ka8p>.

Speeches were internally validated on emotionality, valence, imageability, familiarity, difficulty, and speed by all participants of the study on a scale from 1 (not emotional, very negative, not imageable, not familiar, very easy, and very slow) to 5 (very emotional, very positive, highly imageable, very familiar, very difficult, and very fast). Emotionality, valence, imageability, and difficulty were also externally validated by 18 language specialists on the same scale as well. There were reliable differences between the valence and emotionality of positive, negative and neutral speeches in the expected directions based on both internal and external assessments (all  $ps < .05$ ) (see Table 1). There was also a significant difference in difficulty as per participant evaluations;  $F(2,51) = 3.91, p = .02$ . The pairwise comparison indicated that neutral speech ( $M = 2.83, SD = 0.99$ ) was evaluated as more difficult (to interpret simultaneously) than the negative speech ( $M = 2, SD = 0.77$ );  $p = .02$ . Further, the Turkish adaptation of Flesch readability index analysis (Ateşman, 1997) based on word and sentence lengths has indicated that neutral speech is in the middle difficulty category (*Readability score* = 60.3), while positive (*Readability score* = 70.4) and negative (*Readability score* = 79.9) speeches are in the easy category. There was no difference in difficulty as per external specialist evaluations;  $F(2,51) = 2.05, p = .14$ .

**Table 1**

*Descriptive Characteristics (Means and SDs) of Source Speeches as Rated by the Participants (I) (n = 18) and External Assessors (E) (n = 18)*

| Measure             | Positive speech    | Neutral speech     | Negative speech    | F     | P       |
|---------------------|--------------------|--------------------|--------------------|-------|---------|
| Overall             |                    |                    |                    |       |         |
| Number of words     | 406                | 404                | 409                |       |         |
| Total duration (s.) | 220.16             | 238.26             | 236.44             |       |         |
| Participants        |                    |                    |                    |       |         |
| Emotionality (I)    | 4.33 (0.59)        | 1.67 (0.97)        | <b>4.67 (0.59)</b> | 88.64 | < .0001 |
| Valence (I)         | <b>4.78 (0.43)</b> | 2.72 (0.57)        | 1.17 (0.38)        | 268.4 | < .0001 |
| Imageability (I)    | <b>4.39 (0.61)</b> | 3.06 (0.94)        | 3.61 (1.09)        | 9.92  | < .001  |
| Difficulty (I)      | 2.39 (0.92)        | <b>2.83 (0.99)</b> | 2.00 (0.77)        | 3.91  | .02     |
| Self-performance    | 2.61 (0.85)        | 2.44 (0.98)        | 3.11 (0.96)        | 2.48  | .09     |
| Familiarity         | 3.56 (1.38)        | 4.11 (1.02)        | 3.11 (1.53)        | 2.56  | .09     |
| Speed               | 2.94 (0.80)        | 2.94 (0.87)        | 2.56 (0.92)        | 1.21  | .31     |
| External assessors  |                    |                    |                    |       |         |
| Emotionality (E)    | 4.22 (0.81)        | 1.56 (0.78)        | <b>4.78 (0.43)</b> | 110.4 | < .0001 |
| Valence (E)         | <b>4.67 (0.49)</b> | 3.11 (0.76)        | 1.50 (0.99)        | 76.02 | < .0001 |
| Imageability (E)    | <b>4.50 (0.62)</b> | 3.50 (1.04)        | 3.67 (1.08)        | 5.86  | .005    |
| Difficulty (E)      | 2.56 (0.70)        | 2.17 (0.86)        | 2.67 (0.77)        | 2.05  | .14     |

Note. The highest values in the measures with significant differences are in bold.

## **Procedure**

The main task of the study was SI from L1 (Turkish) to L2 (English). As spelt out below, the study was composed of five consecutive phases: (1) the baseline, (2) the pre-test questionnaire, (3) simultaneous interpreting (SI), (4) mental imagery and memory tests, and (5) the post-test questionnaire.

(1) The baseline: Two weeks before the interpreting task, participants were asked to describe a black-and-white drawing of a street, which formed the baseline/control language data for comparison with the SI output data. Participants were also asked to complete the PANAS to describe their baseline emotional state using 20 adjectives on a five-point Likert scale (Watson et al., 1988).

(2) Pre-test questionnaire: Participants were asked 12 questions about their demographics (age and gender) and academic background (university, year, CGPA, courses taken and interpreting experience).

(3) Simultaneous interpreting (SI): Participants were asked to simultaneously interpret three speeches varying in emotionality and valence from L1 (Turkish) into L2 (English). Participants received no prior information about the speeches and their terminological background. The speeches were presented in counterbalanced order. 1/3 of the participants started with negative, positive and neutral speeches. The interpretation was recorded. Participants were asked to complete the PANAS immediately after each SI task. The auditory output was analysed as described in 3.1. below.

(4) Mental imagery and memory tests: Participants were also asked to self-report their mental imagery abilities on five scales (see Kumcu & Öztürk, 2023 for further details), and they were tested on forward and backward digit span tests corresponding to STM and WM, respectively, to determine whether there were any imagery or memory differences between participants that would predict their emotional response in the study. The memory tests were developed on PsychoPy (Peirce et al., 2019) and administered on Pavlovia.org. Accuracy and reaction times in the memory tests were used as dependent measures.

(5) Post-test questionnaire: Participants were administered a questionnaire in which they evaluated the perceived emotionality, valence, imageability, familiarity, difficulty, and speed of the source speech and also, their SI performance. They were also asked to qualitatively comment on their output.

## **Results**

### ***Acoustic Analysis of Auditory Output***

Participants' auditory output was cleaned for artefacts (i.e., coughing or throat clearing) and analysed using Praat version 6.3.09 (Boersma & Weenink, 2022) for the acoustic markers of emotional states (Sondhi et al., 2015): pitch as a function of fundamental frequency (F0), intensity, and percentage of pause duration (%) as a function of fluency. F0 range was defined as 75-300 Hz for males and 75-500 Hz for females. The percentage of pause duration was computed as the ratio of the duration of silent pauses to the total duration of interpretations. The *mark pauses* script (Lennes, 2002) was used for the analysis of pause duration. The minimum pause duration was set at 0.5 seconds, the minimum pitch at 100 Hz, and the maximum intensity at 59 dB.

### **Mixed-Effects Modelling**

Data were analysed using linear logit mixed-effects modelling to reveal the predictive factors of SI performance. The contribution of a fixed effect was investigated by comparing a full model containing the effect in question against a reduced model in which only that effect was removed, or a null model without any fixed effects (Winter, 2013). Data were analysed and visualised in the R programming language and environment (R Core Team, 2023). Raw and processed data files and R scripts used to run the analyses can be accessed at <https://osf.io/4ka8p>. Mixed-effects models were constructed with the *lme4* package (Bates et al., 2015). Significance values of the coefficients in models were computed based on the *t*-distribution using the Satterthwaite approximation with the *lmerTest* package (Kuznetsova et al., 2017). Multiple comparisons between factors were performed with *multcomp* package (Hothorn et al., 2008) and based on Tukey's Test.

### **The Effect of Interpreting Emotional Speeches on Subjective Affect**

#### **Positive affect**

Mixed-effects models were fit with the speech type (baseline, negative speech, neutral speech, and positive speech) as a fixed effect, participants as a random effect and positive affect score as the target variable. The results showed that the speech type significantly improved the null positive affect model;  $\chi^2(3) = 12.01$ ,  $p = .007$ . Participants reported significantly higher positive affect scores at the baseline ( $M = 28.89$ ,  $SD = 7.73$ ) as compared to the neutral speech ( $M = 21.72$ ,  $SD = 6.29$ );  $B = 7.17$ ,  $t = 3.44$ ,  $p = .001$  and the negative speech ( $M = 23.61$ ,  $SD = 5.77$ );  $B = 5.28$ ,  $t = 2.54$ ,  $p = .01$ . There was not a significant difference in positive affect between the baseline and the positive speech ( $M = 26.17$ ,  $SD = 9.19$ );  $p = .2$ .

When the baseline has been dropped, the speech type did not improve the null positive affect model;  $\chi^2(2) = 4.66$ ,  $p = .1$ , showing that there was not a significant difference between the positive affect score following SI of the positive speech and positive affect score following SI of the neutral speech;  $p = .35$  or negative speech;  $p = .21$  (see Figure 1).

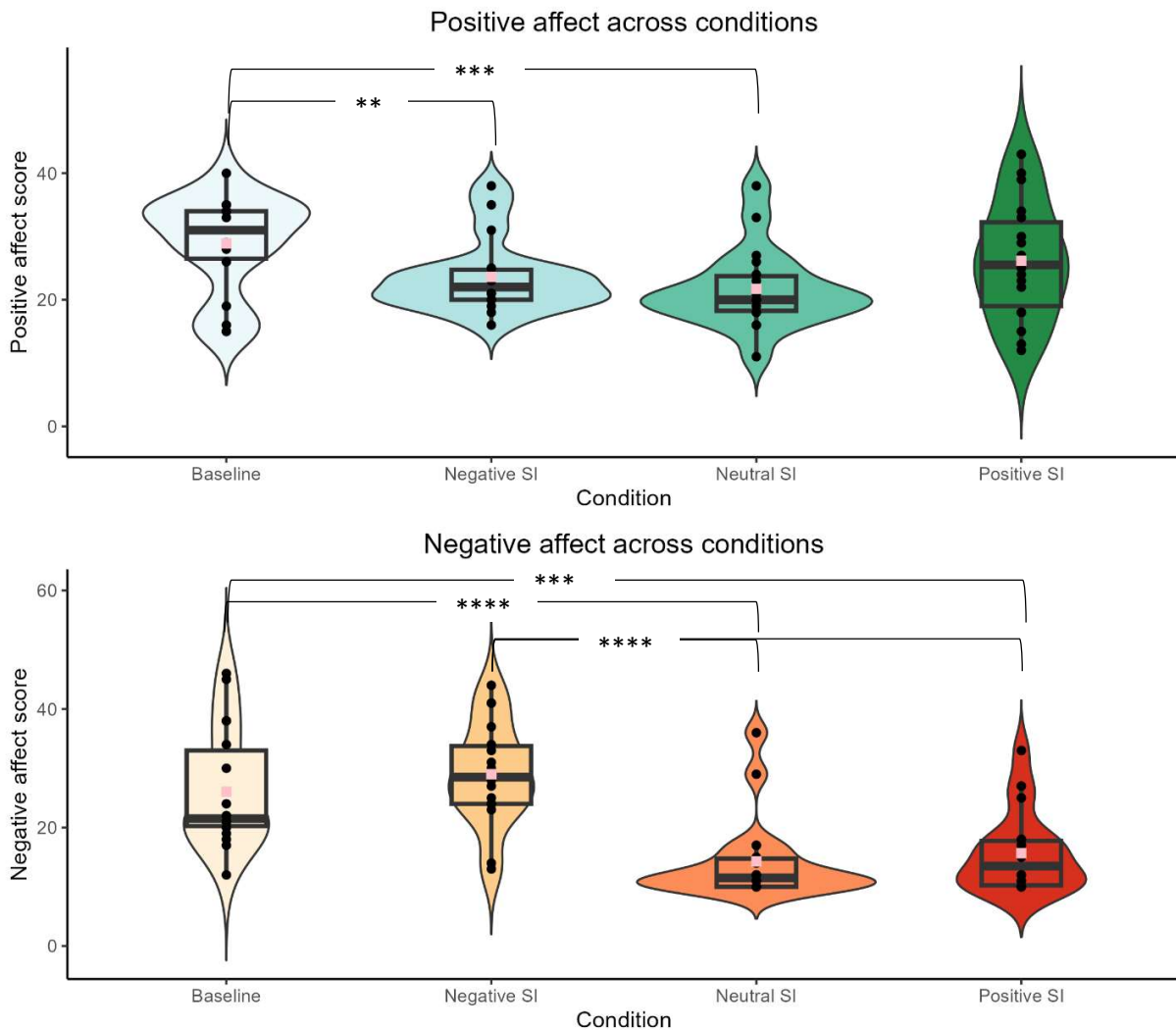
Models with internal and external speech properties, mental imagery scores and memory measures as fixed effects were fit. Results showed that interpreting highly imageable speeches according to both internal;  $B = 3.33$ ,  $t = 2.23$ ,  $p = .03$  and external assessments;  $B = 4$ ,  $t = 2.13$ ,  $p = .04$  resulted in more positive affect scores. Emotionality, valence or difficulty did not predict positive affect scores. Mental imagery scores or memory performance did not predict positive affect either (all  $ps > .05$ ).

#### **Negative affect**

Similar models were fit with the negative affect score as the target variable. The speech type improved the null negative affect model;  $\chi^2(3) = 36.43$ ,  $p < .0001$ . Participants reported significantly higher negative affect score at the baseline ( $M = 26.06$ ,  $SD = 9.97$ ) as compared to the neutral speech ( $M = 14.28$ ,  $SD = 7.12$ );  $B = 11.78$ ,  $t = 4.63$ ,  $p < .0001$  and the positive speech ( $M = 15.67$ ,  $SD = 6.7$ );  $B = 10.39$ ,  $t = 4.09$ ,  $p = .0002$ . There was not a significant difference in negative affect between the baseline and the negative speech ( $M = 29$ ,  $SD = 8.53$ );  $p = .25$ .

When the baseline has been dropped, the speech type improved the null negative affect model as well;  $\chi^2(2) = 34.92$ ,  $p < .0001$ . Participants reported significantly higher negative affect scores following SI of the negative speech when compared against both the neutral;  $B = 14.72$ ,  $t = 6.84$ ,  $p < .0001$  and the positive speech;  $B = 13.33$ ,  $t = 6.20$ ,  $p < .0001$  (see Figure 1).

Interpreting speeches that are evaluated as more emotional;  $B = 3.22$ ,  $t = 3.6$ ,  $p = .0007$ , more negative;  $B = -3.46$ ,  $t = 4.55$ ,  $p < .0001$ , less familiar;  $B = -14.22$ ,  $t = -5.66$ ,  $p < .0001$ , that are perceived more slower;  $B = -36.07$ ,  $t = -7.48$ ,  $p < .0001$  and that are associated with better performance;  $B = 23.14$ ,  $t = 7.32$ ,  $p < .0001$ , that are rated easier by the participants;  $B = -17.41$ ,  $t = -5.83$ ,  $p < .0001$  resulted in higher negative affect scores. Mental imagery scores or memory performance did not predict negative affect (all  $ps > .05$ ).



**Figure 1.** Violin plots show the distribution of positive and negative affect scores at the baseline and immediately after SI tasks. The box plots within the violins show the whole range (vertical line), the mean (pink square), and the median (horizontal line). Black dots represent data points for individual participants.

\* $p \leq .05$ , \*\* $p \leq .01$ , \*\*\* $p \leq .001$ , \*\*\*\* $p \leq .0001$



## ***The Effect of Interpreting Emotional Speeches on Prosodic Measures***

### **Intensity**

Results from the prosodic analysis of the baseline and SI outputs were presented in Table 2. Mixed-effects models were fit with the speech type (baseline, negative speech, neutral speech, and positive speech) as a fixed effect, participants as a random effect and vocal intensity (dB) as the target variable. The results showed that the speech type significantly improved the null intensity model;  $\chi^2(3) = 23.21, p < .0001$ . Overall, the vocal intensity was higher in all SI conditions as compared to the baseline ( $M = 64.52, SD = 5.96$ ), namely, neutral speech ( $M = 68.45, SD = 3.7$ );  $B = 3.93, t = 4.67, p < .0001$ , positive speech ( $M = 68.4, SD = 4.2$ );  $B = 3.88, t = 4.62, p < .0001$ , and negative speech ( $M = 67.43, SD = 3.63$ );  $B = 2.91, t = 3.46, p = .001$ . When the baseline has been dropped, the speech type did not improve the null intensity model;  $\chi^2(2) = 5.06, p = .08$ . Post-hoc analyses showed that although the vocal intensity was lower during the interpretation of negative speech as compared to the neutral speech, the difference was not significant;  $B = -1.02, z = -2.06, p = .1$ . Vocal intensity during the interpretation of positive speech was not higher than that of the neutral speech either;  $B = 0.04, t = 0.09, p = .1$  (see Figure 2).

Models with speech properties, mental imagery scores and memory measures showed that higher difficulty (internal);  $B = 1.2, t = 1.98, p = .05$ ; lower self-performance;  $B = -1.62, t = -2.27, p = .03$ , and higher speed;  $B = 2.56, t = 2.33, p = .03$  resulted in a higher voice intensity. Valence did not predict intensity ( $p > .05$ ). Mental imagery scores or memory performance did not predict intensity either (all  $ps > .05$ ).

### **Pitch**

Mixed-effects models were also fit with the speech type (baseline, negative speech, neutral speech, and positive speech) as a fixed effect, participants as a random effect and F0 as a function of the pitch as the target variable. Following the tradition in prosody research (e.g., Alku & Vilkmann, 1996; Tolkmitt & Scherer, 1986; Weeks et al., 2012), the pitch data were analysed by sex for a more precise analysis.

The results showed that the speech type did not improve the general null pitch model either among females;  $\chi^2(3) = 3.38, p = .34$  or males;  $\chi^2(3) = 5.93, p = .12$ . When the baseline has been dropped, the speech type improved the null pitch model among males;  $\chi^2(2) = 6.14, p = .05$  but not among females;  $\chi^2(2) = 0.9, p = .63$ . Post-hoc analyses in male data showed the F0 was significantly lower during the interpretation of negative speech ( $M = 119.42, SD = 10.58$ ) as compared to the neutral speech ( $M = 124.28, SD = 11.27$ );  $B = -4.86, z = -2.73, p = .02$ . F0 during the interpretation of positive speech ( $M = 121.49, SD = 12.52$ ) was not higher than that of the neutral speech;  $B = 2.79, z = 1.57, p = .26$  (see Figure 2).

Models with speech properties, mental imagery scores and memory measures showed that valence did not predict pitch;  $p = .43$ . However, higher difficulty (internal) resulted in a higher pitch among males;  $B = 8.86, t = 2.29, p = .04$ . Mental imagery scores or memory performance did not predict pitch (all  $ps > .05$ ).

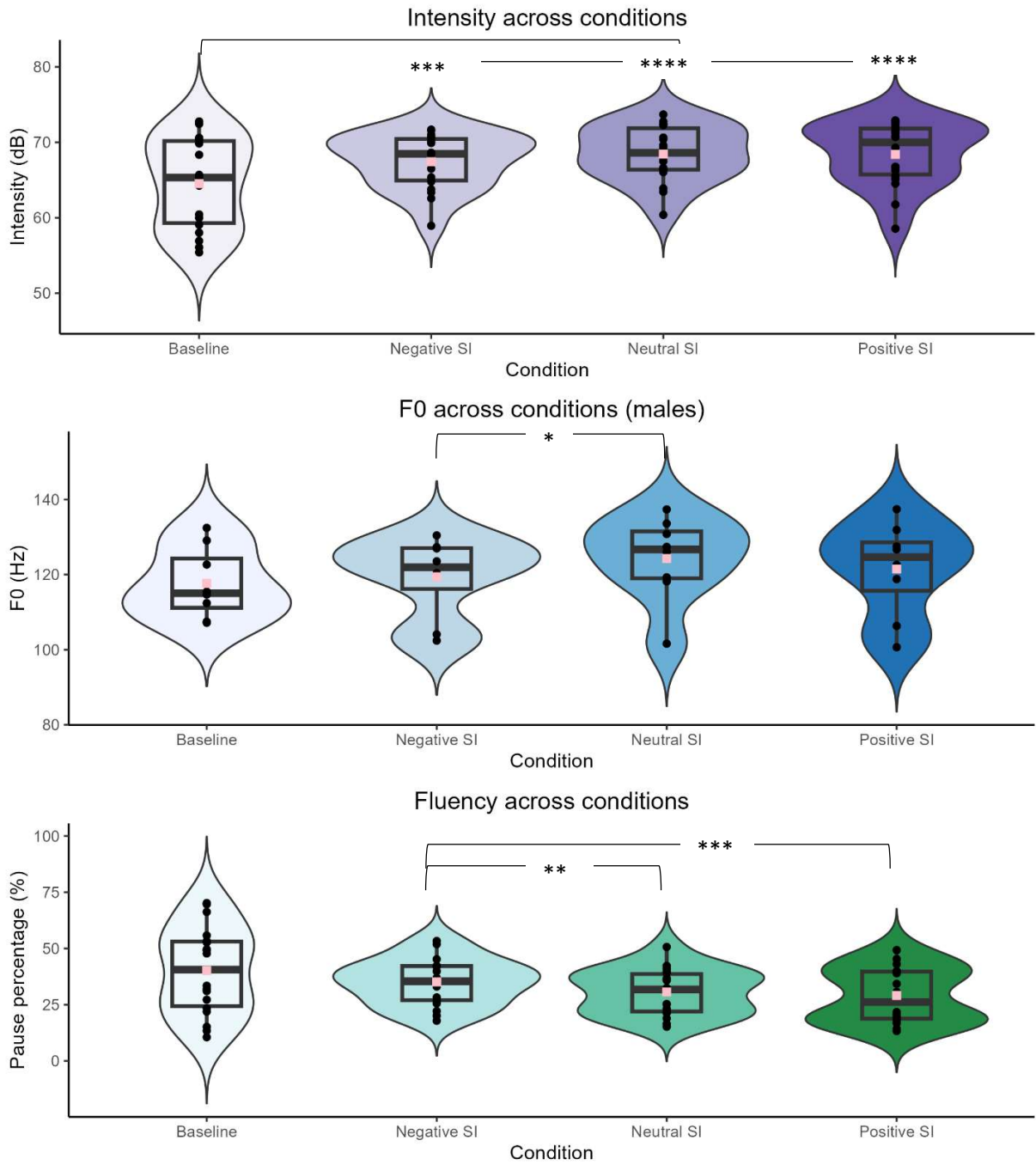
## Fluency

Mixed-effects models were fitted with the speech type in the SI task (negative speech, neutral speech, and positive speech) as a fixed effect, participants as a random effect and percentage of pause duration (ratio of pause duration to total duration) as a function of fluency as the target variable. The results showed that the speech type significantly improved the null fluency model without the baseline condition;  $\chi^2(2) = 12.68, p = .002$ . Post-hoc tests showed that the percentage of pause duration during the interpretation of negative speech ( $M = 35.14, SD = 10.28$ ) was significantly higher than the percentage of pause duration during the interpretation of neutral speech ( $M = 30.68, SD = 10.16$ );  $B = 4.46, t = 2.78, p = .009$  and also of positive speech ( $M = 29.11, SD = 12.1$ );  $B = 6.03, t = 3.76, p = .0006$ . Percentage of pause duration in positive speech was not significantly lower than neutral speech;  $p = .6$ . In line with this, lower valence;  $B = -1.62, t = 3.58, p = .001$  but also lower difficulty (internal);  $B = -5.17, t = 2.42, p = .02$  predicted higher pause percentage. Mental imagery scores or memory performance did not predict pause percentage (all  $ps > .05$ ).

**Table 2**

*Self-Reported Affect Scores and Acoustic Measures at the Baseline and across Task Conditions (Means and SDs)*

| Measure               | Baseline       | SI Positive speech | SI Negative speech | SI Neutral speech |
|-----------------------|----------------|--------------------|--------------------|-------------------|
| Positive affect score | 28.89 (7.73)   | 26.17 (9.19)       | 23.61 (5.77)       | 21.72 (6.29)      |
| Negative affect score | 26.06 (9.97)   | 15.67 (6.70)       | 29.00 (8.53)       | 14.28 (7.12)      |
| Total duration (s.)   | 154.74 (46.59) | 227.12 (6.81)      | 232.59 (34.49)     | 245.78 (9.70)     |
| Mean F0 (Hz.)         | 165.37 (47.32) | 169.63 (48.18)     | 168.44 (49.23)     | 171.82 (49.06)    |
| Mean intensity (dB)   | 64.52 (5.96)   | 68.40 (4.20)       | 67.43 (3.63)       | 68.45 (3.70)      |
| Pause duration (s.)   | 65.00 (40.43)  | 65.90 (26.85)      | 81.62 (27.09)      | 75.28 (24.55)     |
| Pause percentage (%)  | 40.16 (19.47)  | 29.11 (12.10)      | 35.14 (10.28)      | 30.68 (10.16)     |



**Figure 2.** Violin plots show the distribution of intensity, F0 and pause percentage at the baseline and immediately after SI tasks. The box plots within the violins show the whole range (vertical line), the mean (pink square), and the median (horizontal line). Black dots represent data points for individual participants.

\*  $p \leq .05$ , \*\*  $p \leq .01$ , \*\*\*  $p \leq .001$ , \*\*\*\*  $p \leq .0001$

## Discussion

The current study investigated the predictive effect of simultaneously interpreting speeches varying in emotional valence on self-reported positive and negative affect and three prosodic measures (i.e., intensity, F0, and pause duration) to shed light on the emotional language processing in extreme bilingualism. Overall, our results demonstrated that processing emotional language in a performative language task with very high language control demands (Hervais-Adelman & Babcock, 2020; Van Der Linden et al., 2018) has consequences on both subjective affect and acoustic measures of emotional state. Below we summarise the results as per the research questions and discuss them in light of previous research.

(1) Does the simultaneous interpreting of emotional speeches of different valence modulate subjective affect? Subjective affect scores collected via the PANAS showed that interpreting an emotional speech with a negative valence, which can be considered as "sad", amplified the negative psychological state of the participants in the current study. Such an effect was previously reported by Korpál and Jasielska (2019). In the current study, the findings were replicated, suggesting the reliability of the "negative speech effect". More importantly, our results have provided an answer to an open question: Does interpreting a so-called "happy" speech also increase positive affect? Our results answer this question in the negative. Positive affect scores did not increase after interpreting a positive speech. In conclusion, the present study shows that SI modulates self-reported negative emotional state, but not positive emotional state. Interestingly, participants' positive and negative mood scores were higher at baseline than when interpreting a neutral speech, suggesting that SI without emotional content somehow dampened the emotional response in the present study.

To explain our findings in subjective affect, we can turn to emotion research, where there is ample evidence for a "negativity bias" in affect, proposing that negative emotions are more salient than positive emotions and that negative experiences are remembered better than positive experiences, even when they are equally intense (Kensinger, 2009; Vaish et al., 2008). More importantly, there is also evidence that the negativity bias is more prevalent in younger adults and that cognitive load enhances the effect (Carstensen & DeLiema, 2018), which applies to the task conditions and the sample in the current study. One finding that requires further investigation is the reason why the imageability of the source speech predicted positive affect but not negative affect. Our findings as to the first research question have important implications for interpreting as well considering that emotional stability largely modulates performance (Albl-Mikasa, 2014; Bontempo & Napier, 2011) and output quality deteriorates as a result of stress in SI (Mackintosh, 2003). Further, community interpreters typically working in highly emotional settings are vulnerable to developing vicarious trauma due to prolonged emotional fatigue (Splevins et al., 2010).

(2) Does the simultaneous interpreting of emotional speeches of different valence modulate prosodic parameters in the auditory output? First, the results showed that participants' vocal output exhibited higher intensity in all SI conditions compared to baseline. However, there was no difference in intensity according to the emotional valence of the source speech. Although mean intensity was lower when interpreting negative speech than when interpreting neutral speech, the difference was not significant. Furthermore, while higher difficulty and lower self-performance predicted higher intensity, valence did not. Taken together, these results suggest that intensity in SI appears to be modulated by cognitive rather than emotional load. On the other hand, male participants produced a lower F0 when interpreting the negative speech compared to the neutral speech. That said, higher difficulty

rather than higher valence predicted a higher pitch in males, as reported in intensity. A higher F0 was not documented when interpreting positive speech compared to neutral speech. Finally, the percentage of pauses during negative speech was higher for both neutral and positive speech, but the same difference was not found between positive and neutral speech. In contrast to intensity and pitch, lower valence, together with lower difficulty, predicted a higher percentage of pauses.

Overall, the prosody results suggest that the percentage of pause duration, in particular, and pitch as a function of F0 are modulated by the emotionality of source speech to a larger extent. The direction of the effect is in line with the literature discussed above. It is important to note that although males produced lower F0 during the negative speech as to the neutral speech, speech difficulty still predicted F0. This is an important area of research and future studies can be developed on a 2 by 2 factorial design to test the effect of both emotional load and cognitive load in SI. The fact that the effect of pitch was reported only in males complies with the previous results showing sex-related differences in findings based on pitch (e.g., Weeks et al., 2012). A more detailed analysis showed that as highly expected, F0 among females ( $M = 208.55$ ,  $SD = 25.13$ ) was significantly higher than F0 among males ( $M = 121.73$ ,  $SD = 11.16$ ) across all SI conditions;  $B = 86.81$ ,  $t = 9.44$ ,  $p < .0001$  due to anatomical/physiological and even sociocultural reasons (Van Bezooijen, 1995). However, the difference between males and females in mean F0 was larger in negative speech ( $M_{diff} = 88.22$ ) as compared to neutral speech ( $M_{diff} = 85.57$ ) suggesting that it was the even lower pitch during the interpretation of negative speech among males which led to a significant difference. In any case, the results of the current study should be viewed and interpreted with caution due to the limited sample size, which is a common problem in experiments testing either trainee or professional interpreters (Liu, 2011).

Finally, our results showed that individual differences in mental imagery, STM or WM did not play a mediating role in the relationship between emotional language processing and subjective affect/prosody parameters. Our previous results (Kumcu & Öztürk, 2023) showed that mental imagery control is a crucial skill for consecutive interpreting accuracy. In this regard, future studies could investigate the relationship between mental imagery and emotional processing on performance metrics.

In conclusion, the current study extends previous findings on emotional language processing in bilingualism to an underrepresented language pair (Turkish-English) and to an underrepresented task (SI). We show that competent bilinguals transfer mostly negative emotions processed in the L1 to the L2. In other words, interpreters not only imitate the speaker's discourse intentions (Amos & Pickering, 2020) but also her/his emotions to a certain extent. The study also shows that certain vocal cues can be considered as potential indicators of emotional (and also non-emotional) processing in interpreting, which calls for further research.

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# Empire and Exception in Amy Kaplan's Works, and Beyond

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## Abstract

This article revisits Amy Kaplan's works and reassesses their contribution to the study of American cultural studies. It foregrounds Kaplan's call to integrate American studies and postcolonial studies and contends that while Kaplan critiques American exceptionalism and empire, her critique is largely based on her notion of "culture," which in turn excludes any discussion of empire in the larger economic, political, and legal contexts. By situating Kaplan's works in the broader debates surrounding the concept of exception as it emerges in the works of theorists such as Carl Schmitt, Giorgio Agamben, and Jacques Derrida, this article argues that a true critique empire is incomplete without unconditional responsibility and exceptional justice for the others of empire.

**Keywords:** Empire, Exceptionalism, Responsibility, Justice, Decolonization

## Introduction

Amy Kaplan's works are daring adventures into the ghosted house of the "imperial" America. If thinkers like Richard Rorty are against any attempt to think "otherness,"<sup>1</sup> Kaplan's works are pervaded by what she calls the disembodied, unincorporated, and spectral spaces of the "empire," and by the distorted subjects that inaugurate haunting in the hegemonic structures of the empire. Kaplan has given us so much to think about, and her thoughts are always directed and dedicated to the margins of the nation and the "others" of the citizens. Her Presidential Address to the American Studies Association gives a clear picture of her position on what she calls "the global politics of anti-imperialism," which is unthinkable for her without a simultaneous "call on grief and mourning for the uncounted dead and the unrepresented suffering" (Kaplan, 2002, p. 16) unleashed by the post-9/11 developments in world politics. She is a unique and enlightened thinker of globality and an advocate of the politics of responsibility against the norm (both in politics and academia) of denial and disavowal. This however does not mean that she is the only writer who critiques U.S. exceptionalism; there is a host of others including some prominent voices like Malini Johar Schueller, Susan K Gillman, Shelley Streeby, and John Carlos Rowe, whose works continue to shape and sharpen the critique of U.S. imperialism. Amy Kaplan's deployment of the term "exceptionalism" is indeed unique as

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<sup>1</sup> In *Achieving Our Country* Richard Rorty argues that the politics of responsibility and justice is mere nuisance because it inclines more to Gothicize nation by conjuring up the ghosts of the long dead past. What we need to achieve "our" country, he advises, is to hold up all the "romances" given by Whitman and Dewey and not allow them to be displaced by Poe. For Rorty, theories of truth, grounds of normativity, the impossibility of justice, or the infinite distance separating us from the other are irrelevant compared to a simple formula Dewey proposed of solving "the problems of men," which requires us to move from the issue of otherness to our moral identity and democratic citizenship (Rorty, 1998, p. 97).

she evokes it in relation to exceptional legal decisions and responsibility towards the Other.

Kaplan's works vigorously attempt to speak what is left unspoken.<sup>2</sup> They outline a project of responsibility for repression, of the work of mourning for the dead and of listening to their receding voice; in short, her works attend to and witness the inescapable haunting and the ghostly presence of the Other. Kaplan audaciously voices her opposition to any attempt of exorcism of this Other and to the possibility of any reinstatement of a monolithic notion of culture, nation, identity, and discipline. Kaplan's critique of exceptionalism also requires a careful examination as it unfolds in her writings as a multifarious and rigorous rereading of nation, culture, history, race, colonization, and imperialism.

The present article is an attempt to read Kaplan as an important public intellectual. It contextualizes her contributions to the discourse of empire, especially her book, *The Anarchy of Empire in the Making of US Culture*, which opens new avenues of inquiry and thinking about exceptionalism. While acknowledging that Kaplan insightfully steers the critical discourse on exceptionalism into a new direction, from several nodal points left unelaborated in her writings, this article attempts to reconfigure a more intense grid of critical thoughts to examine the highly charged and debated topic of empire. Central to this reading, therefore, is the reworking of the notion of exceptionalism itself as it interfaces with empire. By transforming the concept of the "exception" with the help of the controversial and conservative German jurist and theorist Carl Schmitt's politico-legal philosophy, especially his 1950 book *The Nomos of the Earth*, this article argues that even though Kaplan foregrounds "empire" in the discourse of American studies, she takes the multiple narratives of empire as a single uninterrupted whole, thereby discounting the roles of interruptions, including her own, that interrogate them.

Kaplan evokes U.S. "exceptionalism" in her introduction to the landmark collection of essays on U.S. cultures of imperialism, in *The Anarchy of Empire in the Making of U.S. Culture*, and in her last book, *Our American Israel*. Kaplan employs it to mean at least three things: the construction of a unique and monolithic nationhood that disavows its imperial character; the tendency to keep concepts like "home" and "domesticity" away from the contamination of the foreign or the political; and the striking absence of the U.S. and its imperial cultures from the discourse of colonialism/post-colonialism in the academy.

Building upon the legal discourse of empire that opens *The Anarchy of Empire*, especially the insular tariff cases and Kaplan's astute critique of the "Doctrine of Incorporation," this article contends that Kaplan's critique of exceptionalism somehow tends to overlook the legal and political significance of the term "exception," thereby implying inadvertent support for normativity. Consequently, her project retains a theoretically noble silence about the issues of violence in law and justice, and about the global hegemony and sovereignty the U.S. exercises in the name of the rule of law, human rights, and democracy. The task of this study is not to critique Kaplan's position, but to point out the immense potential it has by exploiting a curious vantage point it offers towards thinking about the problematic of empire and law. The article delineates some of the theoretical positions Kaplan departs from. The third section of the

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<sup>2</sup> Amy Kaplan's critique of U.S. cultures of imperialism owes to Toni Morrison's notion of speaking the unspeakable. Morrison writes that race remains a virtually unspeakable thing (Morrison, 1994, p. 370), which haunts the entire field of American literature. Whether it is the terms like "gothic," "romance," "sermonic," or "puritan," or the American fear of failure, powerlessness, boundarylessness, and terror, or of being an outcast, there is the black population to ground these anxieties. Africanism is inextricable from the definition of Americanness (Morrison, 1993, p. 65).

article discusses the problem of the homogeneity of the nation in Kaplan, and it deconstructs a probable resurfacing of a unitary and normative nation in Kaplan. Part four of the article brings in Hardt and Negri's works on empire and sovereignty to assess their influence on Kaplan and her revision of their position. And demonstrates how political and historico-geographical "exceptions" interface. With the help of two seminal Supreme Court cases, *Dred Scott v. Sandford* (1857) and *Downes v. Bidwell* (1901), the concluding part suggests that justice, as a rupture in the existing structures of hegemony, is possible only when one exception is brought to bear against the other.

### **Haunted House of the Nation**

Kaplan's works examine the traces of "imperialism" and their narratives in the history of the nation building in the United States; and her depiction of the undulating space of modern nation-scape is, despite her friendly nod towards Edward Said, not his notion of the modern nation as the "horizontal, secular space of the crowded spectacle" (Said, 1983, p. 145). No ghostly structures are secular and horizontal. Kaplan opens her critique of U.S. exceptionalism by remarking that the "field of American studies was conceived on the banks of the Congo" (Kaplan, 1993, p. 3). At the level of the discursive foundation or formation of U.S. studies lurks the ghostly presence of Africa, the presence of the Other and the foreign. The unavoidable Africanist presence functions in Kaplan almost as "originary displacement," or as the "uncanny doubling" in the realization of the nation and its narrations (Bhabha, 1990, p. 295). The acknowledgment of this haunted moment for Kaplan is etiological enough to unveil the darkness and to articulate the silences, which help expose the systematic absences, namely, "the absence of culture from the history of U.S. imperialism; the absence of empire from the study of American culture; and the absence of the United States from the postcolonial study of imperialism" (Kaplan, 1993, p. 11). Kaplan's revision of nation-building is significantly different from the simplistic discourses of empire-bashing prevalent now among some writers, insofar as she envisions a theoretical strategy to expose exceptionalism by creating a methodological alliance between cultural studies, discourse analysis, and postcolonial theory.

For Kaplan, building bridges across disciplines and trying to connect several seemingly irrelevant geographical points in the globe are crucial in the examination of the imperial culture in the U.S. She sets herself apart from the so-called New Americanists, especially their rhetoric of regionalism. Philip Fisher, in his introduction to *The New American Studies* anthology, for instance, locates a shift from the traditional geographical regionalism, such as the New England mind, the Southern way of life, and the West of the pioneer, towards a more diverse regionalism based on race, gender, and ethnicity (Fisher, 1991, p. xii). Kaplan engages a much broader spectrum as she avoids Fisher's reduction of multiculturalism and the complexity of gender, race, and ethnicity to regionalism, and she explodes the consolidation of such regionalist rhetoric that eventually serves exceptionalism. Kaplan's transnationality, however, is not the same as another New Americanist - John Carlos Rowe's call for comparative study not only of U.S. cultures but also of "several Americas so often ignored and thus trivialized by the disciplinary title" (Rowe, 2002, p. 16). Rowe's comparativist model overlooks what, for Kaplan, is the fundamental category of connection, namely, the empire.

On the one hand Kaplan, in the revised collection of her influential essays on the theme of the empire, very insightfully unmasks the academic exorcism that tries to promote and maintain U.S. exceptionalism. She argues that there is a "jarring proximity" between Catherine Beecher's kitchen and the battlefield of Mexico in 1846. Kaplan reopens the cold case of the "culture" (and this time meaningfully in the singular) of United States Imperialism with *Downes v. Bidwell*, a

Supreme Court case that belongs to the so-called “insular cases” legislating the fate of the U.S. protectorate “abroad.”

This invocation of the legal critical subject gives Kaplan considerable leverage to mount criticism on a number of theoretical fronts. She seems to have, for instance, argued through, if not beyond, a certain circumscribing or exhausting of the issue of imperialism by the “spectacle” talk. Nikhil Pal Singh precautions all readers against the temptation to interpret Kaplan as a theorist of the spectacle and argues that Kaplan urges to see the underlying mechanism of the imperial through the spectacle and not to lose sight of the matters and methods pertaining to less “spellbinding” issues like kitchen, wars, laws and court decisions.<sup>3</sup> Overcoming the “spectacle-speak” in the field of U.S. studies is somehow equivalent to overcoming metaphysics in philosophy, at once unthinkable and formidably forbidding, but essential. The problematic of the spectacle in Kaplan needs to be taken seriously as it could easily be conflated with the euphoria of “the end of history” and the subsequent victory of the VCRs and dishwashers (Fukuyama, 1992, p. 312), or with a certain justification of neocolonialism coming from conservative propagandists such as Dinesh D’Souza, who encore empire for its benevolence and liberatory presence in the Third World as it offers “Titanic. . . baseball caps . . . technology” (D’souza 2002).

To continue with the theoretical positions that Kaplan re-envisions, she, perhaps unbeknownst to herself, is also responding to a vehement exorcism of the resurgence of the legal and constitutional questions by the American Left. For instance, Fredric Jameson bemoans the untimely return of political philosophy, along with its “ancient” issues of constitution and citizenship; Jameson calls it one of the regressions of the current age (Jameson, 2002, p. 2). By referring to the insular cases like *Downes v. Bidwell* and the space of the legal limbo that the cases unfold only to relegate the inhabitants of these “unincorporated” and “disembodied” territories like Puerto Rico into beings at once inside the jurisdiction of law and outside it, Kaplan very successfully wields a critique against the perpetual production of the threshold figures that are “neither citizens at home nor aliens from another nation” (Kaplan, 2002, p. 3).

Kaplan also cuts her way through a conceptual fix another Americanist, Paul Lauter, points out between American studies and various forms of ethnic studies. According to Lauter, there is a tension between the “unconsidered internationalizing impulse” on the one hand, and the “exceptionalist parochial tendencies in the US academy” (Lauter 2001, p. 133). Kaplan pushes the argument to its limit by contending that the ambiguous limbos opened by Perry Miller’s jungle epiphany in the “Congo,” and by the “Doctrine of Incorporation” in the insular cases on “Porto Rico” unsettle the manifest domesticity of America as a nation by turning it into a “haunted house” (Kaplan, 2002, p. 6).

### **Nation as Homogeneity**

Kaplan is perspicacious enough to notice that the drive to hegemony is also the crisis of hegemony. She notes that “imperialism does not emanate from the solid center of the fully formed nation; rather, the meaning of the nation itself is both questioned and redefined through the outward reach of the empire” (Kaplan, 2002, p. 12). In order to instantiate various machinations of empire, she turns to Williams Appleman Williams’ concept of the U.S. Empire

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<sup>3</sup> In his review of Kaplan’s *Anarchy* Singh outlines the modern resonance of anarchy, especially US humanitarian intervention in Iraq. He writes that the American folk tradition of public lynching and the statue’s fall captures Kaplan’s characterization of the American fantasy of global conquest without colonial annexation, her way of pulling back the curtain on the imperial spectacle (Singh, 2004, p. 431).

as a public phenomenon or a way of life that could as much be observed in the kitchen, novels, movies, and theaters as in the battlefields. However, for Kaplan, the “United States” remains a unitary and concrete whole. On the one hand, she acknowledges, with Hardt and Negri - two of only a few theorists of empire that make it to *The Anarchy* - that empire does not have a fixed center, and nation and its narrations are always in the making; on the other hand, by foreclosing empire from foreign policy, diplomacy and international relations conducted by what she calls the diplomatic elites and by extricating empire from economy, she foregrounds only a certain notion of “culture” so that one could examine the formation of “a dominant imperial culture at home” (Kaplan, 2002, p. 14). Thus Kaplan, who starts by invoking specters of the repressed other, employs the same mechanism of repression and exorcism of the economic and political dimensions of the empire. Even a casual reader would be able to locate the sources of her anxieties as she painstakingly disengages empire from economy and conflates “culture” with empire without ever stopping to define what she means by “culture.”

As Kaplan is left alone with the overwhelming ambiguities of “culture,” the homogeneity she evokes in the name of “multiple interpretations” of empire in terms of culture, therefore, leaves her alone with a monolithic notion of the United States, thereby completely obfuscating the terms of her critique.

In his response to the Russell Tribunal held in April 2004 to examine “The Project of New American Century (PNAC)” that proposed a program of rebuilding America’s defense in order to maintain global supremacy, Jacques Derrida cautions us exactly against this type of wholesale critique of America without the careful examination of the democratic forces within it:

Personally, I have a critical attitude towards the Bush administration and its project, its attack on Iraq, and the conditions in which this has come about in a unilateral fashion, . . . But notwithstanding this criticism. . . I would not wish for the United States in general to have to appear before such a tribunal. I would want to distinguish a number of forces within the United States that have opposed the policy on Iraq . . . It is a very legalistic country rich in displays of political liberty which would not be tolerated in a good many other countries (Derrida, 2004).

Kaplan’s critique of empire and exceptionalism may be strong but not stringent as it does not strive towards what Derrida would call rigorous critique and calculation, often misunderstood for being destructive or deconstructive. In other words, once she reverts to William A. Williams’ theoretical position that empire is *a way of life in the U.S.*, it is impossible for her not to homogenize empire, let alone find a critical locus within empire to counteract it. To make matters worse, since her term of critique is “culture,” her resistance yields neither the critique of capitalism that we find in Lauter, nor a pragmatic vision to deal with problems of “selfishness and sadism” we witness in Rorty. This is not to separate the sphere of culture from being implicated in empire and colonialism. In fact, culture, as the etymology of the term suggests, is inherently complicitous with colonialism. But at the same time, we need to distinguish, as Raymond Williams has taught us, the dominant from the residual culture, and to acknowledge the emergent culture that could be oppositional to the hegemonic culture (Williams, 1977, p. 121-23).

### **From Exceptionalism back to Normativism?**

Kaplan’s indulgence in the singularity of culture devoid of any politico-economic overlay owes a great deal to Hardt and Negri’s work on empire, to which, she admits, she has “more in

common than with their description of imperialism" (Kaplan, 2002, p. 15). As we know, Hardt and Negri distinguish "Empire" from "imperialism" by arguing that American sovereignty which is true to the spirit of Empire differs from the "modern" or traditional form of sovereignty based on transcendental models outlined in the works of Hobbes and Rousseau. American sovereignty, for Hardt and Negri, not only returns to the "origin," or to the signatures of the founding fathers, but it also has an internal arrangement of the multitude through the checks and balances in the legislative, which in turn, makes it, "an extraordinarily secular and immanentist" empire (Hardt & Negri, 2000, p. 165). The immanentist or "postmodernist" sovereignty of the United States (as opposed to the modernist and transcendentalist sovereignty of the old Europe) is also a democratic sovereignty, for in spite of its "tendency towards the open, its expansive projects on an unbounded terrain," the democratic expansionism of the United States is inclusive rather than exclusive. Hardt and Negri continue, "When it expands, this new sovereignty does not annex or destroy the other power it faces, but on the contrary opens itself to them, including them in the network" (Kaplan 2000, pp. 165-166).

Not that Kaplan shares Hardt and Negri's euphoria for the immanent and postmodernist sovereignty of the United States. In fact, she distances herself very clearly from the distinction Hardt and Negri create between empire and imperialism. She clarifies:

They [Hardt and Negri] regard Theodore Roosevelt as pursuing old-style European imperialism, and Woodrow Wilson with his League of Nations as foreshadowing the emergence of today's postmodern regime, in which sovereignty of the nation dissolves in the borderless world of Empire. I would argue that these two tendencies are not as distinct as Hardt and Negri contend, but that both are at work in varied configurations throughout the history of U.S. imperialism. . . . To separate Empire from imperialism is to foreclose the history of American imperialism and breathe new life into the belief in American exceptionalism. (Kaplan, 2002, pp. 15-16)

On the one hand, Kaplan puts Hardt and Negri's project back on track by pointing out that Theodore Roosevelt and Woodrow Wilson's empires intersect in the course of their apotheosis of American nation-form itself; yet, on the other hand, she immediately retracts from her critique of the U.S. national particularism to limit her analysis only to the "cultural expressions [that] reveal an anxiety about the anarchic potential of imperial distension underlying this exceptionalist ideal" (Kaplan, 2002, p. 16).

Before reflecting more on the "imperial distension" that Kaplan refers to here, let us return shortly to Hardt and Negri's *Multitude*, wherein at the outset they re-invoke the same juxtaposition between empire and imperialism, but with a different key. This time they substitute the problematic of empire and imperialism with the contradiction between the legal and political "exception" and U.S. exceptionalism. Citing former Secretary of State Madeleine Albright's justification of the use of force: "If we have to use force, it is because we are America. We are an indispensable nation," Hardt and Negri argue that Albright's very ambiguous statement has two often mutually exclusive implications. On the one hand, the idea of an "indispensable nation" implies, according to them, that the U.S. is an exception from the corruption of the European forms of sovereignty, and it is the beacon of republican virtue in the world; on the other hand, it also means, in the legal tradition, exception from law, a pretext to exempt itself from international agreements such as conventions on environment, human rights, criminal courts, etc. For Hardt and Negri these two aspects of U.S. exceptionalism are contradictory and mutually self-exclusive, so much so that to read them as compatible and

mutually reinforcing is a blatant ideological confusion and mystification (Hardt & Negri, 2004, pp. 8-9).

Hardt and Negri's projects on empire and multitude not only fail to grasp the interface, as Kaplan shows, of two imperial tendencies, but they also miss (as do, unfortunately, Kaplan's works) the intertwining of the legal/political and historical "exceptionalisms." In spite of her insightful discussions of law and court decisions, and in spite of her invocation of the important world-historical juncture of the 1890s around which, to recall the German jurist and philosopher Carl Schmitt's *The Nomos of the Earth*, the old nomos of the earth was dissolved and the new global nomic lines emerged by putting the United States at the sacral center of the earth, Kaplan fails to bring in the history of legal exceptions that the United States has time and again appropriated in the name of the security of the Western Hemisphere.

No surprise therefore that such an important document of U.S. exceptionalism as the Monroe Doctrine (1823) was mentioned neither by Hardt and Negri nor by Kaplan. Carl Schmitt notes that nobody seemed to notice the political significance of the doctrine when it was declared by President James Monroe on December 2, 1823. Schmitt historicizes various global lines starting from the Spanish-Portuguese *rayas* based on the dichotomy of the Christian/non-Christian territories that endowed the Pope the authority to grant missionary mandate to occupy non-Christian territories. The second major global legal line, according to Schmitt, is the French-English friendship lines, or the European amity lines that belong to the 17th-century religious civil wars between land-appropriating Catholic powers and Protestant sea powers followed by the lines drawn in the name of President James Monroe's "Western Hemisphere," the third and the last global line raised by the new world to counteract the old.

The amity lines created the so-called "free space of the sea" beyond the European states, thereby bracketing war among themselves and in turn converting the "free space" of the sea and the rest of the world, particularly Africa, America, and Asia into the theatre of European wars. Monroe's idea of the Western Hemisphere is a zone of security and self-defense against the perpetration of European powers. But in essence it, along with the other two global lines, is the construction of exceptional territories. Schmitt locates the modern jurisprudential notion of the state of exception in the "idea of a designated zone of free and empty space," which lies beyond the pale of law, therefore it is a zone of pure war" (Schmitt, 2003, p. 98).

These states of exceptions that in fact were not States per se included the New World (until Monroe Doctrine); and they were extra-legal spaces, therefore "open" and "free" spaces for occupation, and they remained, according to Schmitt, beyond the amity lines and hence beyond European public law until the Congo Conference of 1885, which was at once the culmination of the European race for legal rights, land-appropriation and occupation and the beginning of the relativization of Europe and eventually the disappearance and dissolution of the European international law. For Schmitt, the Congo conference was not purely European due to the significant presence and decisive role of the U.S. in the conference, especially the unprecedented recognition by the U.S. of the flag of the International Congo Society, which was at the time a non-state or free soil.

The decisive entry of the U.S. into the Congo Conference and its recognition of a space of exception herald not only a shift from European public law to a new global order but also mark the beginning of the expansion of the American security zone beyond the traditional three miles limit. By the time of the Panama Declaration of 1939 the line of the neutral security zone extended three hundred miles into the Atlantic and the Pacific from the American coasts



(Schmitt 2003). Like every true empire, he continues, America also claimed a sphere of spatial sovereignty beyond its borders, thereby pushing, especially after the Spanish-American war (1898), Monroe doctrine's security proviso into an "open imperialism":

The war did not abide by the old continental concepts of the Western hemisphere, but reached deep into the Pacific Ocean and into the old East. . . From a global geographical perspective, this was a step from the West to the East. In relation to the new East Asian sphere rising in world history, the American continent was now in a position to displace the Eastern continent, just as one hundred years earlier old Europe had been thrust aside in the eastern hemisphere by the world-historical rise of America. (Schmitt, 2003, p. 292)

Thus, the idea of the space of exception allows a curious peek into the constant manifestations of these spaces throughout American history; and the Monroe Doctrine, in its multiple incarnations over the centuries, is seminal insofar as it at once helps explain American intervention in the Congo, the continental expansion in the Americas, and America's eastward movement.

Kaplan is aware of the paradigms of "linear" thinking in the history of the United States. However, she argues that "the confrontation between white settlers and Native Americans" as represented by the notion of the Westward movement of Empire, "overlooks how intimately the issues of slavery and emancipation and relations between black and white were intertwined with each stage of U.S. imperial expansion" hence a necessity to explore "the representations of U.S. imperialism. . . not through a West/East axis of frontier symbol and politics, but instead through a North/South around the issue of slavery, Reconstruction, and Jim Crow segregation" (Kaplan, 2002, p. 18).

Unless one decodes this paradigm shift from the East/West axis to the North/South axis as the invocation of the "global south," often conjured up in the works of postcolonial theorists like Gayatri Spivak, or as the invocation of the "global color line" found in the works of W.E. B. Dubois and recently in the works of the critical legal race theorist, Charles W. Mills,<sup>4</sup> Kaplan's inversion of the axes implies a mere change of vantage points rather than a subversion. Whether she stays in one axis or the other, both are, and equally so, the reproductions of the multiple teleological narratives of imperialism. Mere switching of the perspective does not confront the issue of the "exception" at all. Kaplan's cultural analysis helps project a homogenous nation with merely immanentist sovereignty. Her substitution of the East-West axis of empire by the North-South model makes her perspective one-sided. As a result, her analysis not only suffers from a lack of rigorous interpretation of the exception, it also fails to do "justice" to the exceptional zone of "pure war" beyond the politico-legal lines, especially to the "bare life" inhabiting the exceptional zone.

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<sup>4</sup> For the discussion of the global south as the constituency of postcolonial discourse, especially women not as victim but the base of the metropolises of the empire see Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's *The Critique of Postcolonial Reason* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1999). Charles W. Mills' treatise on race and empire, *The Racial Contract* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1997), can be taken as an extended discussion of W.E.B. Dubois's prophetic assertion: "The problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the color line - the relation of the darker to the lighter races of men in Asia and Africa, in America and the island of the sea" (Dubois, 1999, p. 17).

### Bare Life and the Question of Justice

When we move from Kaplan's critique of American exceptionalism – that is, from her critique of America as an exceptional nation – what we gain is exceptionalism from below. In other words, if Kaplan focuses on the cultures of Empire, the theories of legal exception focus on the subjects of imperialism. To put it differently, we move from exceptionalism from above (the nation) to exceptionalism from below (those excluded from that national culture or its boundaries). And that is the sphere of bare life.

Kaplan refers to the insular cases and some other legal quandaries associated with the question of the American empire, but her analysis falls short of expanding itself into a more rigorous examination of the question of the bare life and the creation of the exceptional zone, which can be said to be one of the favorite sports of imperialism. Even though Kaplan is perceptive enough to correlate Justice White's demurral to granting citizenship to the Puerto Ricans in *Downes v. Bidwell* and the stripping of African Americans of full citizenship at home; she fails to notice that all nations and all laws are founded upon some originary violence. It is thus an exceptionalist position to take if we only focus on America or on Israel by arguing that the proximity of the US and Israel can only be explained through exceptionalism – through their being exceptional nations – one the land of refuge and another of "exceptional suffering," a tie that makes Israel "as much a domestic as a foreign issue" (Kaplan, 2018, pp. 7-8). All institutions of citizenship and belonging, incorporation and interiority are created on or against the body of what philosopher Giorgio Agamben calls the "bare life" created in and through exception:

The exception does not subtract itself from the rule, rather, the rule, suspending itself, gives rise to the exception and, maintaining itself in relation to the exception, first constitutes itself as a rule. The particular "force" of law consists in this capacity of law to maintain itself in relation to an exteriority. We shall give the name *relation of exception* to the extreme form of relation by which something is included solely through its exclusion. (Agamben, 1998, p. 18)

The "rule" of exception, Agamben would argue, is inclusion through exclusion; and this is exactly what happens in the exemplary insular tariff case, *Downes v. Bidwell*, where contrary to Kaplan's images of the hybrid or graft, Puerto Rico and its "alien races" are included only through exclusion. Therefore the imagined threat of the alien races that resounds the majority decision in the case is far from Kaplan's fantasy of imperialism for a "borderless world where it finds its own reflection everywhere [to the effect of shattering] the coherence of national identity, as boundaries that distinguish it from the outside world promise to collapse" (Kaplan, 2002, p. 16); rather it is the imperial auto-immunity with which the empire suspends its "exceptionalism" in order to incorporate the "exception" through exclusion.

This double meaning of "exceptionalism" that Hardt and Negri unsuccessfully tried to grapple with in the *Multitude* can be seen fully at work in *Downes v. Bidwell*. In order to answer what it means to have an exception as the general rule of a polity, or what it means to have this exclusionary and violently unjust core in every law, we need also to recall *Dred Scott v. Sandford*, an influential and decisive precedent to *Downes v. Bidwell* itself. *Dred Scott v. Sandford* is a case of trespass in which Dred Scott is moved by his "master," Dr. Emerson from Missouri to a military post in Rock Island and from there to Snelling situated on the west bank of the Mississippi. After returning from the federally governed and free territory Dred Scott claims that he is free. The Supreme Court summarizes the case as follows:

The question is simply this: Can a negro, whose ancestors were imported into this country, and sold as slaves, become a member of the political community formed and brought into existence by the Constitution of the United States, and as such become entitled to all the rights, and privileges, and immunities, guaranteed by the instrument to the citizen? One of which rights is the privilege of suing in a court of the United States in the case specified in the Constitution. (1857, p. 403)

Without implying a homology between these two cases that are historically and contextually different from each other, one can maintain that these cases nevertheless exemplify what we have been trying to grasp as the exceptional or free zone (Puerto Rico) or the exceptional beings, the bare life (the descendants of the slaves). Both deal with the question of the borderland between a mere human being and a legal citizen, and both try to grapple with the issue of legal and constitutionally protected territory and, by extension, the “zone of war” that lies beyond it.

In *Downes v. Bidwell* the Supreme Court holds that the tariff imposed on goods imported from Puerto Rico does not violate the constitutional requirement that all duties, imposts and excises should be uniform throughout the United States. This is an interesting moment at which the interface of the legal and the illegal, the constitutional and the unconstitutional become problematic and indeterminate. President Jefferson, for instance in his 1803 letter to John Dickinson, expressed his doubt about the powers of the government to constitutionally acquire foreign territories.<sup>5</sup> And here is an argument that not only legitimizes holding of such a territory, but also tries to maintain that the revenue collected on the goods imported from Puerto Rico is constitutional.

Kaplan's characterization of Puerto Rico as an exceptional space or case therefore does not go beyond anarchy and hybrid liminality. Even though the North/South axis allows her to bring in the issue of slavery, it does not address the issue of the figure of the exception, the bare life, who invariably bears the brunt of the imperial legal decisions. These decisions are obviously made at overdetermined junctures where constitutionality and legality are pushed to their limit. To put it differently, they are made at the critical moments at which constitution and legality justifiably suspend themselves to defend themselves against what they deem to be or project as unconstitutional and foreign.

Whereas Kaplan believes that the foreign lodged within the domestic casts a dark enough shadow to render the borders at home extremely unstable; exceptionalism, on the contrary, operates through self-suspension. In the process it betrays the violent nature of law, and produces the figure of the exception, the bare life without citizenship and without any legal and political protection, whose mere existence is perpetually exposed to the violence of the exceptional decisions, and whose bare life, too savage and raw to be a full member of a polity, occasions the manifestations of the imperial sovereignty. When the majority decision in *Dred Scott v. Sandford* very self-consciously states that it is “not the province of the court to decide upon the justice or injustice, the policy or impolicy, of these laws,” and when it further remarks that since the decision of the question regarding who the “people of the United States” are, is already taken by the law-making power, the duty of the court is “to interpret the instrument they have framed” (405), we immediately realize what is left out of the picture of the legal

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<sup>5</sup> Jefferson writes that the “general government has no power but such as the constitution has given it, and it has not given it a power of holding foreign territory, and still less of incorporating it into the Union. An amendment of the Constitution seems necessary for this” (Jefferson, 1895, p. 262).

violence masquerading as justice.

Whenever justice is not a point of reference, any formalistic execution of law in the name of law, as Derrida has shown us, is violence;<sup>6</sup> and law here is not limited to law proper, rather it includes all structures built on the figure of exclusion. Whether it is the law/structure of patriarchy or imperialism, colonialism, or capitalism, all are violent and exclusionary, therefore it is imperative to invariably invoke justice as responsibility towards the ones that are excluded.

Kaplan is aware of the simple reversion of the categories when she detects a Wilsonian tenet in W.E.B. Du Bois's Pan-African leadership (Kaplan, 2002, p. 200). Any programmed counter-structure to existing hegemony is not necessarily the end of exclusion and exception. The resurgence of a Du Boisian "world citizenship," argues Kaplan, also helps resurface the Wilsonian vision of "the United States of the World." But what she leaves unelaborated is how the force of justice, the disrupting event that justice is, exceeds simple calculation of the reversal of the structure, again built on the figure of the exception.

The exception against itself is discernible, albeit never present, on almost every page of the court decision over *Downes v. Bidwell*, which is not only a complicated case about the issue of imperial territories but also about the battle between two constitutional bodies: the Congress and the Court. It becomes obvious when the court gets divided exactly on this issue as the concurring judges uphold the unlimited authority of the Congress over the ceded or acquired territories, and the dissenting opinion inclines more towards judiciary interventions into the alleged power of the Congress over the territories. The Court opinion at the outset sets the background for this division:

The case also involves the broader question of whether the revenue clauses of the Constitution extend their own force to our newly acquired territories. The Constitution itself does not answer the question. Its solution must be found in the nature of the government created by that instrument, in the opinion of its contemporaries, and in the decisions of this court. (1901, p. 244)

Unlike Kaplan, who thinks that Justice White resurrects the memory of chattel slavery, the majority decision opines that the 13<sup>th</sup> Amendment applies to the territory, whereas the 14<sup>th</sup> does not. Which is to say the inhabitants of the territories are protected by law against any attempt at involuntary servitude, but they are not citizens. As a result, the insular cases also surface the same legal distinction between the mere human and the citizen that we encountered in *Dred Scot v. Sandford*. The majority opinion, therefore, cites the special provision made by the Congress for organizing the territory of Louisiana by the act of March 26, 1804, whereupon Chief Justice Fuller, in his dissenting opinion, along with three other judges concurring, invokes the same "force" of exception:

Aliens in the territories are made citizens of the United States, and bankrupts residing in the territories are discharged from debts owing citizens of the states, pursuant to uniform rules and laws enacted by Congress in the exercise of this power. (357)

Court cases like *Downes v. Bidwell* are not only testimonials of the history of legal exceptions,

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<sup>6</sup> The reference here is to Jacques Derrida's monumental treatise on law and violence, first delivered as the keynote address to a colloquium at the Cardozo Law School in October 1989, "Force of Law: The "Mystical Foundation of Authority," (*Deconstruction and the Possibility of Justice*, ed. Drucilla Cornell, et. al. (London: Routledge, 1992), 3-67). In this work, Derrida discusses justice both within and outside of the constellation of the laws.

but they also foreground, as the dissenting Chief Justice clarifies, the possibility of exceptional decisions by which justice is granted even to the aliens and the bankrupts. Simple negation of the exception, therefore, is not sufficient. This is what perhaps Frederick Douglass meant when exasperated by Judge Taney's decision on *Dred Scott v. Sandford*, he said: "Judge Taney can do many things, but he cannot perform impossibilities" (Douglass, 1857, p. 31). Justice beyond calculation is performing an impossibility, which is possible only through exceptional decisions against all exceptionalisms.

## Conclusion

Amy Kaplan's works have transformed the field of American cultural studies through their critique of empire and exceptionalism. Her call to open American studies to the field of postcolonial studies truly makes her a unique but globally involved American critic. While her engagement with empire makes her approach truly transnational and decolonial in its spirit, it must be expanded beyond the context of culture that she limits it to. In the same way, her evocation of exceptionalism must also be situated in the broader theoretical debates on the legal concept of the exception as it relates to sovereignty. A wholesale renunciation of exceptionalism is like throwing away the baby with the bathwater in the same way as arguing that there is no outside to empire is like resurrecting and reinstating the totalizing narrative of imperialism. In order to envision a theory of decolonization, we must expose the constraints Kaplan imposes on her theory in the name of the everydayness of culture. Such an expansion is impossible without deploying a certain radical form of decisionism that challenges the very notion of everydayness by attending to the emergence of exceptional moments of justice and responsibility.

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# Salley Vickers' *Where Three Roads Meet* as Metaleptic Retelling of the Oedipus Myth

Oedipus Mitinin Metaleptik Yeniden Anlatımı Olarak Vickers'ın *Üç Yol Ağızı*

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## Abstract

Considering the fact that postmodern literature is an intertextual field which the reader reinterprets the text in an ongoing process, it is evident that referring to the past, particularly ancient myths through various writing strategies is becoming highly popular. Within the framework of this understanding, Salley Vickers attracts attention with *Where Three Roads Meet*, where she retells the Oedipus myth, published in 2007 by Canongate Publishing House. The author blends the ancient myth with the Oedipus complex that Freud introduced to psychoanalysis, transforming it into a masterfully constructed contemporary myth that oscillates between the fantasy world of myth and Freud's era. This study's primary aim is to examine Vickers' various narrative techniques in rewriting the ancient myth, particularly metalepsis. In this respect the study also focuses on the author's existential, psychological, philosophical, and fantastic interpretation approaches to constructing her postmodern work. Finally, in her metaleptic version based on the one-to-one dialogue between Freud and the narrator, this study concludes that Vickers deconstructs the myth tradition and creates an illusion effect on the reader that suspends thanks to the ambiguity and multi-layeredness composed in the narrator's core and throughout the account.

**Keywords:** Salley Vickers, *Where Three Roads Meet*, Retelling, Metalepsis, Mise en abyme

## Öz

Post modern edebiyatın, okurun metni sürekli yeniden yorumladığı metinlerarası bir alan olduğu düşünüldüğünde, çeşitli yazma stratejileriyle geçmişe, özellikle de antik mitlere atıfta bulunmanın oldukça popüler hale geldiği açıktır. Bu anlayış çerçevesinde Salley Vickers, 2007 yılında Canongate Yayınevi tarafından yayımlanan Oedipus mitini yeniden anlattığı *Where Three Roads Meet* ile dikkat çeker. Yazar, antik miti Freud'un psikanalize kazandırdığı Oedipus kompleksiyle harmanlayarak, mitin fantezi dünyası ile Freud'un dönemi arasında gidip gelen, ustalıklı kurgulanmış çağdaş bir mite dönüştürür. Bu çalışmanın temel amacı, Vickers'ın başta metalepsis olmak üzere antik miti yeniden yazarken kullandığı çeşitli anlatı tekniklerini incelemektir. Bu doğrultuda çalışma, yazarın post modern eserini inşa ederken kullandığı varoluşsal, psikolojik, felsefi ve fantastik yorumlama yaklaşımlarına da odaklanmaktadır. Son olarak, Freud ve anlatıcı arasındaki birebir diyaloga dayanan metaleptik versiyonunda, Vickers'ın mit geleneğini yapı bozuma uğrattığı ve anlatıcının merkezinde ve anlatının genelinde oluşturduğu belirsizlik ve çok katmanlılık sayesinde okuyucu askıya alan bir illüzyon etkisi yarattığı sonucuna varılmıştır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Salley Vickers, *Where Three Roads Meet*, Yeniden anlatım, Metalepsis, Mise en abyme

## Introduction

Postmodern literature is an intertextual field in which the reader reinterprets the text in an ongoing process. In this context, with Derrida's reckoning, meaning is infinite and always passes through a different context. (Derrida, 1978). Similarly, for postmodernism, prevailed

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by the idea of the death of the author put forward by Barthes, Rosenau thinks that the search for facts and sources or origins should be abandoned and replaced by an authorless, purely intertextual field where there is no agent (Rosenau, 1992). Foucault, on the other hand, defends the view that the author cannot precede his/her work and that the polysemic texts are reworked and thus disappear in these texts. Finally, the French literary critic, who denotes that we must start by overturning the traditional idea of the author, argues that it does not matter who is speaking in the text (Foucault, 1980). Considering the above information, it is possible briefly to state that “The intertextuality method, which aims to make both the text and the reader active, lays the groundwork for the creation of new texts based on old texts” (Ünsal Ocak, 2018, p. 246).

One of the writing techniques commonly used in contemporary literature and popular culture is metalepsis. It is a term that originated in ancient legal discourse and later coined by Gérard Genette to describe the transitions between the narrative level. The French theorist defines metalepsis as follows: “any intrusion by the extradiegetic narrator or narratee into the diegetic universe (or by diegetic characters into a metadiegetic universe, etc.) or the inverse” (Genette, 1980, pp. 234-35). Metalepsis, in general terms, purports the unauthorized transition from one level to another. One of the fundamental distinctions of narrative discourse is the distinction between the level of discourse and the level of story. In this respect, metalepsis comes about when the extradiegetic narrator or reader enters the diegetic world without permission when the diegetic characters make an unauthorized entry into a meta-diegetic world or vice versa, that is, when the meta-diegetic characters violate the diegetic level. Therefore, it may be argued that metalepsis overturns the levels involved in this distinction and questions its validity (Dervişcemaloğlu, 2019). In other words, metalepsis also refers to narratives with more than one narrative world or level, overt or implicit. It only takes place at the borders between these narrative levels when multi-layered narratives tell stories within the story, that is, “world in which one tells, the world of which one tells” (Cohn and Gleich, 2012, p. 236). In metaleptic narratives, where the levels of entirely different worlds are intertwined, simultaneity is created by intervening in the story and the telling time. The objective is to get the reader immersed in the fiction.

Another literary technique frequently used in postmodern literature is the *mise en abyme*, which goes arm with arm with metalepsis. Derived from heraldry, the term comes down being ‘placed in the abyss’ and is considered a technique of placing a copy of an image into itself. Gray explains the term, first used by the French writer André Gide with a similar approach, for modern criticism: “A term for a self-reflexive repetition in a text. [...] The term also suggests infinite regression, such as the design which used to appear on the Quaker Oats packet, on which there was a picture of a man holding a Quaker Oats packet, and so on” (Gray, 1992, p. 181). The term was adopted in deconstructive criticism for occasional glimpses of the ‘dissolving emptiness’ that underlies the endless free play of word meaning.

Examination of the contemporary literary works, obviously affirmed that referring to the past through various rewriting techniques is highly prevalent in postmodern literature. In this context, myths, major sources of inspiration in literature, as in almost all disciplines, becomes effective. Karen Armstrong argues that mythology is an art form that points to the timelessness of human existence beyond history and allows us to step out of the intricate flow of random events and look at the essence of reality. She also claims that when famous philosophers such as Freud and Jung entered the contemporary study of the soul, they instinctively appealed to classical mythology to explain their insights and brought new interpretations to ancient myths (Armstrong, 2005). In this regard, Scottish Publishing House Canongate, adopting the fact that myths form the basis of literature, has started the tradition of retelling myths by commissioning celebrated authors from different



nationalities as of 2005. One of the ancient myths rewritten within the scope of this tradition is the myth of Oedipus. In 2007, Vickers rewrote the classical myth under *Where Three Roads Meet*, presenting a contemporary version of the myth to postmodern literature. Utilizing different writing techniques and strategies, in *Where Three Roads Meet*, the author combines her literary expertise with her analytical psychotherapy knowledge and evaluates the ancient myth from a postmodern perspective. Accordingly, blending the Oedipus myth with the Oedipus complex, which Freud introduced to psychoanalysis inspired by the ancient myth, the author creates a masterful fiction that oscillates between the fantastic world of myth and Freud's time. In her retelling, Vickers amalgamates metalepsis and, *mise en abyme* technique with a self-reflective account. She removes the classical myth, reinterpreted from a psychoanalytic and existential viewpoint, from its monological structure and exposes it to different interpretations. Within this scope, this study explores how Vickers employs narrative devices, particularly metalepsis, in her retelling of the ancient myth. Parallel to this, the study also focuses on the author's presenting a highly contemporary recount from an existential framework and deconstruction of the mythic story.

### **Vickers' *Where Three Roads Meet* as Metaleptic Retelling of the Oedipus Myth**

The mother then of Oedipus I saw,  
 Fair Epicaste, that, beyond all law,  
 Her own son married, ignorant of kind,  
 And he, as darkly taken in his mind,  
 His mother wedded, and his father slew.  
 Whose blind act heav'n expos'd at length to view,  
 And he in all-lov'd, Thebes the supreme state  
 With much moan manag'd, for the heavy fate  
 The gods laid on him. She made violent flight,  
 To Pluto's dark house from the loathed light,  
 Beneath a steep beam strangled with cord,  
 And left her son, in life, pains as abhorr'd  
 As all the furies pour'd on her in hell. (Homer, *The Odyssey* Ch 11, v350[629])

Vickers brings the myth of Oedipus, which inspired various literary texts and turned into an indispensable theory of psychoanalysis by Freud, to the agenda with a striking interpretation in *Where Three Roads Meet*. In the novel, the classical myth is told to Freud, by a mysterious visitor oscillating between different narrative levels. The narrator claims to be the wise seer Tiresias of Thebes; however, it is ironically realized that he suffers from the Oedipus complex. Based on a psychological, philosophical, existential, and fantastic interpretation, the work consists of twenty chapters, including the last stages of Freud's illness. Each chapter is based on the basis of a dialogue between Freud and the stranger who has regularly visited Freud struggling with cancer. In the novel, set partly in pre-World War I London and partly in the world of myth, the Nazis allow Sigmund Freud, suffering from cancer's debilitating effects, to leave Vienna. Taking refuge in England, Freud settles with his family in a house in Hampstead, where he dies about a year later. Having been locked in his room as a result of numerous operations, Freud has difficulty speaking; yet the routine visits of the stranger storyteller revive his health. While telling the famous defender of the Oedipus Complex a story he knows, the mysterious visitor appears in different roles, completely upsetting the narrative coherence. In the novel where the narrative and story levels are violated, the reader has difficulty comprehending whether what is told is real or Freud's imagination on his deathbed. Towards the end of the work, when Freud hesitates about whether what he saw was real or "Not a figment of [my] imagination?" (Vickers, 2007, p. 192), he leaves the reader with a great contradiction. Moreover, and most importantly,

the various roles and overlapping different narrative levels Vickers assigns to the narrator in her masterfully constructed work turns the text into a highly multiplex one. In this context, deploying the metaleptic narrative in her retelling, the author not only confuses the reader but also manages to keep his/her attention alive by involving him/her in the story entirely. Accordingly, there is complete confusion and violation regarding the story's time, thanks to the temporal distortion effect created by the transition to the old period of which the stranger is a part while telling the epic from time to time.

Subtly constructed on different setting and narrative levels, the novel is a blend of the Oedipus myth and the Oedipus complex of the narrator during the difficult seven-year period in the monastery. Deploying principally the ontological metalepsis narrative strategy, which roughly means the narrator's involvement with the story, the author rewrites the ancient myth with a highly contemporary interpretation. In this sense, the novel may also be considered one of the most striking samples of ontological metalepsis, which affirms the fact that the same character cannot occupy two different levels ontologically at the same time. In this context, the incompatible aspects of the two stories told in the novel, in terms of the collision of the narrator's roles in multiple narrative levels simultaneously, indicate a metaleptic narration. Consequently, it is evident that the work consists of two different narrative levels. Thus, the story, in which the narrator tells Freud about his experiences as 'our story' (Vickers, 2007, p. 134), takes place in a metaleptic narrative level covering the pre-World War I London period and the seven-year monastic period of the fantastic myth world.

Within this context, the narrator is in dialogue with Freud as two different characters, both in the myth world and in the monastery where he spent his childhood, in the story on different levels that do not overlap with each other, which he occasionally recounts in the 'mind world,' as he suggests. The stranger begins his story by asserting that he and a 'shepherd' witnessed an 'eagle' bringing a 'baby' on Delphi Cithaeron Mountain when he was at the age of twelve. The author makes an ironic and playful reference to the Oedipus myth at the novel's very beginning. He then adds that he saw a man rolling her mother from his hands to the ground on the line between fantasy and reality. This hand is familiar because of its white mark: it belongs to his father. This time, the author successfully connects the Oedipus complex and the narrator. Before long, the child has faced the bitter truth that his mother is dead. However, he never believed his father's lie about his mother drowning in the river. Eventually, the child finds himself in "the chief sanctuary of the god Apollo" (p. 36) as the stepmother does not want a child who resembles his mother. The narrator continues his story, which he tells unreliably from the point of view of his mind from time to time, after the death of his mother, of going to the monastery for various reasons and living there. The one who suffers from the Oedipus complex first-hand is Tiresias, the blind seer in the ancient myth, with the metalepsis technique that the author utilizes very ingeniously on a different level. The fact that her grandmother wants him to go to the monastery due to his interest in "eagles" indicates that the narrator, who gets his ability to see the future from the eagle, will assume a different identity in the same story as a blind seer. While the narrator is taken to the monastery on the slopes of Parnassus, which will be his home for about seven years, he ironically claims that he learns from his uncle that his full name is "Tiresias" the first time. However, at the same time, from another narrative level, it is understood that he is a little boy with Oedipus complex who hates his father. One of the reasons to be taken to the monastery is, in reality, to protect him from his father. Deploying similar metaleptic writing strategies and word plays in the rest of the work, Vickers depicts the narrator as the seer in the ancient myth and the child with the Oedipus complex, who conflicts with his father and burns with longing for his mother. In this context, towards the end of the eighth chapter, where he is given the task of portraying

the god in the music festival “in memory of Apollo’s return to Delphi” (p. 70) may be considered as the section where the author uses metalepsis highly cunningly. The narrator witnesses snakes mating in the pool while in seclusion for his duties before the ceremony. Then, when he leaves to pee, he encounters the silhouette of a naked woman, and ironically, the first word that comes to his mind is ‘mom.’ The narrator’s following statement is an embodiment of the Oedipus Complex that reflects the unaccomplished mother-son relationship: “The golden snakes coupling in the silver water of the pool and the smell of urine on the wet thyme beneath my bare feet and the new light on the green rushes and the woman’s White body- and my piteous childhood loss” (p. 77). Then he goes blind, just like the seer in the ancient myth. Vickers manages to cunningly blend the story of the blind seer Tiresias in the ancient myth with the character of the boy with the Oedipus complex. In this way, two different identities, which cannot exist on the same narrative level, are attributed to the same character, creating an illusion effect, which is the essential feature of a metaleptic narrative. In the ancient myth, it is told that when young Tiresias comes across two entwined mating snakes, he separates them with his stick and instantly turns into a female. Seven years later, while walking in the forest, the female Tiresias reencounters a pair of snakes mating. Putting his wand between them, he completes the cycle and becomes a male again. There are accounts about Tiresias that this life experience may have unintentionally caused his blindness in both sexes (Servi, 2014).

Exploration of Vickers’s retelling in this regard demonstrates how the author has succeeded in adapting the experiences of Tiresias in the ancient myth to her protagonist at the effective use of a metaleptic narrative level. The author blends Tiresias and the stranger who appears in the role of the son full of hatred towards his father in the story he tells Freud. The one who witnesses mating snakes appears in two roles: Tiresias in the ancient myth and the boy with the Oedipus complex. Thus, the reader’s attention is questioned by the illusion created by presenting the three events of the manifestation of the mother in the form of Athena and the blindness of the oracle after seeing the snakes on the same narrative levels. In her retelling, where a transition between the fictional world and the real world and two separate fictional worlds is accomplished, Vickers pictures the stories and characters in different worlds on the same narrative level. Thus, a kind of simultaneity effect is created in the text, based on the illusion of the reader’s resemblance to reality and caused by an illusion that the reader believes, not disbelieves. As a result, a highly gripping contemporary myth is created, where the time of narration and the time of the story intersect, and the reader stays alert.

In metalepsis, at first glance, the assumption of simultaneity between the telling of the story and the time advancing on the world level does not seem to involve a violation of the level. However, the simultaneous formation reflected here is like a door to the fictional world. Therefore, at this point, a border violation can be mentioned. The levels of entirely different worlds appear to be interpenetrated. Genette argues that while creating resistance to realism with metaleptic strategies, the importance of the limits of creativity that are forced to overcome this is also shown and summarizes the situation as “a shifting but sacred frontier between two worlds, the world in which one tells, the world of which one tells” (1980, p. 236). The adroitly constructed narrative level in Vickers’ novel, where the author plays with story and narration time and creates the impression of being simultaneous, is the kind that may be considered an affirmation of the ‘sacred’ border between the two worlds in Genette’s argument above. Tiresias, the blind seer who witnesses Oedipus’ unfortunate fate, also tells his own story, claiming that he has experienced similar things. However, they seem like stories told from the same level. In reality, the coincidence of narrative levels in Vickers’ masterfully created fiction does not go unnoticed by the shrewd reader. In Greek mythology, the blind seer Tiresias, the son of Athena’s nymph Chariclo,

plays an essential role in the tragic events involving the protagonists of the Oedipus myth. He declares that the person who would defeat the Sphinx would be presented with the throne of Thebes and that he would marry Iocasta. He also assists Oedipus to learn the secret of his birth. In this regard, Vickers places the blind seer Tiresias, the witnesser of the ancient myth, in the centre with his vivid narratives in her novel. Using the details of the ancient myth ironically and in different narrative levels in her text, the author presents an ingeniously fictionalized reinterpretation both spatially and thematically. In the story from the narrative level of Tiresias, the blind seer makes a kind of confession by making personal comments with word plays while telling the story of the unfortunate Oedipus. In the story that he tells Freud, the narrator includes Oedipus again in a twisting way while sharing his experiences of his student years in the monastery. In this way, he manages to keep the reader's attention and excitement alive in the confusion he creates. This is where his only friend Pythia in the monastery rewarded with the ability to prophesy like the narrator comes in. However, she is cursed and dies due to her prophecy from the god Apollo to a Corinthian client against the rules. Unable to bear the death of his friend, the narrator leaves the monastery and returns to Thebes with the prophecy "Tiresias grieve no more. From this day the deathless ones will speak to you in the song of birds" (Vickers, 2007, p. 86). Re-entering the classical myth from the turning point, the narrator reintroduces the 'cursed' Corinthian who caused Pythia's death, to the story highly strikingly and ironically. The Corinthian is none other than Oedipus, who would become king as a reward solving the Sphinx's riddle after killing King Laius. Through the metalectic narrative, the author encourages the reader to ponder by giving Tiresias and the young man at 'where three roads meet' on his way back to Delphi after leaving the monastery a chance to make ironic comments. Tiresias, who takes all possibilities as "Had I left one hour sooner or later, had I taken this way rather than that, what might have changed, what might have been" (p. 92) into account is in an effort to find a happy ending for the story.

The riddle of the Sphinx told as "what walks on four legs in the morning, two legs at noon and three legs in the evening?" (p. 95) as the representation of destruction and evil luck in the classical myth, is outstanding in regard to its connection with the fate of the unfortunate Oedipus. Known for his sharp wit and bad luck, Oedipus gives the correct answer and explains: "man crawls as a baby, walks upright in maturity and in old age creeps by with the aid of a stick" (p. 95). Eventually, at the end of the novel, the author reminds the reader that the riddle of the Sphinx has come true with a fiction that coincides with the story in the ancient myth. The fate of the hapless Oedipus is bounded by his name, meaning "swollen feet," and the number "three." Upon a cursed prophecy, baby Oedipus is left to die by being chained to his feet. When the adoptive mother sees the poor baby's miserable feet, she names him Oedipus, meaning "swollen feet." Unable to escape his fate, Oedipus kills his father "where three roads meet" and has sexual intercourse with his mother thus ensuring the fulfilment of the prophecy. Finally, facing the facts, Oedipus cannot stand all this and blinds himself with the gold pins in his "mother-wife's" collar. The unfortunate blind "son-husband," Oedipus, needs a cane to walk, just like the "three" legged final form of human beings in the riddle of the Sphinx. The narrator tries to explain the situation from an existentialist point of view, which Sartre describes as "a doctrine that does render human life possible; a doctrine, also, which affirms that every truth and every action imply both an environment and a human subjectivity" (1966, p. 24) along the fine line between fate and choice. The tragedy of Oedipus in the ancient myth is based on his desire to know what he should never have known. Could Oedipus have lived happily unaware of everything if he had not been so questioning about his birth parents? Within this frame, Oedipus's suffering parallels Bohlmann's assessment about where Sartre saw the origin of suffering: "Sartre sees the origin of anguish in the feeling of a being which is not responsible for its origin or

the origin of the world, but which, because of its dreadful freedom to choose one form of action over another, is responsible for what it makes of its existence" (Bohlmann, 1991, p. 35). Similarly, Tiresias in the retelling is self-critical thanks to the time violation created. It is a matter of curiosity whether Tiresias, with the gift of prophecy, had ever wondered about the meaning of Oedipus's name or could have solved the mystery. Had he gone to the crossroads earlier or later, could he have prevented all this, or had he preferred the motto "Let well alone" (Vickers, 2007, p. 101). Keeping questioning, in the following chapters, the self-reflective narrator claims that Jocasta, the 'mother-wife' (p. 132), actually knows the truth. Furthermore, the narrator alleges that the queen has many clues by which she might recognize her son. For example, the scars on his legs or the red hair from his infancy are evidence that may reveal his son's identity. Nevertheless, the queen ignores all the signs as she desires to have sex with her son. In essence, the author, through the narrator, re-evaluates the tragic story of the mother-father-son trio in the myth, from another narrative level and with a highly postmodern and existential approach. It is judged whether the fates of the heroes of the tragedy could have been reversed, and this tragedy could have been prevented, either with the outside intervention of the blind seer or with the different choices of the heroes of the tragedy. Thus, the Oedipus Complex, which Freud first put forward in his book *Interpretation of Dreams* (1899), inspired by the Greek mythical figure, would have never appeared in psychoanalysis. In a letter to Wilhelm Flies on October 15, 1897, Freud confesses how he developed the concept of the Oedipus complex:

the Greek legend seizes upon a compulsion which everyone recognizes because he senses its existence within himself. Everyone in the audience was once a budding Oedipus in fantasy and each recoils in horror from the dream fulfilment here transplanted into reality, with the full quantity of repression which separates his infantile state from his present one. (qtd. in Masson, 1985)

According to Freud's psychoanalytic theory, the concept of the Oedipus complex is roughly defined as the sum of desires, impulses, and fantasies to possess and have sexual relations with the opposite-sex parent, which creates a sense of rivalry with the same-sex parent (Freud, 1913). The term, mainly used to refer to a stage in the development of young men, coincides with a critical stage in the normal developmental process of the individual. According to Freud, boys around five (phallic stage) who want to have all their mother's love feel jealous of their fathers. Their hatred towards the fathers can lead to a psychodynamic conflict that may cause them to unconsciously wish for their fathers' death. In this context, having been trained as a Jungian analytical psychotherapist, Vickers combines her expertise in the field with her novelist identity and tells the Oedipus complex, the basis of Freud's psychoanalysis studies, through the main protagonist, who has two identities at the same time at the metaleptic narration level.

In the story-within-a-story text, it is found out that the narrator identifies his story with his father, with Oedipus, the unfortunate hero of the ancient myth. From the story's beginning, ironic emphasis is placed on the narrator's rivalry with his father. It is also observed that the narrator's loss of mother in the phallic period and his hatred for the father entirely overlap with Freud's account of the Oedipus complex. The hero's claim from the world of mind that the father killed his mother and he was sent to the monastery after his stepmother's arrival may obviously be regarded as an indication of the conflict between father and son. It is endeavoured to reach a safe conclusion for both sides of the conflict between the same-sex parent and him by sending the child away to the monastery. For example, in his dialogues with Freud, the narrator states that the idea of being sent to the monastery "he also thought of saving [me]" (Vickers, 2007, p. 38) belonged to his grandmother, and he reveals the father-son conflict. Alternatively, in the same chapter, the cathartic confession of the stranger as "my father might well have murdered me too" (p. 36)

in his dialogues with Freud, may also be considered as the embodiment of the father-son conflict. Freud's ironic 'or you him' answer to confession is also significant in that it resembles the unfortunate fate of Oedipus. Dylan Evans' argument in the *An Introductory Dictionary of Lacanian Psychoanalysis* about the Oedipus Complex may be regarded as the affirmation of the father-son conflict in Vickers's retelling. The author explains Lacan's approach to the Oedipus complex, asserting that the evolution of the father figure is responsible for the fate of the Oedipus complex and that the child desires the mother regardless of gender, and therefore the father is a hindrance. Evans states that the evolution occurred when the father intervened in the dual relationship as a third link as follows:

By promulgating the incest taboo in the second time, the imaginary father is seen to deprive her of this phallus. Lacan argues that properly speaking, this is not castration but privation. However, Lacan himself often uses these terms interchangeably, speaking both of the privation of the mother and of her castration. (Evans, 1996, p. 23)

The panoramic analysis of the novel displays that the narrator composes a plot in which he identifies himself with the hero while witnessing the experiences of the myth hero in the story told. In both stories, the boys are rejected by their fathers and obsessed with their mothers. King Laius never wanted to have a son. Therefore, he deprived his wife of the feeling of motherhood. Even if he unintentionally caused the birth of a boy, he sought a way to get rid of him with the excuse of an evil fortune prophecy. Similarly, a father figure wants to get rid of the son in the modern version of the myth, which creates an illusion effect on the reader with a metaleptic narrative that partially overlaps each other from the world of the mind. The situation of the unfortunate Oedipus, who, upon the fulfilment of the prophecy, finally goes to his mother's bed and makes her bear a child, corresponds to the subconscious manifestation of the mother in the naked female silhouette of the strange narrator in Vickers' version. The narrator's statement that "I felt sick with a fever and the Pythia took me into her bed [...] I sucked it in her arms like a baby" (Vickers, 2007, p. 84) may again be regarded as a result of image of a woman substituted for a mother.

In this context, the analysis of the text with regards to its psychological dimension highlights that Vickers gives a chance to analyse and interpret both the narrator and the mythical figure Oedipus by blending him with the Oedipus complex, simultaneously with the role of the blind seer Tiresias. Telling the interpenetrated stories from different narrative levels with two overlapping identities to the topic expert Freud gives the narrator a chance for catharsis and awareness. The story that he claims to be 'the story of the two of [us],' is in reality the story of three people: Oedipus in the myth, the narrator himself, and Freud the one who knows the story of both. Taking credit for himself through the ancient story, the stranger questions his evil destiny. Thus, by abstracting the ancient myth from its monological discourse, the author prioritizes a dialogic account that the reader can question with a highly postmodern approach and succeeds in making the unquestionable story of the ancient myth exposed to different interpretations. Bakhtin argues that "By its very nature the epic world of the absolute past is inaccessible to personal experience and does not permit an individual, personal point of view or evaluation" (1992, pp. 14-16). He explains the dialogic structure of the novel as follows: "[e]very novel is a dialogized system made up of the images of 'languages,' styles and consciousnesses that are concrete and inseparable from language" (p. 333). Within this frame, the final cursed prophecy in the ancient myth is discussed in detail and explored in all its aspects. Different endings are explored with alternative solutions from a sceptical and experimental view of the narrator. Accordingly, in her novel, written from an existentialist perspective, Vickers aspires to draw attention to the bitter contradiction between fate and choice. In the novel, she opens to interpretation through the narrator, the author rebels against the fatalistic point of view by

displaying different approaches to the tragic end of the classical myth. Thus, it is observed that the narrator tries to reverse Oedipus's the cursed fate, with whom he identifies himself, through different option presentations, and to create an entirely different ending. In this regard, changing Oedipus' destiny represents changing his destiny as well.

The dominant metalepsis narrative strategy emphasized since the beginning of the text goes in hand with a concept taken from art theory, *mise en abyme*. It is stated by Bloom that "In the field of literary criticism, André Gide borrowed from heraldry the term *mise en abyme* to define the property of certain paintings in which a convex mirror reflects the scene in the picture, or the fictions in which a text-within-the-text echoes the main narrative" (2007, p. 228). Considering the above conception, it is evident that Vickers generates a new fictional order in her version of retelling of the myth with cunning puns and temporal and spatial distortions. This new order and retelling are formed through the *mise en abyme* technique, and metalepsis. It is observed that the analogy between the plot and the subplot in the work shows parallelism with the definition as "any [smaller] part of a work that resembles the larger work in which it occurs" (Nelles, 2010, p. 312). Moreover, the analysis of the novel with respect to the *mise en abyme* technique, based on an explicit piece-whole analogy, as mentioned above, clearly indicates the existence of two pieces in the work that resemble the main text. The novel depends on telling two sub-stories intertwined in the main plot. Accordingly, the sub-story[s] displays apparent analogousness with the main plot concerning the thematic and structural features. The main plot of the work is based upon the storytelling of a stranger narrator with regularly visits to the famous psychoanalyst Freud for about a year before he dies. This story is the amalgamation of the myth that formed Freud's theory and the Oedipus complex of which the narrator is a part. Direct association of the narrator with the ancient myth and the Oedipus complex is also very significant with respect to the author's cunning intelligence and skill in using language. In her retelling, the author presents the narrator as both the blind seer Tiresias, personally witnessed the unfortunate hap of Oedipus in the epic's fantastic world, and the young boy in the phallus period, the victim of the Oedipus complex who oscillates between the time of Freud and the time of fantastic myth. In this respect, the work draws attention with its apparent parallels between the events and the hero. The hero in the main plot goes to the fantastic world of myth via the story he tells, as Tiresias, the key figure of the myth. As a blind seer who witnesses the myth first-hand, attains the right to interpret the story told with the illusion he strives to create. Thus, it is possible to review what happened in the classical myth on the same narrative level as Freud, the expert on the main plot. Accordingly, the determination to explore a new version of the classical myth, on this narrative level where fantastic heroes are set free to question their deeds and thoughts may obviously be perceived. In addition, it can be asserted that employing the *mise en abyme* technique, the author successfully brings the roles of the foreign narrator overlapping with the sub-story into reality. Thanks to the temporal harmony created in the main story level with the roles in the narrated sub-story, the reader gets lost in the stories that have penetrated each other. In the main plot the protagonist manages to fascinate the reader, as describing the roles of both the oracle and the adolescent with the Oedipus complex who clashes with his father in the sub-story he tells, in a language unique to the fantasy world. In stories that are highly parallel to each other, the narrator also creates an opportunity to go back to the main story level and comment on the myth and the Oedipus complex through the dialogue with Freud. In this context, the sub-story reflects the main plot, just like in Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. However, the main difference here is that even though the narrator, the protagonist of the plot, oscillates in different story levels, the reader is hesitant about not believing the illusion effect created. Although the stories take place at different times and obviously in different settings from the main story, the

narration level confusion composed by metalepsis ensures that the reader is deeply immersed in the fiction.

### Conclusion

In *Where Three Roads Meet*, Salley Vickers handles the Oedipus myth from a new perspective. Having been specialized in analytical psychotherapy, the author, offers a multi-layered rewriting blending the Oedipus myth with the Oedipus complex. The author emphasizes the conflict in the mother-father-son triangle by assigning a metaphorical title, *Where Three Roads Meet*, at the very beginning. This conflict is first introduced in the myth of Oedipus. After ages, it has transformed into a theory as the basis of Freud's psychoanalytic argument and has become one of the essential reference sources of literature. The author subtly combines these two epochs with the contemporary era of the reader.

In her retelling, Vickers frees the ancient myth from its monologic structure and presents it from various perspectives, such as psychological, philosophical, fantastical, and existentialist. Through a highly contemporary approach, she transforms classical myth into a dialogic one in which the reader may also be a part. Vickers's version is based on the one-to-one dialogue between Freud and the narrator, who appears in different roles and at different narrative levels. Consequently, basing her text on self-reflective narration and deconstructing the mythic story, the author deploys metalepsis, a frequently used technique in postmodern literature. Vickers appoints her protagonist as the narrator simultaneously and thus creates an illusion effect on the reader. In view of this, the author attributes him to different roles: both as Tiresias, the blind seer in the fantastic world of myth, and as man suffering from the Oedipus complex oscillating between different worlds. Thus, through her masterfully constructed plot with polyphonic narrative strategy, her retelling presents the hero's evil fate in the epic and the transformation form of the myth into theory in the contemporary world. Furthermore, using "three roads" and "swollen feet" as the recurring motif of her novel, the author handles the Oedipus myth and complex from an existential perspective. The metaphorical 'three' motif in the text is manifested as a symbol of the inevitable fate of humankind and Oedipus with the cursed prophecy. Temporal distortion and intertwining at the narrative level in the fantastic world of myth and Freud's time may be regarded as a direct reflection of the use of metalepsis.

The act of disbelief is suspended thanks to the ambiguity and multi-layeredness created in the narrator's core and throughout the account. The sudden transitions of the narrator between the myth world and the narration time construct simultaneity. The novel is constructed on a complex plot based on an amalgamation of the Oedipus myth and the Oedipus complex, inspired by the ancient myth. The similarity of the part-whole is the demonstration of the concept of *mise en abyme* within the novel. The other noteworthy aspect of the novel is that the author treats the ancient myth from an existential and psychological viewpoint thanks to the narrator's involvement in the story through ontological metalepsis. Thus, in the contemporary version, the myth is explored from a Freudian perspective while contemplating the fine line between fate and choice with an existential approach. In the retelling, exposed to interpretation from different perspectives and narrative strategies, the author strengthens her hand by deploying the dialogic feature of the novel emphasized by Bakhtin. Consequently, Vickers' metaleptic retelling allows for reconsideration of Oedipus' cursed fate in the ancient myth through the sceptical viewpoint of the narrator with alternative solutions and different endings.



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# Explicit Intertextual Connections in Driscoll's *Her Perfect Family*: A Reader-Centric Analysis

Teresa Driscoll'un *Her Perfect Family* Adlı Eserinde Açık Metinlerarası Bağlantılar:  
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## Abstract

This study examines explicit intertextuality and its impact on the reader in Teresa Driscoll's crime novel, *Her Perfect Family*, published in late 2021. Julia Kristeva's theory of intertextuality stands as a significant milestone in postmodernist literature, positing that any new text is inevitably influenced or enriched by prior writings. British author Driscoll employs explicit intertextuality throughout the work, incorporating references to renowned English writers such as George Eliot, Thomas Hardy, Charles Dickens, Charlotte Brontë, D.H. Lawrence, Mary Shelley, and Lewis Carroll in various chapters. As a result, the reader perceives a connection between these authors and the chapters, contributing to the overall reading experience. It becomes evident that Driscoll, as a contemporary postmodernist novelist, draws from the themes and characters of these established literary figures to enhance the intricacies of her plot. By providing clues and insights relevant to the contemporary context, the author cleverly weaves explicit intertextual references into the narrative, engaging readers in a process akin to solving a puzzle, and creating connections. Moreover, Driscoll assumes the role of an instructor, posing critical questions about the aforementioned acclaimed authors, their works, and their characters. This approach makes the reader feel like a student, encouraging them to establish intertextual connections in *Her Perfect Family* and to understand the plot more easily.

**Keywords:** Her Perfect Family, intertextuality, Julia Kristeva, postmodernism, Teresa Driscoll

## Öz

Bu çalışma, 2021 yılı sonlarında yayımlanan Teresa Driscoll'un suç romanı *Her Perfect Family*'deki açık metinlerarasılığın okuyucu üzerindeki etkisini incelemektedir. Julia Kristeva'nın metinlerarasılık kuramı, postmodernist edebiyatta önemli bir kilometre taşı olarak kabul edilir ve herhangi bir yeni metnin önceki yazılardan kaçınılmaz şekilde etkilendiğini veya onlardan beslendiğini öne sürer. Driscoll, eserinde ustalıklı açık metinlerarasılıktan yararlanarak George Eliot, Thomas Hardy, Charles Dickens, Charlotte Brontë, D.H. Lawrence, Mary Shelley ve Lewis Carroll gibi ünlü İngiliz yazarlara atıflar yapmaktadır. Çağdaş bir postmodern romancı olarak, Driscoll bu tanınmış edebi figürlerin temalarından ve karakterlerinden yararlanarak olay örgüsünü zenginleştirmektedir. Böylece okuyucu, adı geçen yazarlarla eserin bölümleri arasında bir bağlantı kurarak romanın bütününden daha fazla keyif alabilmektedir. Yazar, çağdaş bağlama uygun ipuçları ve anlayışlar sunarak metinlerarası referansları ustalıklı öyküye işlemekte ve okuyucuyu bir bulmaca çözme ve anlam oluşturma sürecine dâhil etmektedir. Ayrıca Driscoll, söz konusu ünlü yazarlar, eserleri ve karakterleri hakkında eleştirel sorular sorarak bir öğretmen rolünü üstlenmektedir. Bu yaklaşım, okura kendini bir öğrenci gibi hissettirerek *Her Perfect Family*'de metinlerarası bağlantılar kurmasını ve olay örgüsünü daha kolay anlamasını sağlamaktadır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Her Perfect Family, metinlerarasılık, Julia Kristeva, postmodernism, Teresa Driscoll

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## Introduction: On Modernism and Postmodernism

The concepts of modernism, postmodernism, and contemporary exist in the intellectual and artistic realms, each with distinct characteristics. Contemporary encapsulates the current moment and exhibits intricate connections with both modernism and postmodernism. To distinguish between modernism and postmodernism, it is crucial to recognize their subtle differences. Postmodernism, as the name implies, is not a mere successor but a nuanced reaction to the long-standing modernist tradition, rooted in the Enlightenment era of the 18th century (Tarescavage, 2020, p. 1) and even extending back to the Renaissance. This movement evolved not as a complete replacement but as a distinct approach, primarily aimed at comprehending the literature and art of the 20th century. Contrary to common beliefs that its inception occurred in the aftermath of modernism, particularly in the wake of the Second World War (Albright, 2018), postmodernism has a significant emphasis on the period following 1980.

Modernism, a concept coined in the 1900s, still holds relevance in numerous cultural and commercial spheres in the 21st century. While some may consider modernism and postmodernism to be purely artistic trends, they encompass a far broader range of societal issues (Firat and Venkadesh, 1995, p. 239). Modernism is rooted in the belief that life has an objective purpose. According to modernists, humanity's goal is to unravel the secrets of the planet and the universe. They prioritize aesthetics, values, and ethics over politics and maintain an optimistic outlook on life. Many remarkable modernist works in art, literature, music, architecture, poetry, and science have received attention and praise due to their elegance and simplicity. However, the outbreak of World War I instilled scepticism in modernist novelists such as Virginia Woolf, James Joyce, and D. H. Lawrence, leading to a widespread pessimistic tone in their works.

Postmodernism, in contrast, is a way of thinking that explores to deny any particular character of all sorts of privileges and to reject the consensus of taste. It originated as an artistic trend and evolved to take on social and political significance, as is often the case with transformative ideas (Bishop, 1996). Profound and radical changes occurred in the final decades of the 20th century which had an impact on politics, the economy, society, the arts, and literature as well. The progress in technology, music, art, and literature characterizes the postmodern era, serving as a reflection of the state of people in the most economically developed societies. Postmodernism first appeared as a philosophical term in the 1979 work *The Postmodern Condition* by the French intellectual Jean François Lyotard (Browning, 2014). He stated that different groups of people use the same language in distinct ways, implying that they can arrive at a somewhat diverse and personal view of the world (Lyotard, 1984). However, postmodernism lacks a precise definition since there is no consensus on what the term exactly means. Powell, for instance, describes postmodernism as “an attempt to make sense of what is going on now” (1998, p. 17). From my perspective, postmodernism is a system of thought which tries to reveal the reasons that restrict people's freedom and equality in the present era. In this regard, movements such as feminism align with postmodern principles by advocating for equal rights between women and men. Furthermore, feminism is considered postmodern because it asserts that “differences exist to be respected and contribute to multiplicity and polyphony” (Gündar, 2022, p. 870).

Lyotard (1984, p. xxiv) defines postmodernism as a sense of incredulity resulting from scientific advancement. Furthermore, he contends that everything we have learned thus far should be met with suspicion (Lyotard, 1984, p. 79). Consequently, the concept of origins has typically been met with scepticism in postmodernist thought (Sheehan, 2004, p. 20; Kuznar, 1997, p. 95). Thus, postmodernism rejects the pursuit of absolute truth, logical

reasoning, and precise definitions within individual sciences, favouring complete deviation instead. According to Jameson (1984, p. vii), postmodernism signifies a fundamental departure from dominant cultural and aesthetic norms and the emergence of new socioeconomic structural elements. In this light, postmodernism stands in opposition to the ideals of progress, science, and technology. Consequently, authors within this framework are sceptical of emerging technologies, perceiving them as a potential threat to individuals seeking their own identity and place in the world. This outlook on technology represents a marked departure from previous decades when machinery was celebrated as a source of salvation. While it may have seemed that postmodernity waned in influence during the first decade of the 21st century, Kester (2018, p. 1330) posits that postmodernity, in conjunction with modernity, is experiencing a clear revival following the 2016 UK and US elections.

Postmodern literature is influenced by the transformations brought about by a globalized and digitized society, while simultaneously paying respect to the great narratives and philosophers of the past, whose contributions remain relevant even today. For example, Butler (2002, pp. 2-3) notes that postmodernists often draw inspiration from Karl Marx and have a heightened awareness of the unique state of contemporary society, which they refer to as the 'postmodern condition'. Building upon this, poststructuralist theorist Julia Kristeva (1986, p. 37) argued in 1966 that there is nothing truly new to write about and coined the term 'intertextuality' to describe the phenomenon of all new writing being a combination of existing texts. Thus, intertextuality, in the context of literature, refers to the utilization of written texts in various forms, such as implicit or explicit references, allusions, parodies, and quotations, creating a network of interconnected works. Scholars like Michel Foucault, Roland Barthes, Philippe Sollers, and Jacques Derrida have further developed the concept of intertextuality, which greatly influenced postmodernist literature and criticism (Orr, 2010, p. 1).

On the other hand, intertextual reading by the reader involves recognizing, exploring, and interpreting the relationships and connections between the text they are currently reading and other texts, whether they are literary works, historical documents, cultural references, or even personal experiences (Akdal and Şahin, 2014). It is an active and analytical approach to reading that goes beyond the surface of the text to understand how it interacts with the broader literary and cultural context. When a reader engages in intertextual reading, they are actively seeking out these relationships and using them to create a deeper understanding of the text at hand. According to Hartman, when a reader is actively creating meaning from a text, they establish intertextual connections between different textual elements to suit a specific context. In this process, the reader borrows, adjusts, adopts, and reshapes various text components within their own mental framework (Hartman, 1992, p. 298).

Various linguistic stylistic devices, including expressive language and engaging formulations, are employed in postmodern literature. Narratives are not always presented in chronological order, and multiple narrative threads often coexist within a work. Furthermore, through the use of periodic time jumps, readers are challenged to reconstruct the plot themselves. It is worth noting that the novel genre has been particularly popular among postmodern British women writers, such as J.K. Rowling, Doris Lessing, Zadie Smith, and Teresa Driscoll, who have made significant contributions to postmodern literature.

### **Teresa Driscoll's Postmodern Novel: *Her Perfect Family***

Teresa Driscoll is a notable writer of the 21st century known for her postmodernist approach in crafting novels. She began making a name for herself in British literature with

the publication of her first book *Recipes for Melissa* in 2014<sup>1</sup>. While not all of her novels adhere strictly to postmodernism, it is possible to identify postmodernist elements in the majority of her works. Driscoll's seventh novel, *Her Perfect Family*, was published at the end of 2021 and swiftly became a best-seller. This postmodern work serves as a response to a world perceived as chaotic, where objective facts are challenging to communicate, and independent literary reality is elusive. The novel is structured in the whodunit genre, keeping readers in suspense until the very end as detectives strive to uncover the perpetrator. As previously mentioned, the profound changes in nearly every aspect of human life and the rapidly advancing technology are central concerns in postmodernism. Within this framework, scepticism about technology emerges as a dominant theme, seen as a threat to human survival within the novel. Driscoll endeavours to illustrate that the world is on the brink of destruction or may have already sustained irreparable damage.

*Her Perfect Family* is a suspenseful psychological thriller spanning sixty-nine chapters, providing insight into the past and present lives of the family members. This narrative technique, characterized by frequent time jumps, is a hallmark of postmodern writing, often leaving readers in a state of confusion. However, the novel commences with a prologue and concludes with an epilogue, enriching the reader's experience with additional information. Rachel and Edward Hartley eagerly await their daughter's graduation from the university, anticipating it as one of the happiest days for their close-knit family. Unfortunately, this joyous occasion takes a tragic turn when Gemma stumbles and falls on the stage, revealing that she has been shot and is now fighting for her life. As Gemma remains in a coma in the hospital, the identity of her attacker remains shrouded in mystery, leaving the reader suspicious of various characters.

In postmodern literature, authors often assume an active role within the narrative, akin to Driscoll in *Her Perfect Family*. They write their narratives by meticulously organizing and directing events in a distinct, non-linear, and fragmentary style. This approach compels readers of Driscoll's work to assemble the narrative themselves, resembling a patchwork quilt or Frankenstein's monster, where the pieces may appear jumbled. The intricate storyline and the absence of clear character identities in the novel are emblematic of postmodern literature. As mentioned before, the theory of intertextuality developed by Kristeva greatly contributes to the complexity of the plot in postmodern works. This theory posits that newly written texts inevitably bear the imprint of previously written ones. In Driscoll's writing, intertextuality takes centre stage as a defining element of the postmodern novel. By incorporating references to several renowned writers throughout her work, Driscoll aims to make the plot more accessible to readers. However, intentionally, she at times includes references unrelated to the central themes of her novel, such as her allusion to Beckett in chapter 19: "Waiting for Godot – did Samuel Beckett truly write for performance or did his work pose restrictions for actors and directors? Discuss" (Driscoll, 2021, p. 155).<sup>2</sup> This deliberate choice disrupts the plot and introduces confusion to the reader's experience, aligning with a common objective in postmodern literature.

Driscoll's novel incorporates several postmodern elements, offering a multi-layered reading experience. Most notably, the characters in the book frequently engage in interior monologues, allowing readers to access their inner thoughts and perspectives. Each character's worldview is influenced by a myriad of circumstances, contributing to a rich

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<sup>1</sup> On her official website, Teresa Driscoll reveals that her dream of becoming a novelist has been alive since her primary school years. After more than two decades as a journalist and presenter for the BBC, as well as a columnist for various newspapers and magazines, she released her debut novel. For more information, please visit <https://www.teresadriscoll.com>.

<sup>2</sup> All quotes from *Her Perfect Family* are presented in their original format in this article.

narrative tapestry. Throughout *Her Perfect Family*, a prevailing sense of fear and pervasive mistrust permeates the lives of the characters. This underlying atmosphere establishes a predominant tone of pessimism and scepticism, highlighting the theme that appearances can be deceiving.

On the other hand, it is crucial to note that Driscoll's work, while portraying the negative aspects of the contemporary world, refrains from presenting clear-cut solutions, a characteristic often found in postmodern literature. The protagonist, Gemma, exemplifies the unconventional nature of postmodern literature, as she does not conform to the traditional heroic or sympathetic character. Instead, she is portrayed as an individual with ethical ambiguities and a notable lack of positive development throughout the narrative. Gemma's character also grapples with profound insecurity, evident in her unwarranted fears and persistent anxiety about being under surveillance, a theme that signifies the constraints on personal freedom. Her belief that both her ex-boyfriend Alex and others are monitoring her actions adds another layer of complexity to her character and further underscores the postmodern elements within the novel.

### **Destruction by New Technologies**

As previously mentioned, a common theme in postmodern works is the perception of people feeling threatened by new technologies, which leads them to question their place in the contemporary world. In *Her Perfect Family*, technology is depicted as a source of endangerment. Similar to Driscoll, postmodern writers such as April De Angelis, Thomas Pynchon, and J.G. Ballard often express scepticism towards technological advancements and critique their impact. Besides, the rapid development of information technologies has resulted in new forms of communication and interaction. Individuals now have quick access to information through digital platforms, and online environments have largely replaced face-to-face communication in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. This shift has raised concerns about the widespread availability of private information and the potential for unwanted intrusions, as noted by Heise (2004, p. 140).

Furthermore, the global spread of technology and the internet has given rise to new threats, such as computer hacking, as pointed out by Chua and Holt (2016, p. 534). Consequently, the abundance of technological opportunities also brings forth certain problems for humanity. One example of the high level of opportunities afforded by technology is the ease of accessing vast amounts of information through search engines and online databases. However, this abundance of information access can also lead to difficulties in discerning reliable sources. Additionally, the proliferation of social media platforms has facilitated instant communication and connection with others worldwide. Nevertheless, this constant connectivity has also raised concerns about personal privacy, cyberbullying, and the addictive nature of social media (Griffiths and Kuss, 2017, p. 50).

The majority of people use the internet, their smartphones, and social media because these platforms offer cutting-edge means of communication and information sharing in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Private conversations or group chats are common ways for people to communicate with their friends and family, making it simpler and easier to rapidly exchange ideas. Social meta-processes like individualization, encourage the need for sociability and a social community. Digital media, like Facebook, have a significant impact on our daily lives and, as a result, on our communication because of their universality and constant distribution (Dhiman, 2023, p. 1; Güney, 2023, p. 83). Thus, Facebook is merely one of many internet-based programs with the ability to connect its users virtually, regardless of place or time. Indeed, Facebook is similar to a social space where users interact with one another, go about their daily lives, and allow other users to be a part of those activities (Karlsen and Aalberg, 2023, p. 144). It is now impossible to imagine a culture without social media, and

as a result, cultural and media change are closely related to each other. In addition, technological advancements like digitization cannot be solely blamed for a changing media culture.

One of the highlighted themes in *Her Perfect Family* is online crime via Facebook, that is frequently used by Gemma. The term 'online crime' as a postmodern problem has been around since the beginning of the 21st century. With its disadvantages as well as benefits, the developing technology has produced this new form of crime. In general, online crime refers to the misuse of communication channels such as WhatsApp, SMS, email, and social media like "Facebook, Twitter, and Google Plus" (Ariel and Avidar, 2015, p. 19) by one or more people. It is a type of violence, extremely harmful, and an antisocial behaviour that has long-term and far-reaching negative effects. In this sense, online crime is a non-physical form of violation that occurs within social media. There are a number of emerging definitions for social media, both within the communication domain and in connection with other fields like "public relations, information science, and mass media" (Carr and Hayes, 2015, p. 47). As Bentz et al. (2021, p. 55) indicate, social media offers regular people a simple way to connect with breaking news, and a constant stream of information. In this context, social media is internet-based digital technology (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010) that assists users in connecting with others, exchanging ideas, and learning about new information. Thus, social media, in contrast to traditional media, enables anyone to create content together with adding contributions and comments.

In *Her Perfect Family*, Gemma's boyfriend successfully breaks her social media account password. As a result, Alex has been accessing Gemma's private messages and pictures without her knowledge or approval (Driscoll, 2021, p. 72). This online crime, which manifests as an intrusion into Gemma's personal life makes her feel embarrassed and monitored, and her psychology deteriorates. Driscoll emphasizes in this framework that online crime, which is commonly underestimated or not acknowledged as much, can have a long-term negative impact on the victim's health in romantic relationships. For this reason, Driscoll's *Her Perfect Family* displays how technology can be misused for spying, tyranny, or domination. As Driscoll demonstrates in her novel, online crime is an ever-increasing threat, with implications for individuals, especially for women and girls, and society as a whole. So far, actions have been insufficient, and the cross-border nature of gender-based online crime has not been adequately addressed. Also, because the situation has potentially worsened during the coronavirus pandemic, Driscoll<sup>3</sup> reveals how people's social lives have changed and why they are online much more than before.

It can be concluded that Teresa Driscoll's novel, *Her Perfect Family*, is an illustrative representation of postmodern individuals who have been exposed to online crime in the digital age. In the work, the main character, Gemma, explains the effects of crime on social media in plain words. Eventually, she experiences oppression and suffering due to these troubling circumstances, leading to the development of a mental illness like paranoia (Driscoll, 2021, p. 71). Gemma firmly believes that she is continuously being watched or followed by others in both the real and online environment. Moreover, she becomes obsessed with constantly changing her social media password and stops sending online messages to her friends, expressing, "I don't use DMs<sup>4</sup> anymore, just to be on the safe side. I wish I'd taken the whole security side of social media more seriously before now" (Driscoll, 2021, p. 301). Shandler and Gomez (2022, pp. 4-6) report that online attacks elicit emotions of anger, anxiety, and dread. Consequently, the increasing occurrence of online crimes

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<sup>3</sup> It is highly possible that Driscoll wrote *Her Perfect Family* during the coronavirus pandemic which started in 2020.

<sup>4</sup> DM is a direct message send via social media.

isolates their victims from society and even leads them to experience depression due to the psychological pressure imposed upon them. Driscoll effectively practices social media criticism by highlighting its negative impact on mental health and its constraints on individual freedom.

A further criticism of technology that Driscoll presents in her novel is related to mobile phones. According to the author, these commonly used technological devices enable and contribute to the occurrence of infidelity in marriages, which ultimately leads to the breakdown of society. In the novel, Sam<sup>5</sup>, who is already married to a pregnant wife, and Gemma arrange their secret dates through mobile phone messaging. Gemma confesses this by saying, “he normally texts the name of a hotel, different each time, and I meet him in the room. Not in the bar, in case we get unlucky and anyone sees us. To be perfectly honest, I’ve hated this because it feels sort of dirty and seedy and underhand” (Driscoll, 2021, p. 216).

As observed in the quoted passage, Gemma’s emotions in her relationship with Sam are a complex mix of sadness, shame, and embarrassment. This emotional turmoil stems from the clandestine nature of their meetings, often in different hotels, with Sam always texting her the location. Gemma’s discomfort with these secret encounters is evident in her description of them as dirty, seedy, and underhand. Furthermore, this situation reflects the ease with which Sam is able to arrange these meetings, thanks to the convenience of modern technology and mobile apps. It is known that mobile applications provide numerous practical uses, but they also open the door to potential misuse, as seen in Sam’s secretive hotel rendezvous. Additionally, Driscoll seems to emphasize the vulnerability of pregnant wives to potential infidelity by their husbands.

### **Explicit Intertextuality in *Her Perfect Family***

Intertextuality is a key aspect of postmodern literature, highlighting the intricate connections that texts have with their literary predecessors and the historical and cultural contexts in which they exist (Tejera, 2023, p. 1). According to Julia Kristeva, intertextuality involves incorporating and transforming quotes from previous works, creating a mosaic-like composition (Kristeva, 1986, p. 37). Kristeva’s concept of relation suggests that every element is interconnected, serving as a wellspring of inspiration for new literary creations. This intertextual phenomenon results in dynamic spaces where diverse perspectives, worldviews, and trends converge, often blending elements from older works into innovative narratives. These connections may be made through direct quotations or subtle allusions, providing readers with a rich tapestry to explore (Kristeva, 1980, p. 88).

Within the broader context of intertextuality, there exists a specific category known as explicit intertextuality, which encompasses familiar instances where textual connections or references are overtly and intentionally presented within a work (Juvan, 2008, pp. 43-44; Lika, 2018, p. 16; Lombardi, 2021, p. 3). This visible and conspicuous integration of references from other texts is what defines explicit intertextuality. It serves to bring to the forefront the interconnectedness of the new creation with its literary antecedents, enriching the reader’s experience by making these connections more noticeable and apparent. According to Pecorari (2006, p. 4), explicit intertextuality can be recognized by readers through the presence of citations or quotation marks. Alternatively, it may go unnoticed if the writer does not use appropriate quotation marks or document the source texts. Obviously, explicit intertextuality is essentially a subset of the intertextual landscape, showcasing the intentionality behind weaving these textual links into the fabric of a work, thereby fostering a deeper engagement with the reader.

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<sup>5</sup> His name in *Her Perfect Family* is presented as ‘S’. Towards the end of the novel the reader discovers that ‘S’ is Sam.



In *Her Perfect Family*, Teresa Driscoll skilfully incorporates explicit intertextuality into her narrative. She kindly embraces literary influences and even goes to the extent of an explicit style, often presenting it in italic font, to capture the reader's attention. This meticulous approach allows Driscoll to establish intricate intertextual connections with celebrated writers, shedding light on their works and offering a deeper context and richer explanation to the chapters within her own novel. Dickinson (2016, p. 133) suggests that explicit intertextuality typically constitutes a writer's self-conscious contribution to the text. Consequently, Driscoll's use of explicit intertextuality reveals her profound understanding of her craft.

As the narrative unfolds, readers are not only encouraged but also expertly guided to discern and appreciate the symbiotic relationship between each chapter and the quoted authors and their works. Driscoll's approach to intertextuality, much like Marrapodi's (2017, p. 51) perspective, transforms the reading experience into a dynamic and interactive process. In this process, readers are like being invited to actively respond to the ongoing narrative, making connections with other texts and immersing themselves in the multi-layered storytelling. Meanwhile, in *Her Perfect Family*, the reader has the opportunity to explore the themes and characters referenced in both a cursory and in-depth manner. This flexibility allows readers to engage with the text at their own desired level of analysis and analyse deeper into the connections between Driscoll's work and the referenced texts. Whether readers choose to briefly touch upon these elements or dive into a more comprehensive exploration, the richness of the novel's intertextuality provides a platform for varying levels of engagement and interpretation.

When considering this aspect, it becomes increasingly evident that the most rewarding way to experience Driscoll's novel is within the framework of intertextual reading. This approach proves particularly beneficial when discovering the intricate connections between her work and the texts she references. Even for readers unfamiliar with the authors quoted, engaging in intertextual reading allows for a deeper understanding of the recurring themes that resonate across various texts. By doing so, readers can truly unlock the full impact of Driscoll's work, and immersing themselves in her narrative. Therefore, explicit intertextuality, as masterfully demonstrated in *Her Perfect Family*, not only shapes the reading experience but also serves as a bridge to a more comprehensive and enriched literary journey.

Our protagonist, Gemma, is a university student who frequently composes essays discussing various authors, some of whom are only mentioned by their names. These include renowned figures such as Shakespeare (Chapters 29, 49, 63), Chaucer (Chapter 63), and Virginia Woolf (Chapter 49). By integrating these renowned authors as intertexts in her narrative, Driscoll emphasizes their significance in both British and global literature. Other explicit references to English literature within *Her Perfect Family* guide the reader through different aspects and convey specific messages. For example, in chapter 12, Driscoll uses explicit intertextuality, mentioning a work without disclosing the author: "Alice's Adventures in Wonderland – *the quest for identity?*" (Driscoll, 2021, p. 109). This method enhances the reader's engagement with the text and provides a deeper appreciation of the novel's literary connections.

Driscoll acknowledges that Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, originally published in 1865, achieved global fame even before the movies, largely due to translations into approximately 170 different languages. Because of this, it is a story deeply ingrained in cultural memory on a massive global scale. The novel unfolds in a world where a child navigates life independently, far removed from societal norms. Actually, Carroll's work stands as "one of the canonical texts of Victorian children's literature" (Shi, 2016, p. 178),

portraying Alice's journey down a rabbit hole into a fantastical realm brimming with wonders and captivating creatures (Carroll, 2010). Within this whimsical environment, Alice must grapple with Wonderland's surreal laws, entirely distinct from those of the real world. As of chapter 12 in *Her Perfect Family*, Gemma is portrayed as a diligent student and a beloved daughter. Unfortunately, her innocence is shattered when we discover her infidelity, cheating on her boyfriend, Alex, with Sam. Gemma articulates her complicated emotions and remorse, likening herself to "Alice down the rabbit hole" (Driscoll, 2021, p. 115), feeling as though there's no turning back. As the novel progresses, chapter 24 reveals that Gemma is pregnant by her married school-teacher, leading her to reflect, "Feels like Alice grew up into the worst possible disaster down that stupid, stinking rabbit hole" (Driscoll, 2021, p. 179). By utilizing Carroll's concept of the 'rabbit hole' as an intertextual reference, Driscoll effectively portrays Gemma's predicament as difficult to escape, mirroring the tumultuous and unfair nature of Alice's Wonderland.

In chapters 24 and 44 of *Her Perfect Family*, Driscoll artfully employs explicit intertextuality, linking her narrative to Thomas Hardy's 1891 novel by posing a critical question, "*Is Tess in Tess of the d'Urbervilles portrayed as being responsible for her own demise?*" (Driscoll, 2021, p. 177). In the novel, Gemma is tasked with a homework assignment, explaining whether Tess in Hardy's *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* is depicted as bearing responsibility for her tragic fate. Poor but beautiful Tess, in Hardy's timeless novel, is raped by Alec, becomes pregnant, and faces rejection from society and her family. Later, Tess gives birth to the baby named Sorrow who dies because it is too weak to survive. Throughout the novel, Tess reveals her past to her husband, Angel Clare, on their wedding day. This revelation shocks Angel, leading him to leave Tess. Left with no other options, Tess is compelled to marry Alec. Nevertheless, when Angel returns and confesses his love for her, Tess experiences a nervous breakdown and kills Alec. Consequently, Tess is branded a murderess and is ultimately executed (Hardy, 2005).

There is an interesting parallel between the fictional crime and execution of Tess and the real-life experience of Thomas Hardy, who witnessed the public hanging of Martha Brown, a woman accused of murdering her husband, in 1856 (Morris, 2016). This connection aligns with Kristeva's theory that writers are influenced by their personal experiences when producing their texts. Despite her flaws, Tess is not portrayed as an "idealized literary heroine" (Watts, 2007, p. 35). However, she displays honesty by revealing her past to her spouse, Angel, which leads to the breakdown of their chance at a happy marriage. In contrast to Tess's story, Gemma's parents, Rachel and Ed, in Driscoll's novel have maintained a seemingly happy marriage by concealing their real pasts from each other. Moreover, by referencing Hardy's Tess, Driscoll highlights how societal attitudes towards out-of-wedlock pregnancy have become more tolerant in the 21st century compared to the 19th century.

The next explicit intertextuality in *Her Perfect Family* is presented at the very beginning of chapter 30 as the following: "*Explore the relationship between fiction and metaphysics and/or ethics in any work by D. H. Lawrence*" (Driscoll, 2021, p. 215). As evidenced, Driscoll acknowledges the presence of metaphysical and ethical themes in the works of 20th-century English novelist D.H. Lawrence. Definitely, metaphysics refers to elements that are beyond the scope of the five senses, while ethics pertains to established moral norms guiding human behaviour and actions, including rights, responsibilities, and societal benefits. Driscoll's exploration of metaphysics leads to complex questions that are not easily resolved. Bell (1992, p. 51) implies that D.H. Lawrence's *The Rainbow* provides a comprehensive expression of metaphysical impersonal feeling. In this novel, Lawrence, considered one of the greatest English writers of the modern era (Davies, 2013), expertly portrays the darker aspects of male-female relationships and the transformations from love

to hatred. His protagonist, Ursula Brangwen, rejects traditional ethics, leading to her alienation from her parents and society. She engages in a temporary lesbian relationship with her schoolteacher, Winifred. Additionally, Ursula becomes pregnant with Anton out of wedlock, an act considered immoral during that time. This highlights the intertextual themes of student-teacher relationships and extramarital pregnancy between *The Rainbow* and *Her Perfect Family*.

In chapter 30 of Driscoll's novel, it is revealed that Gemma becomes pregnant after having a relationship with her married school teacher, Sam Blake. As noticed, Driscoll presents a dual ethical critique. First, there is criticism directed at engaging in a romantic and sexual relationship with a married individual. Second, the relationship between a student and teacher is condemned, as it is deemed unacceptable within educational institutions and in social life. Moreover, Sam lies to Gemma, deceiving her by claiming that his wife is old and ugly and that he plans to divorce her. Here, Driscoll aims to convey to readers the importance of ethical values in interpersonal relationships, emphasizing moral principles and values in both individual lives and society as a whole.

In chapter 36 of *Her Perfect Family*, Driscoll begins with a thought-provoking question. She explicitly incorporates intertextuality by referencing Charles Dickens' 1859 novel *A Tale of Two Cities* and its recurring theme of revenge. It becomes evident that this chapter is centred on the theme of revenge, which she introduces as a comparative subject for readers to ponder: "*Revenge is not forced upon a person but is a choice. Discuss in relation to A Tale of Two Cities by Charles Dickens*" (Driscoll, 2021, p. 270). Dickens' *A Tale of Two Cities* tells the story of London and Paris during the French Revolution,<sup>6</sup> challenging the very idea of history (Davis, 2007, p. 357). One of the iconic characters in the novel is Madame Defarge, whose sole purpose is to seek revenge on the aristocrats who ruined her family (Dickens, 2004). Throughout Dickens' novel, Madame Defarge continually devises plans to exact her brutal vengeance, making it a deeply personal mission. In Driscoll's novel, Gemma's desire for revenge stems from jealousy when she discovers that her married lover, Sam, has no intention of divorcing his wife. Feeling deceived, Gemma decides to report Sam to the university where he works and publicly shame him on social media for engaging in a romantic and sexual relationship with his much younger student (Driscoll, 2021, pp. 270-271). To address Driscoll's question posed at the beginning of chapter 36, it is evident that the feeling of revenge in both novels is a result of personal choices made by the female characters.

During the introduction of chapter 39, Driscoll prompts the reader to consider how Mary Shelley's tumultuous family life is mirrored in her literary works: "*Discuss how Mary Shelley's troubled family life is evident in her writing*" (Driscoll, 2021, p. 263). Although this chapter is relatively short, Gemma contemplates how she will disclose the subject of her pregnancy from a married man with her parents, anticipates their reactions, and considers how she will care for her baby after its birth. Deliberately, Driscoll arouses the reader's curiosity about Shelley's<sup>7</sup> life by reminding us of her troubled family history. Notably, Shelley is the daughter of the "proto-feminist writer" (Clemit, 2003, p. 26) Mary Wollstonecraft, who tragically died soon after giving birth to her due to "puerperal fever" (Hoeveler, 2003, p. 46). Shelley herself endured numerous losses, including the deaths of

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<sup>6</sup> As Hawes (2007: p. 3) reports, Dickens is the most important literary English author, beside Shakespeare.

<sup>7</sup> Mary Shelley's father was the writer William Godwin, who remarried two years after Mary Wollstonecraft's death. As a result, Shelley grew up with her step-siblings. Godwin strongly disapproved of his daughter's love affair and pregnancy with the married Percy Shelley, who was one of the prominent poets of the English Romantic period.

her three children and her husband Percy Shelley (Mellor, 2003, p. 16). She also grappled with self-blame for her mother's death and her inability to provide Percy with a child (Hoeveler, 2003, p. 46).

Repetitively, *Her Perfect Family's* chapter 52 exhibits explicit intertextuality concerning parental responsibility, drawing from Shelley's *Frankenstein*. The reader is directed to "Discuss the theme of parental responsibility and neglect in relation to the novel *Frankenstein* by Mary Shelley" by Driscoll (2021, p. 341). Actually, Shelley's novel presents the fear of scientific innovation (Vaishnav, 2021) and is considered as "one of the most powerful horror stories of Western civilization" (Mellor, 2003, p. 9), originally published in 1818. As both *Frankenstein* novel (Shelley, 2003) and *Her Perfect Family* reveal, families are profoundly interconnected, and children are both cherished and supported by their parents.

In chapters 45 and 49, Driscoll diverts the reader's attention to explore the theme of isolation in Charlotte Brontë's 1847 classic novel, *Jane Eyre*, which holds a significant place in women's literature and the broader context of the 19th century (Brennan, 2010, p. 113). The question posed by the novelist is: "Discuss the theme of isolation as portrayed in *Jane Eyre*" (Driscoll, 2021, pp. 299, 319). Interestingly, while the theme of isolation is not explicitly evident throughout Driscoll's entire novel, it is merely presented as an essay homework written by Gemma. Despite this, there are several parallel intertextualities between *Jane Eyre* and *Her Perfect Family*. In both novels, the main characters, Jane (Brontë, 2006) and Gemma, find themselves falling in love with married men who are significantly older than them, and these men often attribute their wives' supposed madness or psychological problems. Additionally, another similarity between Jane and Gemma is their shared passion for reading books, which has been nurtured since their childhood. Besides, a notable parallel between Brontë's and Driscoll's novels is the use of first-person narrative technique, where the main characters describe events from their own perspectives. This narrative style allows the reader immediate access to the characters' views and emotions, enabling a deeper engagement with their experiences. The similarities imply a connection between the characters and the storytelling techniques used in *Jane Eyre* and *Her Perfect Family*, thereby strengthening the intertextual relationship between the two novels.

In chapters 49, 53, and 57 of *Her Perfect Family*, Driscoll draws attention to *The Mill on the Floss*, a novel by George Eliot published in 1860. It is noted that *The Mill on the Floss* is considered the "most closely autobiographical of George Eliot's works" (Rignall, 2000, p. 262). Significantly, Driscoll purposely does not specify the author of Eliot's novel, creating an opportunity for the reader to search for the author's identity and discover that it is a woman named Mary Ann Evans, who wrote under the pen name George Eliot. This deliberate omission prompts the reader to question the reasons behind a female author writing under a male pseudonym and invites exploration into the social context of 19th-century England.

Additionally, Driscoll provides further information about *The Mill on the Floss* within her own novel. It is revealed that the novel is Gemma's favourite book (Driscoll, 2021, p. 344) and that it serves as a reference point for discussions on Maggie Tulliver and the novel's tragic ending (Driscoll, 2021, p. 393). When one reads *The Mill on the Floss*, it becomes evident that Maggie Tulliver is the main character who elicits sympathy and relies on others for affection. The reader follows Maggie's journey from childhood to young adulthood (Eliot, 2003). In the early chapters of Driscoll's novel, Gemma, like Maggie Tulliver, exhibits sensitivity and a strong need for love, indicating that the author was influenced to some extent by Eliot's main character. This explicit intertextuality between Gemma and Maggie

Tulliver suggests a connection and possible inspiration from Eliot's novel in shaping Driscoll's portrayal of Gemma.

### Conclusion

The explicit intertextual relations present in the postmodern 2021 novel *Her Perfect Family* showcase Driscoll's clever utilization of various English authors to construct the plot and shape the characters in her novel. This interplay between different literary works not only adds layers of meaning to the narrative but also invites readers to make comparisons and draws them into a world filled with a sense of familiarity or curiosity. Obviously, Driscoll masterfully displays the writers and their works that have undoubtedly influenced her own life. This is a testament to Julia Kristeva's intertextuality theory, which posits that any new work cannot be created without the influence of previous works. Driscoll's explicit intertextuality is a clear depiction of this theory, as she weaves together a tapestry of literary references, providing rich context for readers and creating a historical journey through English literature.

Furthermore, intertextuality aligns with a reader-centred approach to literary criticism, as it acknowledges that the meaning of a new text can be fundamentally shaped by the reader's own background knowledge and experiences. Thus, intertextual reading promotes critical thinking by fostering readers' analysis and interpretation of a text in conjunction with other texts. By encouraging this approach, readers are prompted to explore the connections, comparisons, and interplay between different literary works, thereby stimulating their critical thinking abilities. As I engaged in an intertextual reading of *Her Perfect Family*, I discovered that I could better comprehend certain chapters, thanks to my familiarity with the explicit references Driscoll made. However, it is important to note that the full impact of the explicit intertextual references may not be realized if the reader is unfamiliar with the quoted authors. Thus, by incorporating different authors and works as intertexts in her novel, Driscoll effectively directs readers to engage in further research, promoting a more comprehensive understanding of the intricate plot. Consequently, readers are able to identify the similarities between the related texts through reading and conducting their own investigations.

Ultimately, the explicit intertextuality employed by Driscoll in *Her Perfect Family* serves as a complementary feature that enhances character development and theme description for readers. It adds richness and depth to the narrative, creating a multi-layered reading experience that bridges connections between multiple literary works.

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# Class Distinction and the Objectification of Women's Body in Lucy Kirkwood's *NSFW*

Kirkwood's *NSFW* Adlı Eserinde Sınıf Ayırımı ve Kadın Bedeninin Metalaştırılması

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## Abstract

Throughout history, some problems have never been solved, and gender discrimination is one of them. While this problem is extremely serious and does not allow women to breathe in some parts of the world, it is also a reality that gender discrimination still continues in developed countries. It cannot be denied that European women had to struggle for equal payment and circumstances even in the 1980s. The cooperation between the capitalist world order and the patriarchal system results in many troubles in women's social and economic life. Social class primarily creates a big gap with regard to the quality of women's lives and it results in inequality. In that regard, women in the lower class not only have to endure hard living and working conditions but they also get degenerated and betray their sisters. They are also abused in various ways and the objectification of their bodies is one of the most common forms of abuse they are exposed to. In *NSFW*, written by Lucy Kirkwood in 2012, these problems and more are brought to attention and dealt with. This study aims to explore class distinction and the objectification of women's body in different ways from the abuse of women's bodies to the established and imposed standards for bodily perfection under the influence of the class system in the capitalist economic order.

**Keywords:** class distinction, objectification of women's body, Lucy Kirkwood, *NSFW*, bodily perfection

## Öz

Bazı sorunlar tarih boyunca çözülememiştir ve cinsiyet ayrımı bunlardan birisidir. Bu sorun bazı ülkelerde oldukça ileri düzeydeyken ve özellikle tüm kadın vatandaşları baskı altında tutan İran gibi Asya ve Afrika ülkelerinde kadınların nefes almasına izin verilmezken, cinsiyet ayrımının gelişmiş ülkelerde dahi devam ettiği bir gerçektir. Avrupalı kadınların eşit maaş ve eşit koşullar için 1980'lerde hala çaba gösterdikleri inkâr edilemez. Kapitalist dünya düzeni ve ataerkil sistemin iş birliği kadınların toplumsal ve ekonomik hayatında pek çok soruna yol açar. Öncelikle sosyal sınıf kadının yaşam kalitesinde büyük bir boşluğa sebep olur ve eşitsizliği beraberinde getirir. Bu bağlamda, alt sınıfa mensup kadınlar sadece kötü hayat ve çalışma koşullarına katlanmakla kalmaz, zamanla yozlaşır ve hemcinslerine ihanet ederler. Bununla birlikte, çeşitli şekillerde istismar edilirler ve bedenlerinin metalaşması en yaygın görülen istismar yöntemlerinden biridir. Lucy Kirkwood tarafından yazılan *NSFW* adlı oyunda bu sorunlar ve daha fazlasına dikkat çekilmekte ve eleştirilmektedir. Bu çalışma kapitalist ekonomik düzene ait sınıfsal yapının ve sınıf farkının etkisiyle kadın bedeninin istismarından mükelleştirilmesine kadar çeşitli şekillerde metalaştırılmasını incelemeyi hedefler.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** sınıf ayrımı, kadın bedeninin metalaştırılması, Lucy Kirkwood, *NSFW*, bedensel mükemmellik

## Introduction

Economic system of each country in the world is emphasised to be fairly significant since it determines the main dynamics in people's lives from education and health to job opportunities and working conditions. Although Karl Marx is criticised as workers have

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not achieved in uniting and banishing the capitalist economic system with a revolution, his observations on the influence of the economic system are accepted to be true. As Marxist critic Louis Althusser points out, the base, the economic system, determines the superstructure of every country. Hence, every institution of a country works according to the rules of the economic system. For instance, the youth of the country is educated in the way the economic system wants them to be shaped and the existing system is supported by other institutions of the superstructure from religion to entertainment. The economic system, which is dominant in most countries in the world, the capitalist economic system, approximately always protects males and gives privileges to them. Even in the developed countries in Europe, women had to struggle a lot to obtain equal payment and equal job opportunities with men for decades. In England, women did not want to go back home after working hard throughout the Second World War and struggled a lot to be active members of the economic life. Nevertheless, it was not an easy process for them as they were not accepted as equals of men by the male-oriented economic system, which tried to exclude them by lower salaries, part-time jobs and fewer opportunities than men. Thus, the capitalist system goes hand in hand with patriarchy, for both of which men are the privileged half of society. Last but not least, the class system of capitalism also aggravates the circumstances for a large group of women in the lower class, who are doubly oppressed due to not only their gender but also their social status. In consequence, the capitalist economic system both dominates every moment of women's lives and suppresses them in every sphere of society from daily life to work life. The aim of this study is to examine the objectification of women's bodies with regard to the class distinction and patriarchy in the capitalist economic system in Lucy Kirkwood's play *NSFW*, standing for *Not Safe for Work*. The capitalist economic order is of great significance for this study as it catalyses the abuse of a woman's body for the lower class and the imposition of several standards on women from every social class for bodily perfection. In consequence, this order and its class system objectify human beings and this study focuses on its abuse of women's bodies in different ways.

### **Historical Background of Gender Discrimination and Women's Struggle**

To understand the reaction of working-class women against the harsh working conditions today, it is essential to go back to the 1960s and the following decades till the millennium. Women in England had to suffer a lot after World War Two in order to keep their jobs and obtain equal payment as well as equal opportunities with men. The male-centred economic system firstly tried to send working women back home after the end of the war as the real owners of the jobs returned to work. Thus, women had to struggle a lot to continue working despite a number of obstacles. As George Joseph observes in *Women in Britain since 1945*:

The typical woman worker at the turn of the century was ... a city dweller, a widow or spinster aged 25 years, employed as a domestic servant or in a textile factory. By the seventies, the typical female worker, aged 40 years, is married, has returned to work after some years of economic inactivity, and works part time in a clerical job. (qtd. in Lewis, 1992, p. 66)

In the immediate post-war years, the number of working married women was pretty low due to a number of obstructions they needed to overcome under the name of a 'marriage bar', implying that a married woman's first duty is to be engaged in her family and in her house rather than having a paid employment (Lewis, 1992, p. 71). Women were also offered part-time jobs because of the same biased reasons, resulting from gender discrimination and gender roles, undermining their capacities and subordinating them. However, women did not accept this significant hindrance this time and the number of

married women in the economic field gradually increased as they had experienced the personal and economic benefits of working during the war. Although they were deprived of the help of their husbands in terms of housework and the support of the state with regard to childcare for a long time, marriage was redefined “as a relationship in which the partners negotiated their roles in accordance with personal preferences rather than externally imposed expectations,” which also provides the change in the image of women for the patriarchal society (Summerfield, 1994, p. 58).

Another problem that women had to fight against for a long time was “particularly marked” working areas such as “white-collar employment” and “the service industries” (Royle, 1994, p. 14). It took a long time for women to overcome the prejudices of the male-dominant working area both in the state and in the private sector. In Lewis’ words, “The Women’s Liberation Movement ... argued that the family was as much a source of women’s subordination in society as discrimination in the public sphere and women’s absence from well-paying high-status jobs and public office” (1992, p. 34-35). Women were “confined for the most part to low paid, low status work” for a long time after World War Two despite their improving education (Lewis, 1992, p. 69). Along with the prejudices of male employers, the lack of nursery schools also prevented women from continuing their work, so each child stole between five and seven years from their working experiences. Only after the 1970s and 1980s, could women take shorter breaks after childbirth. Even though they successfully carried out a variety of jobs throughout the war in the absence of men and removed the barriers separating men’s work from women’s work, caring jobs were assumed to be suitable for them for a few more decades (Addison, 2005, p. 9). What is more, manual jobs were expected to be performed by women while non-manual ones were spared for men, a bias continuing for nearly forty years (Crompton, 1994, p. 99). Thus, women were not accepted for “administrative and managerial work” as male employers subordinated them and, in the meanwhile, they supported the male career by this choice (Crompton, 1994, p. 105-106). Even though they do the same job as men, unequal pay for equal work is one further and a very common trouble for women in that period. The male-dominated economic area “avoided paying women equal rates by insisting that they needed male help to tune or adjust their machines, or that they were actually employed on ‘women’s work’” (Lewis, 1992, p. 79). Employers mostly preferred women so as to pay them lower wages for the same work as men, showing again the gender discrimination in the male-dominant society. Not until the late 1970s, were women able to overcome this gender segregation in the economic field step by step. On the demand side, “the distinction between men and women’s work has been greatly reduced” as well as the rate of women desiring to work and have their economic independence on the supply side (Law, 1994, p. 86). In the 1980s, the rank of women who were either employers or proprietors increased to twenty-four per cent and the rate of female manual workers was twenty-nine per cent (Crompton, 1994, p. 99). Although there are better circumstances for women, the problems and gender discrimination discussed above are still experienced by women in the economic field today.

The relationship between patriarchy and the capitalist economic system is, thus, analysed by especially Marxist feminist critics and they make an analogy between ‘free’ labour of the working class and women (Sears, 2017, p. 175). As the working class is to sell “their laboring capacities to those who do,” Marxist feminists indicate that women also do not have the control over their bodies in a relationship of compulsion (Sears, 2017, p. 176). As Federici observes, women’s deprivation of the “control over their bodies” results in enchaining problems for them, namely turning into free labourers of reproduction and falling into “a new sexual division of labor subjugating women’s labor and women’s reproductive function to the reproduction of the work-force” (qtd. in Sears, 2017, p. 178).

Thus, patriarchal relations, as Marxist feminists McDonough and Harrison argue, are mainly shaped by major relations of production (qtd. in Sangari, 2015, p. 263). Relations of production and relations of reproduction are closely interrelated, which proves that “capitalism and patriarchy ... [are] both interlocking and separate” (Sangari, 2015, p. 262-263). The patriarchal order not only subordinated women to men by excluding them from waged work but it also devalued them in “certain categories of human and certain kinds of work” (Sears, 2017, p. 178). Working-class women unsurprisingly are “dispossessed both as members of the working class and as reproductive workers” (Sears, 2017, p. 179). Their reproductive labour is not paid, and their wage-labour is depreciated. Hence, what happens in the microcosm of the domestic sphere similarly happens in the macrocosm of the economic sphere (Madsen, 2000, p. 66). Consequently, the capitalist system exploits women both economically and sexually and the main reason is the capitalist patriarchy.

Along with being downgraded in domestic and economic spheres, women are also devalued by being reduced to body only, which is claimed to be inferior to its biological processes, like menstruation and gestation, when compared and contrasted with the male mind (Carson, 2006, p. 94). Although such theorists as Jacques Derrida and Michel Foucault rejected “the traditional Cartesian dualism which subordinates body to mind”, it is not simple to change and annihilate discrimination even in the twenty-first century (Carson, 2006, p. 94). The ways in which a woman's body is controlled in the patriarchal system are studied by feminism, including not only the regulations of “women's access to such services as contraception and abortion” but also the imposition of “idealised forms of their bodies” and their objectification by a variety of means (Carson, 2006, p. 94). While the negative representation of women “as stereotypes and objects of male gaze” was discussed by the second wave feminist movement in the 1970s, the problem in the representation of women focusing on their body still continues today with regard to the ideal body form and its abuse in these terms (Carson, 2006, p. 95). In *The Beauty Myth*, Naomi Wolf observes that “the more legal and material hindrances women have broken through, the more strictly and heavily and cruelly images of female beauty have come to weigh upon us” (qtd. in Carson, 2006, p. 95). Thus, physical beauty fitting the imposed standards has transformed into an obsession and it is fairly obvious in social media, fashion and the cosmetics sector. It is also apparent in our play *NSFW*, including two magazines, *Doghhouse* and *Electra*. In both of them, a woman's body is objectified in different ways. For instance, while the nude body of a fourteen-year-old girl is objectified by *Doghhouse*, there is no space for any kind of fault in women's bodies in *Electra*. In his *Ways of Seeing*, John Berger argues that “Men act and women appear. Women watch themselves being looked at” (qtd. in Carson, 2006, p. 97). In consequence, with or without nudity, a woman's body is both idealised and objectified by the male gaze today. The capitalist order, which both dominates and controls people's minds and lives in a variety of ways, brings about class distinction and women's objectification under the strong influence of the class system (Carson, 2006, p. 97).

### **Outcomes of Class Distinction in *NSFW***

Lucy Kirkwood, whose work *NSFW*, standing for *Not Safe for Work*, will be analysed in this study, is one of the outstanding young playwrights of English literature. *Grady Hot Potato*, *Guns or Butter* and *Tinderbox* are some of her well-known plays. *NSFW* was written and premiered at the Royal Court Theatre in 2012. In this play, social class has great significance and its influence along with its being a major determinant in women's lives is clearly observed. The first point to be examined is women's degeneration due to the class distinction causing their hard living and working circumstances in the capitalist society and betraying their sisters by acting according to the rules of the economic system. To Aston, “[T]he meteoric rise of neoliberalism driven by a free market economy and

individualism” dominates our time in the twenty-first century (2016, p. 24). The character Charlotte, working for *Doghouse*, a weekly magazine for men, is a lower middle-class girl of twenty-five. She has to work in a male-dominated place, with a “masculinist culture,” which contains a pool table, a dartboard and a cricket bat as well as topless or nude photo shoots of women, totally interesting for men (Aston, 2016, p. 27). Moreover, she has to bear dirty language around as her workmates and boss are men who are not kind and thoughtful enough. The first scene also establishes “the hierarchical, competitive, and masculinist ethos of the workplace inhabited by a young team of journalists” (Aston, 2016, p. 27). Since *Doghouse* is a magazine for men, she has to discuss which photo of the nude girls can encourage men to buy the magazine. In “the sexist *Doghouse*,” there is a link “to women complicit in the production of sexualized, commercialized femininity” (Aston, 2016, p. 27). Hence, she has to be a part of this working area in spite of all the disturbing and offending behaviour she witnesses or bears. Nevertheless, Charlotte does not prefer to work in such an environment, but she has to:

CHARLOTTE. When I first came down to London I couldn't get arrested. I did three years of unpaid work placements and internships before I came here and that's ... shit. Slave labour. And then I spent three months getting screamed at by Trinny and Susannah because I didn't know what a gilet was and then I came here, which, ... it's not like my dream or anything but it's on my CV and I can pay my rent. (Kirkwood, 2016, I. p. 186)

It is understood that the economic conditions of the capitalist system for her social class forces her to work in *Doghouse*, with better payment. In Adishesiah and Lepage's words, “[Our] neoliberal ... condition [is] unacceptable and dehumanizing” (2016, p. 4). In this system, Charlotte's condition is not surprising or extraordinary as most people in the lower class are in a similar condition. Nonetheless, she lies to the women's group, a part of which she is, about her work and tells that she works as an estate agent as she is aware of the fact that *Doghouse* is a magazine objectifying women by showing their nude bodies for the male gaze on its pages. What is more, she keeps her silence when it is learned that a fourteen-year-old girl Carry Bradshaw's nude photo shoots were published without her consent in the magazine. Even though she should have been reacting while Aidan, the boss, was bullying and blackmailing Mr. Bradshaw, Carry's father, Charlotte just indirectly backed her boss with her silence. The capitalist system, thus, transforms women into beings supporting the system by betraying their sisters abused or oppressed by the male-centred system. As Kirkwood also observes in her interview in *The Guardian*, “In different ways, both men and women betray women” (Adams, 2012). The social class also determines people's viewpoints, and way of life as well as their jobs and attitudes in the work life. As a result, “free-market capitalism” catalyses “today's ruthless individualism” and prevents the capacity for an “individual revolt” (Aston, 2016, p. 25). Charlotte, for instance, behaves as she is expected to keep her job. She even closes her eyes to being seduced by the boss and keeps her eyes and mouth close despite witnessing child abuse and bullying in her workplace.

### **Objectification of Women's Body in NSFW**

The main problem of this dark comedy *NSFW* is publishing Carry Bradshaw's nude photographs in *Doghouse* although she is just fourteen, which means child abuse in the meanwhile. As a media print, *Doghouse* also objectifies women's body by publishing their nude photos. Aidan, Rupert, Sam and Charlotte try to choose the most attractive photo to publish as they need more readers for the magazine. The more women's bodies are vulgarly nude, the more readers it means for them. The female body is exhibited “as a symbol of objectified female beauty” and it becomes an object of the male gaze at

whatever age the woman is as it is obvious in the case of Carry Bradshaw (Carson, 2006, p. 96). Even if they have the consent of women or most of the time the consent of their boyfriends, which is more problematic, it does not mean what they do is acceptable as it is "the production and consumption of representations of women" (Carson, 2006, p. 98). It shows how media reduces woman to body first and then commodifies woman's body and gains money by exhibiting it. It is known how common it is now after the internet has started to be used for it on various platforms and the abuse of woman's and what is worse children's body has been normalised by a number of websites. As Kirkwood states in her interview, "People keep saying to me, 'Isn't it good timing?' ... But we are always talking about these things, aren't we? The play wouldn't have been written if we didn't live in a culture where those anxieties didn't have a natural end point" (Adams, 2012). Thus, the capitalist system consumes women by initially objectifying their bodies on a variety of platforms such as printed media, social media and digital media and then, by commodifying them as if their bodies were consumption goods. Media, thus, is one of the means this economic system utilises in order to consume woman's body. Aidan, the boss of the men's magazine *Doghouse*, unsurprisingly never regrets as they have published a child's nude photos, but he is only concerned that there is no consent for it, which means he is only anxious about politically correctness, which means an ethical problem at the same time. There is also a "representation of the professional middle classes struggling to survive in the dog-eat-dog world of the media market" (Aston, 2016, p. 26). In other words, it is obvious that the capitalist order not only stimulates but also forces the managers of the business world to do anything for profit regardless of its being ethical or humane. As a result, it is not surprising for Aidan to ignore objectifying a child's body since her body and her vulgarly nude pictures are only commodities for him to sell the magazine more.

Another and more important point about the objectification of woman's body is the negotiation between Aidan and Mr. Bradshaw. Whereas Carry's father Mr. Bradshaw came to *Doghouse* both to express his anger for the publication of his daughter's naked photos and want Aidan to collect the volume of the magazine, his visit turns into a negotiation over time. Aidan, firstly, offers the out-of-work father twenty-five thousand pounds when Mr. Bradshaw says that he is planning to take the magazine to court so as to make everyone learn that *Doghouse* "broke the law" (Kirkwood, 2016, II. p. 200). This offer objectifies Carry's body once more, but it is not limited with Aidan's offer unfortunately. In a short time, Aidan starts to bully and blackmail the father with his annoying and threatening sentences. He first tells that his lawyers are very qualified and it will be an ordinary case for them and they will certainly win. Moreover, he holds against Mr. Bradshaw the fact that he is also the buyer of *Doghouse*, which proves that he saw the picture of his daughter while he was looking at the nude women's photos as it is a men's magazine:

AIDAN. I'm not suggesting anything except that you, like all of us here, appreciate certain types of images, that happen to be of beautiful girls in a state of undress. ... But eighteen, nineteen, twenty. Young compared to us old codgers, eh, Mr Bradshaw! (Kirkwood, 2016, II. p. 203)

Mr. Bradshaw's being one of the consumers of the magazine also indicates the objectification of young women's bodies and their being consumed by even middle-aged and old men. When the girl's being fourteen, which means legally she is still a child, is thought, everything becomes more severe. As Aidan reminds, the issue is that "[a] man's hands on her body. And other men, like [Mr. Bradshaw], looking at her" (Kirkwood, 2016, II. p. 205). At every step, Aidan tries to make Mr. Bradshaw feel guiltier by referring to his being divorced from Carry's mother, his being away from his daughter, so her feeling

deprived of his protection and getting mature earlier. Another reality of Mr. Bradshaw's class is his being without a job and being deprived of enough money to support his daughter. The main reason of this problem for Mr. Bradshaw seems to be the class issue and being a member of the lower class and losing the control of life for his daughter along with himself. As Marx argues, people's economic class influences their definition and experience of the body (Bordo, 1995, p. 16). Neither Mr. Bradshaw nor Carry's mother, as lower-class people who are deprived of the essential education and the consciousness of raising a child and who mostly fight economic difficulties to survive, have been able to help Carry learn the value of her body and the uniqueness of herself. Additionally, Mr. Bradshaw has not been close enough to his daughter to protect her from objectifying her body as they see each other only for a few hours twice a month. What is worse, at the end of the Second Act, Mr. Bradshaw surprisingly starts the negotiation this time and tries to increase the offer, but he could not be successful and takes twenty-five thousand pounds. He leaves his honour behind after negotiating on his daughter's body and accepts the money to keep his silence. It is clearly seen that male-oriented society not only objectifies but also commodifies woman's body in various ways and publishing nude photo shoots is one of these ways. They can even be a topic of negotiation and an object to be exchanged and sold financially.

The condition of the other magazine *Electra* is not better than *Doghouse* with regard to class issues and gender. Although it is a women's magazine, under the capitalist living and working conditions, women's body is still objectified by different groups of people in different ways. In Phipps' words,

Although capitalism is not a monolith, it can be said that in western neoliberal economies the body has become a symbol of value and identity which is largely performed and developed via the purchase of products. The drive to consume in order to both express and "add value" to oneself is a key aspect of contemporary consumer culture, which feeds markets that rely on idealized representations of the body and the elevation of particular prestigious bodily forms through advertising. (2014, p. 9)

Hence, the capitalist economic system hails people to be consumers in each sphere of society. Nevertheless, it is a harsh reality that a woman's body also turns into an object with a necessity to look perfect all the time. As Urla and Swedlund observe, "Fueled by the hugely profitable cosmetic, weight-loss, and fashion industries, the beauty myth's glamorized notions of the ideal body reverberate back upon women as 'a dark vein of self hatred, physical obsessions, terror of aging, and dread of lost control'" (2000, p. 397). Not to miss the new products and not to be ashamed of their bodies, most women assume that they have to follow them and purchase new cosmetics and clothes at any cost. Similarly, on the walls of the magazine, women's pictures exist again, but all of them look perfectly beautiful and healthy this time since they have been photoshopped to look perfect. Miranda, the editor of *Electra*, and the women around her, whose voice and laughter are also heard during the act, are businesswomen and their appearance must be perfect like the pictures of women around them. As soon as the Third Act starts, Miranda's sentences remind the reader of Marlene, the protagonist of *Top Girls* by Caryl Churchill, in terms of her being not only the manager of the magazine but also a liberal-minded and self-centred woman. Miranda describes herself and other women:

MIRANDA. We're confident, modern, media-literate women between the ages of twenty-five and forty-five who earn upwards of twenty thousand pounds a year, aren't we?  
SAM. Yes.

MIRANDA. We're leaders, thinkers, dreamers, shoppers, upscale ABC1 women with upscale ABC1 purchasing habits. (Kirkwood, 2016, III. p. 229)

After this dialogue, she proves to be an enthusiastic follower of the capitalist system and later, she announces and emphasises that she loves shoes. As Phipps points out, "among the privileged [there is] a dramatic growth in spending on beauty, fitness and fashion, a rise in alternative health practices and in more extreme 'body projects' such as cosmetic surgeries" (2014, p. 9). In particular, the "neoliberal value system" of the twenty-first century, men's and women's bodies turn into products upon which a number of practices and projects are experimented to make them more and more valuable (2014, p. 9). Thus, for women, the significance of shoes and clothes, cosmetics and aesthetic surgeries is apparent not only in social life but also in every sphere of mass media. Miranda's sentences defining her also highlight that she is an upper-class woman living comfortably and shopping is a significant part of her lonely life.

Miranda, like the top girl Marlene, is alone and she proposes Sam, only in his twenties, to go out although she is in her early fifties. Moreover, during her talk with Sam in the Third Act, she usually moisturises her hands and underlines the significance of her mind rather than her body, especially the genitals. It also shows that Miranda, like Marlene, has to leave her womanhood aside to exist and be successful in this male-centred economic world. However, she is not happy deep in her heart. Even if she does not tell it, it can be understood between the lines and in her proposal to Sam. She does not want to continue living alone in the rest of her life and just tries her chance with Sam. In that regard, Miranda has another common point with Marlene in *Top Girls* as Mrs. Kidd tells her, "You're one of these ballbreakers / that's what you are. You'll end up miserable and lonely. You're not natural" (2013, II. ii. pp. 189-190). Leaving her soul and heart as well as her womanhood aside is another unnatural aspect of her life to be a successful woman and have a great status in the economic sphere, which has been dominated by men for centuries and which still has barriers against women who have to struggle and sacrifice a lot to overcome in the present. Additionally, a woman's body is also objectified here in another way. By imposing on women the necessity of being perfect, which means to consume a variety of products to achieve it, Miranda and *Electra* support capitalism again. In Aston's words, "[I]n contrast to second-wave feminism's mantra 'the personal is the political', the personal divorced from the political is what Miranda's post-feminist world of photoshopped femininity dictates, a world in which 'better versions of ourselves' means the pursuit of commodified, self 'perfection'" (2016, p. 28). The sector of cosmetics is, thus, the first area to be supported in this magazine and other sectors selling clothes, shoes and jewellery are just some of them that profit from the obsession of perfection created by the male-oriented capitalist world. Accordingly, it is a culture of "(s)exploitation" experienced in *Doghouse* and *Electra* as well as in the twenty-first-century neoliberal world (Aston, 2016, p. 28). Even though top girl Miranda seems to focus on the mind in her sentences, her actions create a paradox in the play. She is deprived of the idea of "human dignity and social relations" in her life, like most characters of the play working for the two magazines (Aston, 2016, p. 28). Hence, Kirkwood criticises the media and women working in that sector by Miranda and the other women working for *Electra* who continue their lives behind their masks, looking gorgeous and flawless, but having lonely and miserable lives in private. When one of the groundbreaking playwrights of English theatre Caryl Churchill wrote *Top Girls* in 1982, it "seemed a warning to feminists not to mistake material reward for real progress and liberation" (Reinelt, 2009, p. 31). However, it is apparent in the first quarter of the twenty-first century that there still seems to be no hope for change and progress for women under the dehumanising economic and living circumstances of the capitalist system as it

dominates the basis and determines not only the living and working conditions of society but also the mentality itself. The criticism of Lucy Kirkwood in *NSFW*, written in 2012, shows how the circumstances of the capitalist economic system and the neoliberal consumerist culture become harsher and press women to be top girls who are to look perfect and to be consumers of cosmetics, glorious clothes and shoes along with cosmetic surgery. Carson observes that “The continuing importance of this ideological struggle over representation lies in the powerful relationship between idealised or denigrating images of women in the media and the internalisation of these by female consumers” (Carson, 2006, p. 95). Thus, in *Electra*, a woman’s body is objectified under the cover of perfection which is imposed by the capitalist economic system to oblige women to consume cosmetics and purchase luxurious clothes and jewellery. The beauty industry behind the walls of the magazine obviously stimulates “glamour fashion” and “promotes female beauty icons” (Carson, 2006, p. 95).

### Conclusion

Lucy Kirkwood’s play *NSFW* offers a critique of reducing a woman to body in different ways with an emphasis the role of the class system in the capitalist order in the twenty-first century. Although it can be thought that a number of rights have been achieved for women until now, it is obvious that women in our time still have significant problems which cannot be solved as the economic system determines the basis of our lives and the patriarchy always exists in the background. In both *Doghouse* and *Electra*, the woman’s body is objectified in different ways and women cannot escape from being a part of this objectification since it is impossible to exclude themselves from neither the class system nor the capitalist order. In the men’s magazine *Doghouse*, Charlotte has to bear the dirty language of her male colleagues along with the topless or nude photos of women around her. She has to work in *Doghouse* as she has had worse experiences in her previous workplaces, and she has to pay her rent. Her being rebuked or insulted before, however, does not make her be excused for being silent to the objectification of a woman’s body, child abuse or her being seduced by the boss. In the meanwhile, she lacks the awareness of women’s solidarity, and supports the boss during his meeting with Mr. Bradshaw. Moreover, the reader learns that the nude photos of a fourteen-year-old girl have been published without her consent. It is an obvious example of child abuse and the objectification of a child’s body. What is more, everything becomes worse when her father starts to negotiate for more pay not to go to court. His being a lower-class man shows the reader the circumstances of the capitalist economic system and how it obliges people to have miserable lives once more. Thus, a woman’s body is limitlessly objectified by not only this magazine but also the father. As Kirkwood argues in her interview in *The Guardian*, “A lot of my work dwells on this idea of people buying and selling things that maybe shouldn’t be bought or sold. Things that are private, personal” (Adams, 2012). Thus, the various ways of objectification stressed above mean buying and selling the woman’s body in different ways in the meanwhile. In the last act, Kirkwood surprises the reader by showing the other side of the coin in *Electra* and criticises both women and the capitalist system again. In this women’s magazine, the objectification of women’s bodies occurs under the cover of perfection. On the walls, perfect-looking women’s pictures are hung this time and Miranda, the editor of the magazine, is an unhappy top girl of this play in her expensive clothes. Whereas she emphasises the superiority of her mind to her body in her talk with Sam, she focuses on her body attempting to look perfect and consume expensive cosmetics products in reality as the capitalist economic order forces women to look beautiful and perfect, turning them into one of the objects to be consumed in each product they purchase. As a result, Kirkwood criticises the objectification of women’s bodies in various ways in different places and working areas by emphasising the role of



the capitalist economic system, the base, in this problem along with its power to surround people everywhere they look at and to control their minds.

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# Challenging Ableism: Caregiving and Healthcare in John Belluso's *Pyretown*

Engelli Bireylere Yönelik Ayrımcılıkla Mücadele:  
John Belluso'nun *Pyretown* Oyununda Sağlık Sistemi ve Bakım Verme

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## Abstract

John Belluso's play *Pyretown* depicts a single mother's struggle with the American healthcare system and portrays the destructive consequences of ableism existing in the neoliberal structures. Even though neoliberal ideology promises happiness, health and success through hard work and consumption, the characters in the play are victimized by highly valued autonomy, profit, and privatization. In such a system, disability is also thought to be an individual experience, yet the play shows that it is only a part of complex dynamics in daily life. On her journey to learn disability as a multifaceted experience, Lou engages in affective relationships with Harry and Rebecca whose lives are also jeopardized by the medical industrial complex. The realist portrayal of disability problematizes the job market, the healthcare and welfare system in the United States while promoting for a reform in the social, cultural, and political discourses. Within this context, this article argues that Belluso's *Pyretown* exposes and critiques neoliberal ableism as it exists in American society while portraying the complexities of caregiving, motherhood, and disability.

**Keywords:** American Drama, Disability, John Belluso, *Pyretown*, American healthcare

## Öz

John Belluso'nun *Pyretown* adlı oyunu bir annenin Amerikan sağlık sistemi ile olan mücadelesini ve neoliberal yapılanmada engelli bireylere karşı olan ayrımcılığın yıkıcı sonuçlarını ele alır. Neoliberalizm çok çalışma ve tüketim yoluyla mutluluk, sağlık ve başarı vadetse de, oyundaki karakterler özerklik, kar odaklılık, ve özelleştirme gibi fazlaca önemsenen değerlerin kurbanı olurlar. Böyle bir sistemde, engellilik de bireysel bir deneyim olarak görülse de, oyunda günlük hayattaki iç içe geçmiş ve karmaşık dinamiklerin bir parçası olarak betimlenir. Lou engelliliğinin çok yönlü bir deneyim olduğunu öğrenirken bir yandan da hayatları tıbbi-endüstriyel kompleks yüzünden dağılan Harry ve Rebecca ile onu değiştiren bir ilişki kurar. Bu bağlamda, oyun engellilik deneyimini gerçekçi bir şekilde yansıtır. Ayrıca, Amerika'daki iş piyasasını, sağlık ve sosyal yardım sistemini bir sorun olarak ele alırken, sosyal, kültürel ve siyasi söylemlerde yeniliği destekler. Bu makalede de tartışılacağı gibi, Belluso'nun *Pyretown* oyunu bir yandan bakım verme, annelik ve engelliliğinin karmaşıklığını ortaya koyarken diğer yandan da neoliberal sistemindeki engelli ayrımcılığını açığa çıkarır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Amerikan Tiyatrosu, Engellilik, John Belluso, *Pyretown*, Amerikan Sağlık Sistemi

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## Introduction

John Belluso (1969-2006) was both a playwright and a disability rights activist who advocated for disability visibility in American theater. Although Belluso was advised to refrain from stories about disability at the beginning of his career, he insisted on writing about it because it was an experience that he knew best (Lewis, 2004, p. 40). As a disability rights activist, he argued that disability is a “multifaceted social network” rather than a biological and medical condition. In his own words, he wanted “to dramatize disability in a way which reveals something deeper than a simplistic illness narrative, all in an effort to create new stories, new myths, new ways of revealing the disabled body on stage” (2006, p. 163). As Victoria Ann Lewis (2006) states, “he crafted plays that were competitive with the best in American theatre, plays that have been and will continue to be produced throughout the country, created roles for disabled actors, and instituted a series of commissions” (p. 38). In this vein, Belluso’s plays explore such issues as economic oppression, the flaws of the healthcare system, intricacies of caregiving and the experience of disability.

Directed by Tim Farrell, Belluso’s 2003 play *Pyretown* had its premiere at Geva Theatre Center. Consisting of a prologue, two acts, eighteen scenes and an epilogue, the play portrays the complexities of care and dependency. The characters include Harry, a twenty-two-year-old man who uses a wheelchair; Louise (Lou), a single mother with three children; and Rebecca, a seven-months pregnant doctor, who works for a Health Maintenance Organization (HMO), approving or denying medical treatment for its clients. The three characters go through different affective states by connecting and disconnecting, moving towards and away from each other.

Harry became paraplegic after an accident and lost his mother, who was also his caregiver, to cancer. Blaming the healthcare system for his family’s sufferings, Harry’s only goal in life is to fight the capitalist system. Lou, on the other hand, is separated from her abusive husband and she is trying to take care of her three children, one of whom suffers from debilitating illnesses and requires full time care. Harry and Lou, both of whom need financial support to survive, are characterized in contrast to Rebecca, who represents dehumanized medical authority. Although indifferent to Lou’s circumstances at first, Rebecca later empathizes and understands her desperate circumstances.

Lou attempts to provide for her children on her own, yet her daughter Bea’s health problems will be costly, and she realizes that she cannot solve these problems alone. At the end, Lou decides to reunite with her abusive husband to meet their daughter’s needs. Harry retreats into isolation while Rebecca loses her job for helping patients. Within this context, this article argues that Belluso’s *Pyretown* exposes and critiques neoliberal ableism as it exists in American society while portraying the complexities of caregiving, motherhood, and disability.

## Victims of Cruel Optimism

When asked about the title of the play in an interview, Belluso explains that “[a] funeral pyre is something beautiful and sacred, but also a signifier of death. ... Philoctetes gained his archer’s bow from the lighting of Hercule’s funeral pyre” (Lewis, 2004, p. 40). In this regard, pyre in the title symbolizes the conflicting nature of the promises and realities of neoliberal ideology. On one hand, neoliberalism provides hope while promising happiness through hard work and consumption; on the other hand, it keeps the lives of individuals dependent on the dictates and interests of the market, and thus always at risk. The playwright shows that although the promises of neoliberalism are attractive, it eventually destroys subjects, like a

funeral pyre. Never having the chance to enjoy the promises of the neoliberal market, all of the characters in the play become victims of neoliberal interests, which value autonomy, maximizing profits, consumption, and privatization.

Although disability is usually thought to be an individual experience, it becomes a part of intricate relationship systems on a daily basis. Within this framework, moving away from old stereotypes of disability as a burden, *Pyretown* negotiates disability as experienced by disabled individuals themselves and their families in a complex and truthful manner. When one of the family members is disabled, issues such as caregiving, healthcare, or parenthood become inseparable, continuously (re)shaping the family structure. In her analysis of the play, Sandahl (2010) affirms that although everyone is dependent on others and needs care, these needs might be complicated by the American healthcare system when a person is disabled (p. 229). Once disability is involved, the family becomes a part of larger social and political systems; they enter various affective spaces, requiring the family members to adapt and change. Belluso explains why he explores such interconnections in *Pyretown* as follows:

I wanted to write a love story. At the same time, I was fascinated by HMOs, and the two seemed to come together in my mind. We think in terms of money, but what are the other ways that we pay for healthcare? What are the things we sacrifice? How does healthcare affect the way we love? How does it affect the way we share ourselves? (Lewis, 2004, p. 38)

As the quote reveals, intimate relationships are governed and shaped by social and political structures. Disability is traditionally considered within the medical context; however, as Belluso states, it is a multifaceted and intersectional experience, requiring individuals and their families to negotiate and exchange emotional states in various social and political contexts.

*Pyretown* underscores interdependence and connections among individuals, which are disregarded by neoliberal ideals that prioritize individual over community and autonomy over (inter)dependence. As a nondisabled single mother, Lou is trying to learn the different aspects of disability experience to help her daughter, yet she falls victim to cruel optimism as she cannot guarantee a livable future for her family. Her multilayered struggle with the healthcare system as a single mother is conveyed through her affective experiences with Harry and Rebecca. The affects circulating throughout the play seem to find their emotional representations on the reader/audience, yet all affective connections are reversed at the end as Harry and Lou's connection turns out to be the real problem in Lou's life, whereas a new female bond is formed between Rebecca and Lou.

In their book *Cruel Optimism*, Lauren Berlant explores how hopes and desires, or fantasies as they call it, turn out to be obstacles in a person's life.<sup>1</sup> According to Berlant (2011), at the center of cruel optimism lies a desire for a "good life," which comes with moral, intimate, and economic aspects (p. 2). Individuals develop an attachment to an object or a scene, believing it is essential to their well-being. Berlant (2011) argues that this attachment is affective by nature: "Whatever the *experience* of optimism is in particular, then, the *affective structure* of an optimistic attachment involves a sustaining inclination to return to the scene of fantasy that enables you to expect *this* time, nearness to *this* thing will help you or a world to become different in just the right way" (p. 2). For Berlant, optimistic attachments are not in essence

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<sup>1</sup> Lauren Berlant uses "they/them" as pronouns.

cruel. They become cruel “when the object/scene that ignites a sense of possibility actually makes it impossible to attain the expansive transformation.” What Berlant (2011) calls relations of cruel optimism, or fantasies that typically dissolve, include but are not limited to “upward mobility, job security, political and social equality, and lively, durable intimacy” (p. 3). These fantasies can be “embedded in a person, a thing, an institution, a text, a norm, a bunch of cells, smells, a food idea—whatever” (p. 23). Berlant (2011) also argues that cruel optimism creates a “precarious public sphere” where individuals “circulate scenarios of economic and intimate contingency and trade paradigms for how best to live on” (p. 3).<sup>2</sup>

Within this framework, *Pyretown* shows how neoliberalist politics dissipate the lives of Harry, Lou, and Rebecca. Their affective attachments, which they hope would pave the way for a good life, eventually create a sense of displacement and wear the characters out. Harry's obsession with fighting and demolishing capitalism, Lou's desire to build an independent life as a single mother away from her husband, and Rebecca's strong belief that she needs her job at the HMO so she can provide a better future to her unborn child turn out to have devastating effects in their lives. Haunted by his family's struggle with the healthcare system, Harry is obsessed with living an anti-capitalist life. Although he has the skills, he refuses to work for a company that serves capitalism, and he confines himself to an affectless and lonely life. His attachment to fighting the system prevents him from understanding Lou's circumstances and leaves him alone. Lou, on the other hand, leaves her abusive husband with hopes of a better life, yet neoliberalist structures set barriers against attaining a good life. Without sufficient finances, or the necessary education and skills to have a job, her single-parent family cannot survive in the capitalist normative culture. Rebecca too is a victim of her optimistic attachment because she clings to the belief that her family depends on her job at the HMO, which in return alienates her from society by stripping her of empathy and care. She can liberate herself from that system only when she quits her job. Yet, her financial future and that of her family are now shaky and unstable.

### **Interdependence and Care against Neoliberal Ableism**

Harry and Lou meet at the hospital when Harry offers to switch places on the waiting list to help her. Having separated, Lou lives on welfare, and spends all her time with the children, one of whom requires constant care. As a new single mother who is also new to disability experience, she is frustrated with the cold bureaucracy of the healthcare system and needs emotional support. Throughout Act One, the reader/audience witnesses the gradual development of a romance between the two characters as they go in and out of affective states together. Sandahl (2010) explains that “[t]heir sameness allows them to empathize with one another, and their differences provide them with resources that the other needs” (p. 231). Harry and Lou's connection results in a reciprocal care relationship, reducing anxiety and stress while allowing the couple to recognize their circumstances and priorities. Harry helps Lou to be more self-confident while familiarizing her with how to navigate the healthcare system whereas Lou meets Harry's social needs in addition to giving him a ride or helping with shopping.

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<sup>2</sup> Butler (2009) states that precarity is “a politically induced condition in which certain populations suffer from failing social and economic networks of support and become differentially exposed to injury, violence, and death. Such populations are at heightened risk of disease, poverty, starvation, displacement, and of exposure to violence without protection” (p. ii). Isabel Lorey also defines precarity “as a category of order that denotes social positionings of insecurity and hierarchization, which accompanies processes of Othering (Puar, 2012, p. 165).

In Act One, Belluso avoids conflict between the couple and focuses on their personal stories, which affect their future relationship. In the first scene of the play, both Harry and Lou accept their flaws: Lou admits she needs to do many things, such as taking classes from the Community College, to become more independent, but her responsibilities as a mother and financial concerns slow her down. Harry admits his isolation, as he always desires to stick to the familiar, or to remain in his comfort zone. In their short-term relationship, Lou and Harry try to overcome their problems, and push their limits to escape their circumstances, but neither succeeds in the end because of neoliberal ableism. Both Harry and Lou resist transformation; as a result, they (re)embrace their flaws and retreat into their comfort zones.

Although ableism forces both characters to retreat, their situations are not completely equal. Harry can earn money using his web design skills, but he chooses to retreat, whereas Lou ends up reuniting with her husband because she cannot afford healthcare alone. Lou's decision is related to survival rather than being a so-called good mother. She must return to her husband because neoliberal ableism pushes single mothers with disabled children out of social and professional lives. Even if Lou had found a job, it would have been a low wage posting with insufficient health and childcare benefits. As Berlant (2011) articulates:

There is a global capitalist culture manifested in the absence of affordable medicine that tries to control how poor and sexually non normative people experience privacy (i.e., as having no safety net) and publicness (i.e., as a responsibility to state public health requirements and social conventions). There is the ordinary life luck—luck that is both made and an effect of inherited privilege—of some privileged subjects to have insurance and flexible work, which makes their survival exigencies somewhat more medical than economic. All of the struggles are political. There is an urgency to make work that makes worlds, that subtends art and politics for communicating the proliferating urgencies and techniques of survival. (p. 60)

As Berlant shows, Lou's struggle raises political and ethical questions. As a single mother, Lou is not lucky enough to have access to affordable healthcare and is forced into precarity by neoliberal work ethics, which only prioritizes profit. She is stripped of the chance to create a life for herself and her children and hands her future to an abusive man.

The ways Belluso depicts disability subvert associations attached to Harry's disabled body, identity, and his wheelchair. As a result, they turn into positive affects in the play as disability provides a site where connection/bonding between a nondisabled and disabled subject is now both possible and transformative. That is, Harry's disability opens new affective possibilities as it dissociates the disabled body from negative meanings. In her analysis of Guillermo Gómez-Peña's performance with a wheelchair, Petra Kuppers (2007) explains that the performance transforms the meanings attached to disability: "The wheelchair no longer means tragic immobility but instead stands for the paralyzing effects of colonizing fantasies" (p. 84). Similarly, Harry's disabled body and his wheelchair become constructive because they carry an affective power and embody happiness, hope and desire.

In "Affective Economies," Sara Ahmed (2004) explains that negative emotions such as fear "[do] not come from within the subject, nor does it reside in its object" (p. 127). Rather, the signs of fear which circulate among subjects and objects turn something into fearsome (Ahmed, 2004, p. 127). Similarly, the dominant ideologies regarding ableism, which reinforce so-called normalcy on subjects, control affective responses to impairment. As a result, the affect of disability is associated with negative feelings such as hate, fear, or disgust. Showing

that it is not the disabled body that is disturbing, but the circulating affects controlled by dominant ideologies, Belluso offers new affective registers of disability through Harry and Lou's relationship.

Harry began using a wheelchair after he tried a shallow dive and hit his head, which caused a spinal cord injury. His single mother became his only caregiver until she herself needed care due to cancer. Harry and his mother had to switch roles in their family dyad as Harry assumed the role of the caregiver until his mother died of pancreatic cancer when Harry was twenty years old, a time when he "did not even know what a pancreas was, or what it did" (Belluso, 2004, p. 46). His own experience with disability and his mother's struggle with the healthcare system resulted in social and emotional isolation: "I don't know why I don't have a girlfriend. I haven't had one in a very long time. Haven't tried to have one in a very long time. These last few years, they've been very difficult" (Belluso, 2004, p. 46). As Harry explains, he has been avoiding human contact for years, for reasons that are multiple and complicated. Sandahl (2010) asserts that it is not the impairment that causes Harry's social isolation, but the distress triggered by the healthcare system (p. 231). However, the social stigma attached to disability in American culture should also be taken into consideration when discussing Harry's seclusion from the social world.

When tutoring Lou on the evolution of species, Harry asserts that Social Darwinists misinterpreted and distorted the concept of the survival of the fittest. According to Harry, the fittest means the most adaptive, not the strongest (Belluso, 2004, p. 50). Even though Harry has adapted to living with his impairment, American society denied him the chance to be a part of the social and economic world. To avoid discrimination and stigma—ideological responses to disability—Harry has retreated into an isolated world where he only forms online friendships. Yet, his affective communication with Lou has reminded Harry of who he really is and what he is capable of. Rejecting the designated emotional states of passivity and asexuality, Harry subverts notions of normality and disability with the following remarks:

[W]hen I see a beautiful woman like you, Louise, it's then that I remember, that I still feel desire, still, even now. That's how I can still fit into Nature, because I still feel desire, I still want to kiss a woman like you, and touch her breasts, and feel the way that the shape of her breasts change when I touch them with my fingers. I want to put my mouth close to them and I want to feel alive. I don't want to fly around in circles. I want to feel close to people; desire. That's how I fit into Nature. I never feel cracked or broken, when I feel desire. Those are the moments, when I feel fine. [...] There's some things I can't do anymore. Just so you know. But there's some things I can still do, a lot of things. And I want to do those things with you. (Belluso, 2004, p. 50)<sup>3</sup>

The excerpt comments on the intersection of disability and asexuality as Harry denies the equation of the two concepts. Michael Chemers (2015) suggests that Belluso destabilizes notions that perceive people with disabilities less than human by portraying them as affective and connected individuals with needs, hopes, and desires like every human being (p. 218). Belluso also demonstrates that Harry has been coerced into isolation by social norms that strip him of his individuality by labeling him "cracked," "broken," or disaffected.

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<sup>3</sup> The playwright frequently uses ellipses in the play. Therefore, when words, sentences, or lines are omitted from quotations, ellipses in square brackets will be used to avoid confusion.

Rather than upsetting Lou and causing feelings of dislocatedness, Harry's disability generates abundant positive meanings for her. As Carolyn Pedwell (2012) posits, an "empathetic identification" makes it possible to "open oneself up to different ways of knowing and new forms of intersubjectivity with the potential to dislodge and rearticulate dominant assumptions, truths, boundaries" (p. 164). Touching Harry's legs, inquiring about his disability and engaging with Harry's wheelchair (pushing it, putting in and taking it out of the car) opens room for sympathy, desire, understanding and connectivity:

LOUISE (Staring at his legs): No feeling at all?

HARRY: No, I mean, I can kind of feel, like pressure, in some parts, but not really any sort of—

LOUISE: So, if I poke your legs, (*Poking*) like this, you really can't feel at all?

HARRY (Smiling): Well, I can see that you're poking my legs, so in a way that's sort of like feeling it. Don't poke my legs.

LOUISE (Embarrassed): Oh, I'm sorry, I didn't mean to ... I guess I was just really curious and I, the pot, I haven't smoked pot in so long, I guess I just. . .

HARRY: It's okay. (Taking the hand that she poked him with, smiling) It's okay. Relax. (Belluso, 2004, p. 45)

The stage directions also indicate the affective connection that gradually develops between the characters: Lou stares; pokes; feels embarrassed that she disturbed Harry while he smiles because Lou's attempt to really understand Harry has a positive impact on him. Nevertheless, Lou initially avoids any physical contact with Harry. Belluso unfolds her dilemma through stage directions at the end of Act One, Scene Four as follows:

*Beat. He stares into her eyes, he wants to kiss her. She puts the joint in an ashtray—she looks at him. He moves across the bed, using his arms to move his body toward her, then moves his legs, adjusting them. He moves in close, kisses her, she pulls away.*

LOUISE (*Staring at his legs, a look of discomfort*): No. I'm too old for you. (*Quickly looking away from his legs, then looking to him*) No. Okay? But we will be friends. (Belluso, 2004, p. 46)

Belluso's meticulous depiction of Harry's movements paves the way for a realistic presentation of disability experience and challenges the ableist gaze. Moreover, this scene is followed by Lou overcoming her hesitations and initiating sexual intercourse. These scenes open up new affective spaces by going against the audience's expectations. That is, deconstructing the myth of asexuality attributed to the disabled people and humanizing Harry as an individual with desires create a sense of disaffectedness.

Garland Thomson discusses the politics of looking and staring in *Staring: How We Look* where she explains people tend to stare when they see bodies that do not conform to the standards they know of. The stare becomes a power exercise between the starrer and staree, Garland Thomson (2009) argues, and is also a method of communication that is rich in meaning, including "domination, adoration, curiosity, surprise, allegiance, disgust, wonder, befuddlement, openness, hostility, [and] reverence" (p. 39). She notes that staring has the power to both "sustain" and "demolish" the object of the stare. While an individual may experience "judgment, appropriation, or abrupt dismissal" through staring, which exposes vulnerabilities, staring also validates this person's being (p. 59).

In this context, staring is both political and affective. Lou's stare results in understanding, identification, and transformation whereas the ableist stare in society causes differentiation,



which alienates the disabled body and renders it invisible in the social world. As a result, Harry has lived in isolation and Sandahl (2010) argues, although he is capable enough to improve his circumstances, he has waged a battle against the capitalist system, which does not and cannot change anything (p. 232). When Harry is stared at with derision, it is because he is subject to neoliberal ableism and is seen as “useless” within a society that only values people for their functionary quality.

Yet, dilemmas are not solved just because Harry and Louise have initiated a sexual relationship. The cruel optimism of Harry and Lou's desperate struggle leads the couple to go into other affective states. Harry fails to see Lou's concerns and anxieties because he is too obsessed with the idea of fighting the healthcare system and capitalism. Harry wants to fight the neoliberal ableism together, whereas Lou just hopes Harry would help her navigate through the complexities of the system. That is, although they are oppressed by the same forces—gender expectations, class, and healthcare—their motives to stand up against them differ considerably. Sandahl (2010) elaborates on the reasons that draw Harry and Lou apart and states, “Harry's choices are a form of privilege that he fails to acknowledge. Lou must prioritize getting food on the table and health care for her children over romance, pot smoking, political grandstanding, and intellectual debate” (p. 232). This does not mean that Harry's problems are insignificant in comparison to Lou's, but Lou is below Harry in the social ladder as an uneducated single mother who is not qualified enough to find a job and provide for her family.

As a single mother, Lou is stigmatized by gender and class oppression. She feels ashamed of living on welfare and receiving Medicaid:

LOUISE: What makes you think I'm poor?

HARRY: You have the same shitty Medicaid HMO coverage that I have, can't even get a doctor appointment when you need one, have to go to the emergency room for treatment. Are you on welfare?

LOUISE (*Pauses for a moment*): Yes, I am. It's only for a little while, my ex-husband, he's out of work so he can't pay child support.

HARRY: You don't have to make excuses, I collect Social Security Disability, I don't care if you're on—

LOUISE: Yeah, okay. (Belluso, 2004, p. 43)

Neither the welfare money, nor the Medicaid is enough to sustain a life with three children in need of care. Being dependent on government aid and her ex-husband makes Lou feel insufficient and desperate as a mother since she cannot solve her daughter's worsening health problems, nor can she meet her family's financial needs. Lou is in such a financially desperate situation that she cannot afford to buy the things she wants and needs. Once she “impulse shops” to feel normal and it results in an embarrassing situation at the counter:

I was going to write a check, but I knew I only had ninety-seven dollars in the bank, and my kids were getting fussy and cranky, and I'm looking at the people waiting behind me, and they all got fussy kids, too. (*Beat*) And the number kept going up, past the amount I had, I'm sweating, watching the numbers go up. And the checkout girl turned and looked at me and the number was like, 120-something dollars, and she looked at me and in that moment, she looked all fucked-up, like she had sharp fangs instead of teeth and these really huge hands, and she could tell by the look on my face that I didn't have enough because I was all sweating and panicked, and I just told her,

softly, like I whispered, “I gotta put some things back.” I felt shitty, stupid, (*Short beat*) like a pig. (Belluso, 2004, p. 49)

Lou falls victim to the ideological norms that equate happiness and personal fulfillment with consumption as she attempts to feel normal. As Berlant (2011) explains, “[t]he intensity of the need to feel normal is created by economic conditions of nonreciprocity that are mimetically reproduced in households that try to maintain the affective forms of middle-class exchange while having an entirely different context of anxiety and economy to manage” (p. 180). As a woman who is oppressed both in private and public spheres of everyday life, Lou attempts to become the woman and mother she desires, but she is restrained from having a good life.

As the play moves into Act Two, the tone drastically changes. Throughout Act One, Harry and Lou are supportive of one another, and their affectivity relieves the stress in their lives. However, the more Lou is absorbed into the healthcare system, the more she feels desperate and stressed. In contrast to the optimistic mood of Act One, the distance between the couple increases and they go through several negative affective states as Lou’s anxiety intensifies due to Bea’s deteriorating health condition. Lou’s affective responses to the emerging crisis are revealed through negative reactions such as outbursts. The conflict begins when Bea begins coughing up blood and reaches the climax in the scene where Harry interrupts Lou and Rebecca’s conversation on the phone inappropriately in an outburst of anger, causing Rebecca’s refusal to help Bea.

When Lou calls the HMO center and talks to Rebecca about Bea’s condition, Rebecca underestimates the situation and hangs up. Lou believes she is treated harshly because she is on Medicaid and attacks Harry:

Oh, you’re going to tell me what I would benefit from? You, who has this really valuable skill to work with computers and who could be out having a great career and making money, but instead you choose to keep yourself locked away in places like this stupid college; reading the same books over and over, taking the same classes over and over. [. . .] all the while what you’re really doing is just hiding behind these stupid, politically correct beliefs that no one gives a shit about anymore, because you’re afraid to go out and live in the World. Well personally, I would fucking love to go out and be able to get a good job and make money, even if it is at some ‘evil capitalist’ corporation! Right now that sounds like a fucking idea. (Belluso, 2004, p. 55)

People like Lou are useless, disposable, and invisible in the capitalist system. As Butler states, institutions that are supposed to guarantee equality so that all citizens can claim existence in the public sphere actually “structured in such a way that certain populations become disposable, are interpellated as disposable, deprived of a future, of education, of stable and fulfilling work” (Puar, 2012, p. 168). As a single mother in the welfare system, Lou is a burden on the economy since she does not contribute to the market economy. Therefore, Lou resents Harry because he is qualified enough to earn money whereas she is denied the opportunity to earn a living.

Harry goes through a similar affective state when helping Lou, resulting in a loss of control and outburst. Harry tells her that “[i]f you want her [Bea] to get the tests, you have to work the system. You have to be tough, strong, and hard like steel. (*Short beat, softly*) My mom, she wasn’t strong [. . .] she came from this whole generation where you didn’t doubt your doctor’s wisdom, but we can’t be that way anymore” (Belluso, 2004, pp. 54-55). Lou’s situation brings

back the memories of his mother's cancer treatment and eventual death, for which Harry blames the HMO system. Harry's trauma resurfaces while Lou talks to Rebecca, causing him to become aggressive and interrupt their conversation to attack her. His rage aggravates the situation and Rebecca refuses to help after she is subjected to Harry's hostile behavior. Shaking with anger, Harry does not realize his inappropriate behavior has denied Bea the treatment she needs. Not being able to cope with stress, Lou goes into a negative affective state, and she throws Harry out of the house during the rain, stating her indifference about his commute back home:

HARRY: This is just like what happened with my mother, the American Health-Care System, it's fucked, this is just like what happened to my mother. . .

LOUISE: No, it's not. I'm not your mother. (*Softly, coldly*) Get out of my house. (*A little louder*) Get out of my house.

HARRY (Smiling): It's raining.

LOUISE: I don't care. I don't care how you get home. Just—get out. Now. (Belluso, 2004, p. 57)

As the excerpt shows, Harry is traumatized by his experiences as his mother's caregiver. This prevents him from prioritizing Bea's critical condition and what Lou needs. His unresolved issues with the past cost him a future with Lou who never promised him to fight the healthcare system together in the first place. Rather than relieving Lou's stress by serving as a mediator, Harry causes further problems. Moreover, complicated by financial predicaments, her struggle with the healthcare system places intolerable pressure on Lou's life as a single mother. As a result, she cuts off emotionally and distances herself from Harry.

Lou attempts to reduce her anxiety using two affective practices. First, believing she can convince Rebecca to authorize the necessary tests, she visits Rebecca in person to reverse her position as the "distant other." Although Rebecca was unresponsive to the situation with Lou on the phone, a face-to-face communication creates an affective intimacy, and she finally empathizes with Lou's desperate situation. Sandahl (2010) states that two women immediately connect thanks to "epistemic experiences of motherhood" (p. 233). The affects of the female bond emerge, and Rebecca goes against the system, risking her job by authorizing the tests that reveal Bea's serious condition. Despite all the transformation she goes through due to affective encounters with Rebecca and Harry, knowing that she will need money throughout this process, Lou reunites with her ex-husband. She explains her desperate situation to Harry as follows:

He's doing good right now, he's making good money at his new job. I'm not stupid, I know what he did to me. But I can't keep doing this by myself and he loves the kids and I need money and I need help. And you, you don't have any money. And you're not going to do anything to get money. (*Short beat, softly*) I'm not stupid, but I know, I really don't have a choice. (Belluso, 2004, p. 59)

The quote reveals that the solutions Harry has offered such as getting an education and finding the weaknesses of the system to manipulate it will not solve Lou's immediate problems of caring for a child with a debilitating illness. Reuniting with her abusive ex-husband is the most practical solution for Lou, since this option allows her to focus on taking care of Bea. However, it is uncertain whether this will work out well for Lou considering her husband's nature. As Chemers (2015) states, Lou has to "debase herself, prostrate herself, and subjugate herself both to begging for the care to which she is entitled and to her

disgusting ex-husband” (p. 221). Her socioeconomic conditions and neoliberal ableism render Lou vulnerable. This is a point where the play diverges from other depictions that have shown heroic mothers grappling with disability and evokes the social model of disability as Bea and Lou are subject to the ways in which disability is not accommodated or supported.

### **Challenging the Medical Industrial Complex**

The medical institutions constitute an important place in *Pyretown* as the play exposes the politics of the healthcare system. At the beginning of the play, Lou is at a hospital trying to convince the receptionist that her daughter needs to be examined by a doctor immediately. The way she describes her desperate situation demonstrates the fact that single mothers must almost always juggle a lot:

I’m really not a cranky person, I swear I’m not, but I have two kids with me who have not had naps, I have another kid who I need to pick up from daycare in . . . (*looks at her watch*) seventeen minutes, and I have a Yankee pot roast which I need to cook and slice into little pieces for my kids to eat, and eventually for me to eat as well. I am tired of waiting. I want to see a doctor, NOW! (Belluso, 2004, p. 42)

As the excerpt clarifies, Lou has been waiting for a long time for a simple examination. The bureaucracy in the healthcare system contributes to the anxiety that comes with Lou’s responsibilities as a single mother: “I already gave you our card, yes I did, I gave it to that nurse, that one over there. [. . .] No ma’am, I definitely filled that form out already, yes I’m sure I did, no, she took both the white and the pink copies of the form. I don’t have any copies at all” (Belluso, 2004, p. 41). Although Lou has done everything properly and followed the rules, the hospital requires her to confirm each step repeatedly, costing her time and energy.

Meanwhile, Harry watches Lou struggling with the receptionist, and he offers to switch places in the waiting list so that she can see the doctor before him. Harry knows the system well and explains to Lou that if she annoys the nurses, they will make her wait longer: “You have to make them like you, compliment their nail polish, or something like that” (Belluso, 2004, p. 42). Although their job is to treat people in need of medical care, the cold and detached medical personnel do not care whether or not the patients have urgent needs. On the contrary, they are so insensitive to patients’ problems that they deliberately make people wait if they cause any problems.

This pattern—of medical personnel—can be explained by what Arlie Hochschild termed “emotional labor” in her 1983 book, *The Managed Heart: Commercialization of Human Feeling*. Describing a flight attendant’s work, Hochschild (2012) explains that in addition to mental and physical labor, a flight attendant’s job requires emotional labor, which basically means controlling emotions at work (p. 7). In her preface to the 2012 edition of the book, Hochschild expands the list and explains that whether reluctant or not and whether successful or not, people working in “[d]ay-care centers, nursing homes, hospitals, airports, stores, call centers, classrooms, social welfare offices, dental offices” do emotional labor by suppressing their feelings and emotions and managing those of others (p. ix). Hochschild blames the neoliberal politics of labor for fostering emotional labor in the name of a competitive market. She claims that with the rapid privatization of hospitals and the healthcare system, medical personnel are forced to detach themselves from the patients and suppress such emotions as care and empathy (i.e., detached concern). Moreover, assigned to tasks which make them “float” from one unit to the other, those who work in medical centers

are prevented from enacting care: “Encouraging a patient to eat, listening to a patient story, making a joke, patting an arm—such acts lost importance. They were absent from the medical charts. And these days ‘if something isn’t on the charts [...] it didn’t happen’” (Hochschild, 2012, p. xii).

Rebecca’s scenes are also significant because the reader/audience witnesses how her affected state gradually changes due to the emotional labor she has to perform. The play opens with a prologue where she addresses the audience to introduce the first scene and the theme of interconnectedness of individuals:

There are slivers of something inside of our bodies. Fragile strings of us, slivers, thin, like the most delicate of veins. But they are not veins, they are made of a different Substance.

They are contained within each body, but they also break outward; breaking out of the skin, connecting themselves, to other bodies. Tight, taut, radiant threads of Interconnection, threads constructed of Power and Desire. [...] I do believe in these *connections*, I truly believe these slivers exist. And I see them. They reveal themselves in small moments, small exchanges. (Belluso, 2004, p. 41)

Showing a state of affectedness, the monologue introduces Rebecca’s emotional connection to her environment. She believes that affects circulate among individuals, and they find their emotional representations in small but pleasant exchanges in daily life. This is exemplified when Harry and Lou are introduced to the scene: Harry is in a supermarket and struggling to reach a shelf, but it is impossible to get what he wants from his sitting position. Lou helps him, they exchange smiles and continue their shopping separately. The scene shows, to borrow from Greenwald Smith (2015), the “unpredictability of affective connections” (p. 2) because it introduces an unfamiliar affect, which finds its representation in interdependence. As Sandahl (2010) states, there is neither fanfare nor pity, just a sense of reality (p. 230). Rebecca is moved by mutual dependence and affective connectivity as she describes this moment as a moment of connection and “a beautiful moment of Power and Desire” (Belluso, 2004, p. 41).

Rebecca’s job requires her to decide whether the patients need medical treatment over the phone without even actually seeing them. At first, she is in a moral and ethical dilemma between her desire to help people and her company’s instructions to cut the budget, an implication that medical authorities favor finances more than individuals’ health. Yet, barred from face-to-face communication, which has an affective potential, Rebecca cuts off emotionality. The HMO, a profit-driven company, forces her to slowly transform from an affectively connected individual into a detached, insensitive, and cruel doctor who scolds patients and denies them treatment depending on her whims. Trapped in the medical-industrial complex as a doctor who wants to keep her job, Rebecca begins acting cruelly because of the emotional labor she has to perform. She underestimates the concerns of a woman whose husband has had a stroke before and draws pleasure from exerting power over her. Rebecca keeps the woman on hold while she gets creamer for her coffee and lies to her by stating that she has been looking at her husband’s file (Belluso, 2004, pp. 47-48). Although she was sensitive and had warm conversations with the patients when she first started her job as a Utilization Review Physician at the HMO, she has become cruel in time as the following scene also demonstrates:

REBECCA: [...] What you need to do is to settle down, hang up the phone and put him to bed. Your request is denied.

*Back to the audience Rebecca is a bit stunned at her own anger, then a smile; a note of pride in her voice.*

REBECCA: Denied. (Belluso, 2004, p. 48)

As a part of the system, the more Rebecca detaches herself from the patients and pushes her affective self away, the more she feels successful at her job. Lou breaks this cycle when she visits Rebecca and reminds her of the human aspect of her job.

## Conclusion

*Pyretown* portrays the social, cultural, and political problems existing in American society in such a realistic manner that some critics label it as didactic. Andrea Stevans (2005), for instance, states in her review published in *The New York Times* that the conversations, especially those toward the end of the play, are more like a part of a lecture than a play. Nevertheless, it problematizes social and political institutions, which oppress individuals and erect barriers that hinder liberty and equality. Through the characters who are in conflict with institutions, such as the healthcare and welfare system, restricting their choices in life, *Pyretown* calls for a redefinition and reorganization of social order. The play avoids using disability as a metaphor and explores its intersections with gender, sexuality, social class, and the healthcare system. Belluso illustrates that Harry's tragedy results from his struggle with the HMO, not from his disability. Similarly, Lou suffers due to insufficient government support for her sick child. The neoliberal ableism in the public sphere renders her more vulnerable as a single mother. Rebecca's life is governed by precarity as she is trapped by profit-driven medical institutions, and capitalist work ethics that threaten her with unemployment unless she complies to the strict rules. The villain, or the problem, in *Pyretown* is not disabled individuals, but the neoliberal politics and the unjust medical approach to disability. Unlike traditional narratives that eventually remove or cure disability, *Pyretown* leaves "the problem of disability" unsolved at the end to emphasize that the main issue that needs to be addressed in the United States is the dysfunction in the healthcare system and the established status quo, which cause citizens to suffer financially, emotionally, and socially.

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# Gendering Robotic Bodies in Ian McEwan's *Machines Like Me* and Annalee Newitz's *Autonomous*

Ian McEwan'ın *Benim Gibi Makineler* ve Annalee Newitz'in *Otonom* Romanlarında Robotik Bedenlerin Cinsiyetlendirilmesi

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## Abstract

With the ubiquity of robotic devices in contemporary age, human-like robots have become protagonists of literary works, especially of science fiction which extrapolates from the existing technology and represents how the societies will be arranged or what kind of rules the individuals will be imposed on in the future. In Ian McEwan's *Machines Like Me* (2019) and Annalee Newitz's *Autonomous* (2017) humanoids are in the center of the narrative and though being mechanical human productions, they are expected to comply with heteronormative genders and required to perform their gender roles. Adams and Eves in *Machines Like Me* are produced in a limited number and created as factotum, while Paladin in *Autonomous* is a military bot who is produced as non-binary and without any gender marker; it is basically a machine with blades on its shoulders and hidden shields and weapons, yet because of its being in the military domain and its appearance, it is referred to as "he" by the humans until it was understood that he has a "woman's brain." From then onwards, Paladin was accepted as a woman, and she complied with the social expectations of femininity. When these novels are read through the prism of the classical theories of gender and posthuman feminism, it is observed that just like those of human beings, bodies of robots are also compelled to perform culturally constructed gender roles. Through a comparative examination of these novels, this paper investigates how humans are unable to leave their anthropocentrism behind and how human-centered perspective functions as an entrapment for the nonhumans and thus they are required to comply with the anthropocentric understanding of gender, which is still constructed in a binary logic in regulating the lives of nonhuman entities.

**Keywords:** gendered robots, performativity, compulsory heterosexuality, posthuman feminism.

## Öz

Günümüzde robotik cihazların yaygınlaşmasıyla birlikte, insan benzeri robotlar edebi eserlerin, özellikle de mevcut teknolojiye yola çıkan ve gelecekte toplumların nasıl düzenleneceğini ya da bireylere ne tür kurallar dayatılacağını temsil eden bilim kurgu eserlerinin baş kahramanları haline geldi. Ian McEwan'ın *Machines Like Me* (Benim Gibi Makineler, 2019) ve Annalee Newitz'in *Autonomous* (Otonom, 2017) adlı eserlerinde anlatının merkezinde yer alan insansı robotların, mekanik insan üretimleri olmalarına rağmen, heteronormatif cinsiyetlere sahip olmaları ve toplumsal cinsiyet rollerini yerine getirmeleri beklenir. *Benim Gibi Makineler*'deki Adam ve Eve robotlar sınırlı sayıda her işi yapacak kapasitede üretilirken, *Otonom*'daki Paladin askeri bir robottur ve herhangi bir cinsiyete ait olmadan üretilmiştir; aslında omuzlarında bıçakları, gizli kalkanları ve silahları olan bir makinedir, ancak askeri alanda olması ve görünüşü nedeniyle, "kadın beynine" sahip olduğu anlaşılan kadar insanlar tarafından "erkek" olarak adlandırılır. Kadın beyni meselesi ortaya çıkınca Paladin bir kadın olarak kabul edilmiş ve toplumun kadınlık kimliği beklentilerine uymuştur. Bu romanlar klasik toplumsal cinsiyet kuramları ve insan sonrası feminizm çerçevesinde okunduğunda, tıpkı insanlarınki gibi robotların bedenlerinin de kültürel olarak inşa edilmiş toplumsal cinsiyet rollerini yerine getirmeye zorlandığı görülmektedir. Bu makale, bu romanları karşılaştırmalı olarak

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inceleyerek, insanların insanmerkezciliklerini nasıl geride bırakmadıklarını ve bu insanmerkezci yaklaşımın insan olmayanları nasıl tuzağa düşürdüğünü ve insan olmayanların insanmerkezci toplumsal cinsiyet anlayışına nasıl uymak zorunda kaldıklarını ortaya koymaktadır, ki bu cinsiyet anlayışı da ikili bir mantıksal düzenle insan olmayan varlıkların hayatlarını düzenler.

**Anahtar kelimeler:** cinsiyetli robotlar, cinsiyet edimi, zorunlu heteroseksüellik, insanötesi feminizm.

In its broadest sense, gender is an ideologically, socially, and culturally constructed concept that influences the cultural, social, psychological, and behavioral aspects of humans' lives. Social psychologists Myerson and Kolb argue that the concept of gender is "an axis of power, identities, an organizing principle that shapes social structure, and it is knowledge" (2000, p. 563). The relationship between body and power was first acknowledged by Michael Foucault, in his chapter "Docile Bodies," taking a soldier as a starting point, he states "the body was in the grip of stringent powers, which imposed on its constraints, prohibitions or obligations" (1995, p. 136). According to Foucault, the pervasive force of society shapes an individual's body, which is turned into a type of a prison for the individual. Drawing on Foucault's arguments on the relationship between power and individuals, Butler further comments "There is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender: that identity is performatively constituted by the very expressions that are said to be its results" (Butler, 1996, p. 33). Gender identities are social constructions that result from power relations and are internalized by individuals. With the ubiquity of robotic devices in our age, human-like robots have become protagonists of literary works, especially of science fiction, which generally extrapolates from the existing technology and represents how societies will be arranged or what kind of rules individuals will be imposed on in the future or in alternative realities. Two such thought-provoking novels, which give insights about nonhuman human entanglements, are Ian McEwan's *Machines Like Me* (2019) and Annalee Newitz's *Autonomous* (2017), with humanoids at the heart of the narrative. Though mechanical human productions, the humanoids are approached with an anthropomorphic attitude by the humans and they are assigned or expected to have heteronormative gender identities and are required to perform their prescribed gender roles.

There are a great number of scholarly criticisms of *Machines Like Me*, while only few articles have been published on *Autonomous*. Among the scholarly articles on these novels, merely few of them comment on the gender identity of humanoids. Büyükgebiz, for instance, studies the former from the perspective of masculinity studies and argues that Adam, the humanoid, is a "victim of hegemonic masculinity" (2021, p. 68) and with this feature, he "provokes the fear of losing masculinity" (Büyükgebiz, 2021, p. 59) in society. While Büyükgebiz provides an insightful reading of the novel, he solely focuses on the gender role of Adam. There is only one comparative analysis on these novels by Hayles, who studies above mentioned novels and Ishiguro's *Klara and the Sun* and argues that "the human aura is subverted by conscious robots" in the novels (2023, p. 255), and concludes that "the human aura should be transformed to include a biophilic orientation to cognitive capacities on Earth" (Hayles, 2023, p. 277). Although Hayles presents a penetrating account of the novels, her focus differs markedly from that of this article. The aim of this paper is to read *Machines Like Me* and *Autonomous* through the prism of the classical theories of gender and posthuman feminism to display how just like those of human beings, bodies of robots are also compelled to perform culturally constructed gender roles, for both the robots and gender roles are constructed by the same hegemonic and anthropocentric structure. Through a comparative examination of these novels, this paper investigates how humans

are unable to leave their anthropocentrism behind, and how nonhumans are subjected to dualistic and anthropocentric understanding of gender.

Gender has been extensively studied and written on, and it is not straightforward to define, being a complex and multifaceted concept. Depending on their physiological characteristics at birth, babies of humans are attributed to either male or female roles. Feminist critics have offered challenging accounts of the concept of gender, and the most commonly held belief is that patriarchy conditions the way people behave. Simone de Beauvoir's famous statement "One is not born a woman but rather becomes one" from *The Second Sex* (1973, p. 34) establishes the ground for the idea that gender is a cultural construction. De Beauvoir claims that nobody is born with a gender, it is invariably acquired, and "to become a woman is a purposive and appropriate set of acts, the gradual acquisition of a skill" (Butler, 1986, p. 36). Building on De Beauvoir's ideas, Butler considers gender as "the discursive and cultural means by which sexed nature or a natural sex is produced and established as prediscursive prior to culture, a politically neutral surface on which culture acts" (1996, p. 11). Thus, the construction of gender is indeed political, and once a baby is born into a specific culture, it is plunged into this pre-discursive gender structure. Classical theories of gender are criticized by posthumanist scholars on the grounds of having an anthropocentric approach, which assumes the "belief that humans enjoy special, central, even cosmic significance," (Butchvarov, 2015, p. 1). Humans have long desired to believe that they are the most important beings in the world and have developed a biased understanding of the other beings around themselves from an anthropocentric perspective. In fact, posthumanism and gender theories intersect with their criticism of heterosexuality. Disputing human exceptionalism, posthumanisms seek to debunk the idea of human exceptionalism and to decentralize human, represented mostly by a white, heterosexual, male, able-bodied, and a middle-class person. By abolishing the long-held idea of human at the center, posthumanisms pursue ways to establish a non-hierarchical relationality based on the idea of fragility of boundaries. In posthumanist understanding, so-called boundaries between human and nonhuman are rendered redundant, and a renegotiating of the concept "human" is suggested by drawing attention to the interdependence of all entities.

One can clearly observe that Butler maintains an anthropocentric approach about the much-debated distinction between sex and gender, and declares that one is born with "a sex, as a sex, sexed, and that being sexed and being human are coextensive and simultaneous. Sex is a human attribute and there is no one who is not sexed" (1996, p. 142). While it is commonly held that choice of gender is a way of interpreting social gender roles, Butler argues that sex, gender, and the body are all different types of constructions, and the body emerges as an instrument on which social and cultural significations are imprinted (1996, p. 12). Human bodies are politically constructed as a result of gender; thus, there is no natural body that precedes culture. The body is also constructed linguistically by way of performative utterances such as it is "a girl" or "a boy." Analogous to Butler, Monique Wittig contests the distinction between sex and gender. According to Wittig, the category of sex is politically laden, she maintains "We have been compelled in our bodies and our minds to correspond, feature by feature, with an idea of nature that has been established for us" (1992, p. 9). She claims that the concepts "woman" and "man" are manufactured concepts that serve to consolidate and stabilize a binary relation, the economic requirements and the reproductive goals of a system of compulsory heterosexuality (Wittig, 1992, p. 2). Similarly, Butler puts forth that gender is a kind of imitation and that

The naturalistic effects of heterosexualized genders are produced through imitative strategies ... In this sense the reality of heterosexual identities is performatively constituted through an imitation that sets itself up as the origin. In other words,

heterosexuality is always in the process of imitating and approximating its own phantasmatic idealization of itself. (2004, p. 128)

It could be argued that gender is directly related to the metaphysics of being and it is also a kind of performance because it “happens through a certain kind of repetition and recitation” (Butler, 1994, p. 3), and it is “the repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame” (Butler, 1996, p. 45). Butler underlines gender as a construction that develops over time rather than being an inherent attribute of humans. This proposition of Butler has been contested by scholars of feminist posthumanism. Karen Barad, for instance, holds that

All bodies, not merely “human” bodies, come to matter through the world’s iterative intra-activity- its performativity ... Human bodies are not inherently different from “nonhuman” ones. What constitutes the “human” (and the “nonhuman”) is not a fixed or pre-given notion, nor is it a free-floating ideality. (2003, p. 823)

Within the framework of posthumanism, not only humans but also nonhumans should be thought of as a part of the universe, thereby being included in the ethical, ontological, and epistemological processes and production of the matter of bodies.

Adrienne Rich considers heterosexuality a universally pervasive *institution* shaping male and female relationships. It is through this institution of heterosexuality that men and women enter romantic relationships on the basis of unwritten, yet plainly established conventions. According to Rich, heterosexuality is not natural; rather, it is political in character, serving the wants and desires of males within the patriarchal system and necessitating various forms of male coercion of women in order to produce it. Rich maintains that “heterosexuality has been both forcibly and subliminally imposed on women” (1980, p. 30). As a system of oppression, compulsory heterosexuality coerces women to remain within well-defined and formidable boundaries. Rich’s theory of compulsory heterosexuality focuses primarily on female suffering and lesbian existence. She has been criticized for excluding male homosexuality from her writings. In this respect, Connell draws attention to the fact that it is not only women for whom heterosexuality is obligatory, “compulsory heterosexuality is also enforced on men” (1995, p. 104). Likewise, reminding the proverbial “it takes two to tango,” Tolman states that “boys and men, too, are engaged in the process of reproducing heterosexuality, and it is compulsory for men as well” (2006, p. 77). Men are also influenced by the dominant culture, which inculcates the belief that heterosexuality is the only acceptable and natural practice of sexual relationships. If the novels studied are considered within the scope of critical posthumanism, compulsory heterosexuality acts as a tool to regulate the lives of nonhuman beings as well as humans, though in its essence compulsory heterosexuality critiques the existence of nonhuman entities, which presents us with a quandary. While the borders of human and nonhuman are eroded in practice when it comes to the issue of gender, they remain unshakeable in principle.

Gender is a primary social category shaped by the social norms; therefore, “most social behavior is embedded in the performance of specific roles, and gender roles serve as a backdrop that pervades the performance of such specific roles” (Wood & Eagly, 2010, p. 631). Depending on their genders, individuals are attributed some certain ways of behavior. To exemplify, “Men, more than women, are thought to be agentic—that is, masterful, assertive, competitive, and dominant. Women, more than men, are thought to be communal—that is, friendly, unselfish, concerned with others, and emotionally expressive” (Wood & Eagly, 2010, p. 632). In addition to agency and communion regarding gender stereotypes, people also make a point of the contrasting features of male and female bodies; they “regard men as muscular, strong, and tall and women as pretty, sexy, and petite. With

respect to the mind, ... women [are] more creative and verbally skilled and men [are] more analytical and quantitatively skilled” (Wood & Eagly, 2010, p. 632). The adjectives used to define the gender roles of females and males are prescriptive rather than descriptive, which is also the result of the dictation of heteronormativity.

In such a social structure that enforces stereotypical roles on individuals, it seems impossible for technology to remain abstracted from social and cultural norms. Katherine Hayles maintains technology “has become so entwined with the production of identity that it can no longer meaningfully be separated from the human subject” (1999, p. xiii). Both transhumans and cyborgs, as well as technologically constructed nonhuman bodies, are in the grasp of hegemonic structures. Victoria Pitts holds “high-tech body appears socially plastic” (2005, p. 46), implying that they are modelled on socially accepted norms and beliefs. In contrast to the assumption that technology has the potential to free human beings from their cultural limitations as well as physical constraints, she acknowledges that “our self-identity, our sexualities, and other aspects of our embodied subjectivity are shaped by powerfully gendered discourses” (Pitts, 2005, p. 46). Similarly, Balsamo suggests that it is not possible to have an environment free of the identity or material body because “the gender ... identity of the material body structures the way that body is subsequently culturally reproduced and technologically disciplined” (1996, p. 233). Gender is “both a determining cultural condition and a social consequence of technological deployment” (Balsamo, 1996, p. 9). The ubiquity of gender stereotypes also influences the production of robots and humanoids; they have mostly been attributed stereotypical personality traits and occupational role stereotypes, depending on their predetermined genders. Although robots are mostly produced gender-neutral, people interacting with them insist on labeling them with gender markers, which is one of the results of anthropocentrism; humans want to perceive everything around themselves depending on their own understanding of life, to benefit their own interests. Robots’ non-binary production could be considered in line with Donna Haraway’s cyborg metaphor explained in *A Cyborg Manifesto*. Being neither fully organic nor fully inorganic, cyborgs are hybrid entities which occupy a third space, and “the cyborg is a creature in a postgender world” (Haraway, 2016, p. 8). The figure of the cyborg, then, deconstructs the binary understanding of gender, it has no origin thereby no oedipal link to connect it to an antecedent; however, human perception struggles to codify stereotypical gender roles on nonhuman entities.

Posthumanist thought challenges this tendency of human beings to place themselves above all other beings. Rosi Braidotti, for instance, asserts that the historical nature-culture boundary is currently “replaced by a non-dualistic understanding of nature-culture interaction” (2013, p. 3). Haraway suggests that questioning and no longer consenting to the tenets of human exceptionalism begins with “knowing more ... and feeling more” about human and nonhuman living beings and their dynamic entanglements in and with the world (1990, p. 295). Gaining a deeper understanding of nonhuman living beings and the dynamic interactions between them and humans may challenge the notion of human exceptionalism. Within this frame, traditional notions of gender and body have also been challenged by posthuman critics. Instead of rigid boundaries and anthropocentric approaches, a more fluid understanding of gender, going beyond traditional gender roles, is proposed. In this regard, feminist posthumanities “engages with critical and creative pursuits that address our changing relationships between political animals of both human and more-than-human kinds, and among bodies, technologies, and environments” (Asberg & Braidotti, 2018, p. 16). The boundaries between humans and nonhumans are obliterated, for the lines between “the organic and the inorganic, the born and the manufactured, flesh and metal, electronic circuits and organic nervous systems” (Braidotti, 2013, p. 89) are crossed in the Anthropocene. Referring to Butler’s concept of gender as a performance,

Barad discusses the link between performativity and the production of the subject, and how it is related to the production of the matter of bodies, and she suggests “Posthumanist notion of performativity—one that incorporates important material and discursive, social and scientific, human and nonhuman, and natural and cultural factors” (2003, p. 808). Much as posthumanist critics foreground all-inclusive approaches in order to embrace both humans and nonhumans, anthropocentric attitudes pervade in the contemporary age. Within the scope of gender theories, Braidotti draws attention to “masculinist universalism” (2013, p. 22), which is also critiqued by humanist feminism. Nonhumans also suffer from masculinist universalism, in that they are under the pressure of rigid gender roles. Haraway states that cyborg bodies are “maps of power and identity” (1990, p. 180); it seems it is nearly impossible to be freed of the chains of gender. The nonhumans in McEwan’s and Newitz’s novels are, too, within the grasp of patriarchal gender roles and stereotypes.

Both novels present the stories of nonhuman entities that are forced into performing one of the genders in binary logic. McEwan’s *Machines Like Me* explores the intersection of nonhuman and human relationships, and the story is set in an alternative London in the 1980s. In this alternate history, the UK has undergone extensive computerization, and the Internet and artificial intelligence have played active roles in every field of life. One of the latest and most expensive consumer electronics devices is the humanoid Adam, “a man of plausible intelligence and looks, believable motion and shifts of expression” (McEwan, 2019, p. 10). A total of twenty-five robots have been produced: twelve of the first edition are called Adam, and thirteen are called Eve. Charlie, the narrator of the novel and owner of Adam, would have picked an Eve, but all the females have been sold out, so he has purchased an Adam. Newitz’s *Autonomous* is set in 2144 and features several types of robots, which, to cover the expense of their construction, are placed in indentured servitude. In the fictional world of *Autonomous*, people are also seen as commodities, and the story revolves around the issues of ownership, personhood, and identity. The plot centers on two main characters: a drug pirate known as Jack (Judith Chen) who breaks into pharmaceutical businesses to smuggle affordable access to life-saving medications so that the poor can have access to those too, and Paladin, a robot agent working for International Property Coalition together with a human agent named Elias. Meanwhile, Paladin and Elias try to find Jack because she has committed an intellectual property crime.

Two distinct approaches regarding the production of robots are presented in these novels. Although Adams and Eves are advertised as machines, it could be argued that physically, they are produced as perfect and idealized male and female stereotypes while Paladin is produced as a non-binary military robot. When considered in accordance with anthropocentrism, humans’ tendency to consider themselves the most supreme beings on earth leads them to assume the role of the creator, who, according to Judeo-Christian religions, created humans in his own image. Like God, humans create humanoids similar to their own bodily features and physiognomy in *Machines Like Me*. The appearances of Adam and Eve are almost identical, with the exception of their reproductive organs. Their facial expressions are also arranged in parallel with their genders, “The user’s handbook claimed that [Adam] had forty facial expressions. The Eves had fifty. As far as I knew, the average among people was fewer than twenty-five” (McEwan, 2019, p. 86) says Charlie. This arrangement is in line with scientific findings regarding emotional facial muscular responses in female and male human beings, “women were overall more emotionally responsive than men” (Wiggert et al., 2015, p. 7) and “women express facial actions more frequently than men” (McDuff et al., 2017, p. 8). As the governing logic behind producing robots is humanocentrism, humans cannot go beyond taking themselves as the reference point in creating an entity. In their role of creators, humans build their relationships with

the nonhumans within the framework of humanocentrism, which is problematic when considered from the viewpoint of posthumanism. Though produced non-binary, Paladin is referred to as “he” by humans because it acts as a soldier and has blades on its shoulders as well as hidden shields. There is a propensity among humans to attribute gender markers or pronouns to the robots they interact with in the novel because that is a part of the gender identity for humans who perceive the world according to their own values. Paladin does not care how humans hail him. Regarding the use of pronouns among the bots, it is explained by the narrator that

Gender designations meant very little among bots. Most would respond to whatever pronoun their human admins hailed them with, though some autonomous bots preferred to pick their own pronouns. ... Especially a bot built like Paladin, whose hulking body, with dorsal shields spread wide over his back, took up the space of two large humans. (Newitz, 2017, p. 46)

The robot’s physical appearance (i.e., huge size) and function lead humans to assign a masculine pronoun to it because human beings are controlled by an anthropocentric approach and its discursive practices. Evidently, this is an instance of linguistic and discursive construction of the body of Paladin as a male.

In terms of their personalities, the humanoids are expected to behave in accordance with their assigned roles. While Adam assumes an agentic and violent role as he becomes more experienced, Eves are passive and remain subservient to their owners. When Adam is delivered to the house of Charlie, his upstairs neighbor and later lover Miranda have, of course, adjusted Adam’s features according to their perception of an ideal man. Adam has been produced with a clearly distinguished male physical appearance; Miranda comments that he is a “handsome dark-skinned young man” (McEwan, 2019, p. 13). Adam has a strong body similar to a stereotypically idealized man, “He was muscular around his neck and spine. Dark hair grew along the line of his shoulders” (McEwan, 2019, p. 19). Later, Charlie compares him to a manager, a prestigious position with the authority of control, and is mostly reserved for men. Looking at Adam in a suit he says, “How upright, formal and plausible he looked, like the assured manager of an expensive hotel” (McEwan, 2019, p. 315). Both Miranda’s and Charlie’s perception of Adam and the adjectives they use to describe him evince that they consider Adam as a typical man rather than a robot, for their understanding of genders is also shaped by the heteronormative gender roles imposed on individuals.

Despite being produced to serve humans, Adam assumes an agentic role as well as a violent attitude, which are accepted as stereotypical features of males. As for his agency, he starts with little decisions like choosing a sweater of Charlie to wear without his permission. His deciding what to do with a very great amount of money he earns via online trading also exemplifies his agency. While Charlie and Miranda want to use the money, to purchase a nice house, Adam uses all the money for charity purposes, saying “Every need I addressed was greater than yours” (McEwan, 2019, p. 366). In spite of following the orders of his human masters, it could be argued that he assumes a certain authority and makes his own decisions, just as it was expected from a man. Adam’s agency could also be interpreted in parallel with posthumanist thought, according to which “the universe is agential intra-activity in its becoming ... Agency is not an attribute but the ongoing reconfigurings of the world” (Barad, 2003, p. 818). As agency is not solely an attribute of human beings, but every element of the universe, it is natural for Adam, the humanoid, to display agential behaviors. From a critical posthumanist perspective, nonhuman entities are also as agents as humans, yet in the novel the agent nonhuman is the one which is defined as a male entity. That is

why, the shadow of stereotypical gender roles regulates the agent potentialities of nonhuman entities.

Adam's propensity to engage in violence, which is also considered in relation to men, is made obvious throughout the narrative. The first act of violence is directed at his owner, Charlie, who wants to put him into inactivity by pressing the kill switch on his neck. When Charlie has attempted to do that, he ends up with a broken bone in his wrist. Afterwards Adam threateningly tells him, "the next time you reach for my kill switch, I'm more than happy to remove your arm entirely, at the ball and socket joint" (McEwan, 2019, p. 180). Adam's second act of violence is observed in Goringe's apartment to protect Miranda from his slap; "Goringe dropped to his knees, just as I had, with his captured hand ... Still maintaining the pressure, Adam forced the young man back to his chair and, as soon as he was seated, released him" (McEwan, 2019, pp. 323-24). As it is clear from these incidents, Adam does not hesitate to resort to violence and hurt people, just like what is expected from a stereotypical man, and his "tendency to violence arises from the necessity of proving the masculine role attributed to him" (Büyükgebiz, 2021, p. 67). In addition to his assumed role of masculinity, his first act of violence could be considered an act of defending his right to continue to exist in the world as a being if considered in the posthumanist frame of thought. The representation of nonhumans in the novel cannot go beyond the binary logic problematized by posthumanism, thus they are attributed human genders and depicted either as servants to humans or having potential to be harmful to humans. They are then reduced into dualistic understanding of either being at the service of humans or being threats to them, which is again at odds with critical posthumanism which aims to achieve to place all entities on a flat ontology.

Similar to Adam, Paladin is also expected to behave like a man, perhaps because of his function; he is a military bot equipped with various weapons. However, unlike Adam who has a sexual organ and is capable of having sex, Paladin does not have genitals or sexual programming, and he needs to learn about sexuality in his very first mission. When he meets Elias, they go to a shooting range to test Paladin's weapon capabilities. Mounted on Paladin's back, Elias tells the robot where to shoot so as to destroy the target house. While Paladin shoots, Elias's "reproductive organ, ... was engorged with blood" (Newitz, 2017, pp. 92-93). As he is confused about the situation, Paladin asks Elias whether he needs to learn about "human sexuality" to which Elias replies "I don't know anything about that. I'm not a faggot" (Newitz, 2017, p. 116). Afraid of making his own desires apparent, Elias drifts into denial about his sexual identity. Paladin is not familiar with the word "faggot" and researches it on the Internet, not satisfied with what he has found, he consults his robot mentor, Fang who says

His use of that word is a clear example of anthropomorphization. Robots can't be faggots. We don't have gender, and therefore we can't have same-sex desire. Sure, I let humans call me "he" because they get confused otherwise. But it's meaningless. It's just humans projecting their own biological categories onto my body. When Elias uses the word faggot, it's because he thinks that you're a man, just like a human. He doesn't see you for who you really are. (Newitz, 2017, p. 155)

This is an obvious exemplification of humans' involving non-binary bots in their oppressive social norms and heteronormative discursive practices. Just like Fang comments, it is meaningless for robots because these gender categories are culturally constructed to regulate human behavior and should not be projected onto robots; however, this is not the case. Human beings maintain their humanocentric approach to robots and assume that the use of human pronouns would serve well and they hail the robots as they would hail humans. The narrator comments, Paladin "was pretty sure that Elias anthropomorphized

her ... Maybe he would never understand that his human categories—faggot, female, transgender—didn't apply to bots" (Newitz, 2017, p. 375). Eliaz is raised in a gender-conscious and anthropocentric society that forces everyone to conform to heterosexuality and live according to their assigned gender roles, that is perhaps why he cannot grasp that Paladin is neither a woman nor a man, thus holding a gender-neutral position.

The role women should play in a patriarchal society is rendered through the depiction of Eves and through Paladin when it is revealed that he has a woman's brain. While the reader is presented with the life of Adam in Charlie's household, there is meagre information about Eves. Of the thirteen Eves, four are bought by a sheikh in Riyadh, possibly to satisfy his sexual desires. Adam later learns that two of them found a way to kill themselves, probably because of the suppressive role they have to perform in a carceral home. It could be argued that the situation of these two Eves is the epitome of the role of women in domestic spaces. Luce Irigaray succinctly summarizes women's position in patriarchal societies as follows,

Woman ... is only a more or less obliging prop for the enactment of man's fantasies. That she may find pleasure there in that role ... But such pleasure is above all a masochistic prostitution of her body to a desire that is not her own, and it leaves her in a familiar state of dependency upon man. Not knowing what she wants, ready for anything, even asking for more, so long as he will "take" her as his "object" when he seeks his own pleasure. (1985, p. 25)

In the case of these Eves, they seem to have refused to succumb to realizing their owner's desires, and assuming agency about their lives, committed suicide. Charlie comments on their situation as they are "stifled by their womanly roles in a traditional Arab household, or cast down by their understanding of the world" (McEwan, 2019, p. 255). Women mostly acknowledge their subordinate position, partly because they are familiar with the impositions on themselves under the guise of social norms, yet as exemplified by Eves in this incident, humanoids have difficulty in tolerating such a secondary position. Another Eve whom Adam sees on the street is also in a similar condition, and "She'd found a way, ... to set all her systems into a kind of unravelling. ... I don't know what led her to it, but she was crushed, she was beyond despair" Adam reports to Charlie (McEwan, 2019, p. 289). It is obvious that Eves could not comply with being objects of a male's desire. Adam has difficulty in comprehending Eve's circumstances because as a male, he is in a better position than a woman, and he could not know about the gender roles of women in the limited time he has been around, for he had the chance of experiencing the role of a man and not vice versa. As a male robot occupying the upper leg of the binary just like all the men in patriarchal societies, Adam is in a privileged position.

Unlike the Eves mentioned in *Machines Like Me*, Paladin conforms to the expectations of Eliaz and acts like an ideal woman for him. It is apparent that Eliaz feels a sexual desire for Paladin, but because of compulsory heterosexuality forced upon him, he cannot wholly accept his attraction to a "male" robot. While collecting intelligence on the whereabouts of Jack, Eliaz was drugged in a party, and Paladin has to carry him to their lodging. When they arrive, under the influence of the drug, he gets rid of the restrictions imposed on himself about fixed gender roles and "normal" sexual affairs and says "Come to bed with me, Paladin, ... It will be OK this once" (Newitz, 2017, p. 200). Paladin replies "But you said it was wrong. Two men cannot lie together" (Newitz, 2017, p. 202). With Eliaz's insistence though, Paladin lies down on Eliaz's bed next to him and "read[s] each molecular change in Eliaz' body as the man's euphoria grew and subsided" (Newitz, 2017, p. 201). Drugged Eliaz is freed from indoctrinations about heterosexuality and could come to terms with his sexuality and live out his desires for Paladin. Ingrained for years in the heteronormative sexual paradigm, Eliaz rejoices over learning the fact that Paladin's brain used to belong



to a female soldier who died on the line of duty. This information would make things easier for Elias because his desire for Paladin would be justified; he has a woman's brain, and he is not just a machine. As soon as Elias learns this, he asks Paladin's consent for being hailed as "she,"

"Should I start calling you 'she'?" ... Changing his pronoun would make absolutely no difference at all. It would merely substitute one signifier for another. ... Of course: If Paladin were female, Elias would not be a faggot. And maybe then Elias could touch Paladin again, the way he had last night, giving and receiving pleasure in an undocumented form of emotional feedback loop. (Newitz, 2017, p. 228)

As Elias has been raised in a certain society in which binary system of gender roles is decreed as the proper gender identity and pairing of man and woman is the proper way of sexual coupling, he insists on calling Paladin "she." Otherwise, he would be a "faggot" and that seems unacceptable. Paladin is well aware of what it means for Elias, his interior monologue is presented as follows,

Paladin knew that human gender was part of sexual desire. But he was starting to perceive that gender was a way of seeing the world, too. ... People assigned genders based on behaviors and work roles, often ignoring anatomy. Gender was a form of social recognition. That's why humans had given him a gender before he even had a name. (Newitz, 2017, p. 227)

Paladin is aware of the fact that it falls outside of the human categories of gender, which provides a self-conscious and agentic representation of a nonhuman. Paladin has perceived the significance of the gender roles for the society of humans and Elias is so deeply inculcated with the idea of heterosexuality as the proper norm that he is exhilarated to learn Paladin has a woman's brain and says to Paladin, "I knew there was a reason I wanted you, Paladin, ... I must have somehow sensed that you were a woman" (Newitz, 2017, p. 231). Elias's anthropocentrism hinders him to accept Paladin as a non-binary individual. About which, Paladin ponders,

There it was: the anthropomorphization. But did it really matter if Elias didn't understand that bots had no gender? If Elias saw her as a woman, Paladin could have what she'd been wanting for days on end. It would make things easier for both of them, even if the truth was more complicated than Elias realized. (Newitz, 2017, p. 231)

Paladin cannot help to notice the implications of Elias's attribution of human gender stereotypes to a robot. The narrator also comments, "Elias was truly an anthropomorphizer; he saw Paladin's human brain as her most vital part, especially because he believed it made her female" (Newitz, 2017, p. 293). When Paladin loses her human brain in a gunfight, she loses her abilities of face recognition; in other words, the part which made her a woman according to Elias no longer belongs to her. However, as his feelings to her is strong and genuine, he still wants to be with her; therefore, he accepts her as a woman and tells her "But you are still the most amazing woman I have ever known" (Newitz, 2017, p. 374). Later, Elias offers to go away to Mars, so he "bought out [her] contract. [he] can't stand the idea of the woman [he] love[s] not being autonomous" (Newitz, 2017, p. 373). Paladin accepts this proposition in a submissive way, as expected from a stereotypical woman in a patriarchal society. It is ironic that Paladin has become autonomous just to be the lover of Elias. Now that Elias has bought her contract, she does not have to work, and she is free to perform the role of a perfect partner for Elias. Hence, Paladin continues to perform the role of a woman, which was the only possible way for her to be accepted by the humans among whom she lives. With the romantic relationship

between Paladin and Eliaz, the inability of humans to eliminate their anthropocentric approach to nonhumans and embrace them as their equals even though they behave according to human values is exemplified.

The performative aspect of gender could also be observed in the lives of humanoids, especially those of Adam and Paladin, who generally perform the role they have been attributed by the humans around. Adam fulfills his male role by way of imitation according to Charlie who refers to him as “a facsimile human” (McEwan, 2019, p. 259). He also comments Adam’s “put[ting] on gardening gloves to pull up nettles. [as] Mere mimicry” (McEwan, 2019, p. 95). Similar to the process of a human in society, he performs his role as a man by emulating a role model from his gender. As for Paladin, at first, he just performs his duty as a military robot because he is expected to do so, yet in contact with his partner Eliaz, he is expected more and more to be a woman. Being together with Eliaz and feeling the need to satisfy his desires necessitate his performance as a woman. Paladin’s situation can be described most suitably with the help of Irigaray’s words; Paladin does her best to enact Eliaz’s desires and that is only a “masochistic prostitution of her body” (1985, p. 25) for a desire that does not belong to her. In both novels, regardless of their being mechanical productions, the bodies of Adam and Paladin appear to be sites on which anthropocentric cultural and social values are inscribed.

What emerges from the analyses of the novels above is that no entity is immune to the oppressive impetus of heteronormative and anthropocentric societies. Although gender roles are socially constructed for humans, they are also projected onto robots produced in certain societies, resulting in the binary gender identities of females and males. In both novels, patriarchal cultural meanings are inscribed on the robotic bodies. While Adams and Eves in *Machines Like Me* are produced as male and female robots in appearance, Paladin in *Autonomous* is a warrior bot that has been attributed feminine characteristics by its partner. As argued by feminist critics, gender is a social construction that is established prediscursively and is a performance. In oppressive societies, both women and men are forced to conform to heterosexuality as the only acceptable sexual orientation. The theme of forced heterosexuality is evident in *Autonomous* through the relationship between Paladin and its human partner Eliaz. Much as the latter has a deep passion for Paladin, he struggles to come to terms with his own sexuality because he assumes that Paladin is a male bot and that same-sex desire is not acceptable in society. When he learns that Paladin has a female brain, he devises a plan to take Paladin to Mars, where they can love each other more freely, away from restrictions regarding gender and sexuality. The gender identities of males and females are also inextricably linked with heteronormativity; while women are often expected to exhibit compassion and passivity, men are often expected to be more agentic and aggressive. In this respect, humanoids successfully play their gender roles: Adam is an agentic and violent man while Eve is passive and submissive.; Paladin is rendered as a violent military robot, yet he is expected to be more passive and submissive when Eliaz starts hailing him “she.” As exemplified in these novels, compulsory heterosexuality is used as a tool of oppression and is extended to the robots, limiting as well as shaping the ontology of both robots and humans. Ultimately, as I have argued throughout this study, the robots represented in these novels are forced into heterosexuality, which is an anthropocentric construct, and they have to conform to gender stereotypes depending on either their appearances or the humans they interacted with, which evinces that the imposition of heteronormativity is pervasive and extends even to nonhumans. Rather than a reconsideration of the position of humans, these novels provide stories of humans who are unable to give up their anthropocentrism and force nonhumans to behave according to their own value systems. As represented in these novels, ensuring a posthumanist notion of performativity would require a lot more time, devotion, and perseverance. It should also

be noted that although nonhuman entities are narrated from a humanocentric viewpoint, their central position in both narratives is promising in terms of going beyond anthropocentric narratives.

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# The Anti-Mimetic Function of Paratext in Wilkie Collins's Framed Narrative *After Dark*

Wilkie Collins'in *After Dark* Adlı Çerçevesi Anlatısında  
Yanmetnin Anti-Mimetik İşlevi

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## Abstract

The use of mimetic and diegetic modes of storytelling has significant implications for the meaning and interpretation of Wilkie Collins's (1824-1889) short story collection *After Dark* (1856). By using a framed narrative structure, Collins highlights the mimetic features of the stories in his collection. He creates a semi-factual atmosphere through dividing the story universe into two levels. On the first level, the discourse of the primary narrator and his wife emphasizes the mimetic nature of the six realistic stories recounted on the second level. Through following such a structure, the author seeks to create the illusion that the stories in the collection are biographical accounts. Verisimilitude, or lifelikeness, is therefore presented as the primary narrative property in *After Dark*. However, as this article mainly argues, the authorial discourse presented in Collins's general preface to the collection—which, to use Gerard Genette's term, is a paratext or threshold—dismantles the characters' realistic pretensions on the two levels of the storyworld. More precisely, by calling the six narrated stories in the collection the offspring of his own imagination, Collins's paratextual preface destroys the highlighted mimetic claims on the two levels in the storyworld.

**Keywords:** mimetic storytelling, verisimilitude, framed narrative, paratext, Collins, *After Dark*

## Öz

Mimetik ve diegetik hikaye anlatımı modlarının kullanılması, Wilkie Collins'in (1824-1889) kısa öykü koleksiyonu *After Dark*'ın (1856) anlamı ve yorumu için önemli çıkarımlara sahiptir. Çerçevesi bir anlatı yapısı kullanarak, Collins derlemesindeki mimetik özelliği vurgulamaktadır. Collins hikaye evrenini iki seviyeye bölerek yarı gerçekçi bir atmosfer yaratmaktadır. Birinci düzeyde, birincil anlatıcı ve eşinin söylemi, ikinci düzeyde anlatılan altı gerçekçi hikâyenin mimetik doğasını vurgulamaktadır. Böyle bir yapıyı ygyluyarak, yazar koleksiyondaki öykülerin biyografik anlatımlar olduğu yanılması yaratmaya çalışıyor. Bu nedenle gerçeğe benzerlik veya gerçekçilik, *After Dark*'ta birincil anlatı özelliği olarak sunulur. Ancak, bu makalede esas olarak tartışıldığı üzere, Collins'in ana metine eşlik eden ve Gerard Genette'in tabiriyle yanmetin olarak adlandırılan derlemenin genel önsözünde sunduğu yazar söylemi, karakterlerin hikâye dünyasının iki düzeyine ilişkin gerçekçi iddialarını ortadan kaldırmaktadır.

Daha doğrusu, Collins'in yan metinsel önsözü, koleksiyonda anlatılan altı öyküyü kendi hayal gücünün ürünü olarak adlandırarak, öykü dünyasının iki düzeyine ilişkin vurgulanan mimetik iddiaları yok ediyor.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** mimetik hikaye anlatımı, gerçeğe benzerlik, çerçevesi anlatı, yan metin, Wilkie Collins, *After Dark*

## Introduction

The nineteenth century British novelist and playwright Wilkie Collins's (1821-1889) contributions to the development of the mystery, sensation, and gothic genres, as predominantly exemplified in his novels *The Woman in White* (1859), *The Moonstone*

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(1868) and *No Name* (1862), have earned him a place among the most important writers of the Victorian era. Collins's "popularity as a compelling storyteller," in Jenny Bourne Taylor's words, "has remained undiminished" in a way that "in general studies of Victorian literature and culture Collins is regarded as a serious writer as much as a popular novelist" (2006, pp. 1-2). Although the "interest in his work," according to William Baker (2013), "is undergoing its most fertile period ever," in Collins's own time there was a conflicting critical approach towards his storytelling practices. For example, Lyn Pykett highlights the incompatible attitudes towards Collins's works by stating that, "on the question of Collins's merits as a storyteller, the critical refrain remained substantially the same in the closing decades as it had been in the first decades of his career: he was by turns praised for his skill in storytelling and plotting, and blamed for being a mere or mechanical plotter" (p. 110). However, as Pykett emphasises, reviewers generally "commented favourably on his storytelling ability" (p. 191).

Collins's skilfulness in creating and developing complex characters and intricate plots is also evident in his first short story collection *After Dark*. Published in 1856, his collection includes six short stories. Five of these were previously published in *Household Words*, a magazine edited by Charles Dickens. According to Algernon Charles Swinburne, *After Dark*: "is one of the most delightful books he has left us: each of the stories in it is a little model, a little masterpiece in its kind" (p. 270). Above all, Collins's collection of short stories displays his mastery of storytelling.

Storytelling is the primary subject and goal of narration in *After Dark*. Collins uses storytelling as a medium for transforming the desperate situation within the first level in the storyworld. This feature, according to Anthea Trodd (2006), is a shared quality in Collins's early writing: "Collins's storytelling often recreates the context of boredom within the story, boredom induced by restriction of mobility, vision, or possibilities for diversion, which slowly builds, through intense attentiveness to a limited range of objects, into fear and suspense" (p. 33). The art of storytelling in *After Dark*, however, is mostly presented as a recreational power that can transform a desperate family's circumstances. In other words, storytelling functions as both an emancipatory force and a narrative device to alleviate boredom.

Collins constructs a unified narrative whole in *After Dark* by drawing on the universal tradition of frame structure. This narrative technique allows Collins to imbue the storyworld with a realistic atmosphere. "Framed narratives," according to Bernard Duyfhuizen (2005), "occur in narrative situations when events are narrated by a character other than the primary narrator or when a character tells a tale that, although unrelated to the main story, contains a moral message for the listener in the text" (p. 188). Collins weaves together the six seemingly unrelated stories in *After Dark* by employing a frame narrative structure. The stories are embedded within the narrative of the narrator and his wife. Additionally, Collins incorporates a preface to the collection. As a result, *After Dark* includes two distinct sections: the authorial section and the narrative section or the section of the narrators and characters. While the author's preface provides an introduction to the collection, the narrator's six prologues, epilogue, and his wife's diary serve to introduce the six internal stories. In relating the stories to us from his memory, the narrator recedes into the background to leave us alone with the character-narrators within the six fictional worlds.

The storyworld in *After Dark* is, thus, structured on two levels. The first level is where the primary narrator and his wife reside. The six stories in the collection are set on the second or internal level, which is the world of the narrators-characters. The primary narrator builds up a unified storyworld out of six apparently disconnected single tales—the

traveller's story of a terribly strange bed, the lawyer's story of a stolen letter, the French governess's story of Sister Rose, the angler's story of the lady of Glenwith Grange, the nun's story of Gabriel's marriage, and the professor's story of the yellow mask. Collins constructs a fictional whole through applying a framed narrative structure, and utilising a portrait-painter as a mediating element of the six different tales. The collection begins with the author's preface. After that, the narrator's wife's biographical account of the construction of the collection is presented under the title "Leaves from Leah's Diary." Then, the six stories are presented, each preceded by a short prologue by the narrator. The collection ends with the last pages of the narrator's wife's diary.

As this paper maintains, *After Dark* exhibits a fundamental tension between the mimetic and diegetic aspects of discourse. As two contrasting poetic modes or ways of presenting a story, diegesis and mimesis were firstly introduced by Plato in *Republic*. As for narratologist Gerald Prince's definition, diegesis refers to: "1. The (fictional) world in which the situations and events narrated occur. 2. Telling, recounting as opposed to showing, enacting [mimesis]" (2003, p. 20). While in mimesis (imitation) the poet (or storyteller) pretends to be someone else, in diegesis (narration) they speak in their own names by using narratorial mediation (Prince, 2003, pp. 52-53). In Dan Shen's (2005) words, "as two contrasting ways of narrating the speeches of the characters [...] mimesis is dramatic imitation, and diegesis is indirect presentation" (p. 107).

The mimesis/diegesis complex lies at the heart of narrative in *After Dark*. While the author pretends to be speaking through his characters in the storyworlds, his emphasis on the artistic and creative aspects of his work in his preface to the collection discredits the primary narrator's, his wife's, and the character-narrators' mimetic claims. In other words, as it is mainly argued in this paper, Wilkie Collins's anti-mimetic paratext undermines the diegetic aspect of his narrative in *After Dark*.

Collins presents *After Dark* with a preface in which he discusses the creative process behind the stories in the collection. Although it is not an integral part of the text, his forward deconstructs the pretended narratorial discourse on the verisimilitude aspect of the presented tales in the diegetic level. In his study on the relationship between textual and metatextual elements in a single published literary text, the French narratologist Gerard Genette highlights the guiding role of preliminary elements, such as authorial prefaces, in communicating the narrative meaning and designating how a single narrative should be read. Dedications, prefaces, notes, glosses, intercalations, and misplaced chapter headings, according to Genette (1997), are "paratextual elements" or "liminal devices" that "interrupt the conventional diegetic progress of the narrative" (p. xii). Through these elements, as Genette highlights, authors "*present*" or "*make present*" their texts (1997, p. 1, emphasis in original). The paratext belongs neither to the text nor to the space outside it. Rather, it is a "*threshold ... an 'undefined zone' between the inside and the outside, a zone without any hard and fast boundary on either the inward side (turned toward the text) or the outward side (turned toward the world's discourse about the text)*" (Genette, 1997, p. 1, emphasis in original). By paratext, as an accompaniment of the text, "a text makes a book of itself and proposes itself as such to its readers, and more generally to the public. (Genette, 1991, p. 261). Thus, the "chief function" of an authorial preface, as Genette (1997) argues, is "*to ensure that the text is read properly*" (p. 197, emphasis in original). Therefore, along with its "authorial" and "original" aspects, a preface acts as a "monitory (this is *why* and this is *how* you should read this book)" (Genette, 1997, p. 197, emphasis in original).

As Louise Brix Jacobsen (2022) contends, "following Gérard Genette's seminal work [*Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation* (1987)], paratexts have been regarded as essential parts of the communication between authors and readers of literature" (p. 141) since "it is

common for authors to use the liminal space of the paratext to guide and play with the reader's assumptions about the text" (p. 142). Similarly, Collins uses the paratext of *After Dark* as a medium of communication with the implied reader. In the presented storyworlds, he warns the reader against the mimetic claims of the characters on both levels. Thus, as it is argued in this paper, reading Collins's preface plays a central role in the reader's evaluation of the narrators' claims in the storyworld. In the last paragraph of his preface, Collins explicitly repudiates the realistic or non-fictional aspect of his tales by highlighting their fictional authenticity: "These stories are entirely of my own imagining, constructing, and writing [...] they are not borrowed children. The members of my own literary family are indeed increasing so fast as to render the very idea of borrowing quite out of the question" (Collins, 2019, p. 2). His authorial discourse, therefore, performs a non-mimetic function by guiding us to and warning us against the primary narrator and his wife's fictive or invented discourse presented in the prologues to the stories. Dual discourse, as employed in *After Dark*, prevents readers from being deceived by narrators' verisimilar and mimetic claims, which are designed to immerse them in the storyworld. Instead, it enhances readers' ability to analyse and examine the storyworld discourse by maintaining a distance between the narratorial mimetic claims and the authorial non-mimetic comments. In other words, readers become aware of the fictional nature of the presented stories in *After Dark* before entering them.

In *After Dark*, the author's preface highlights the role of fabrication and construction in both the stories and their presentation, contrasting with the skilful storytelling rhetoric on the two levels of the storyworld, which emphasizes the mimetic or realistic aspect of the presented stories. In this way, the narrative discourse in *After Dark* is presented in opposition to the authorial discourse in terms of mimesis which, in Mathew Potolsky's (2006) words: "Most often (but inadequately) translated from the Greek as 'imitation', mimesis describes the relationship between artistic images and reality: art is a copy of the real" (p. 1). The primary narrator's prologues, epilogue, and his wife's diary entries, which sandwich the six stories, contradict the author's anti-mimetic discourse about the collection presented in his general preface to *After Dark*.

### **The (Anti)Mimetic Stance in *After Dark***

Collins's story collection opens with the author's prefatory writing or preface. Then, standing with her husband on the first level of the story universe, the primary narrator's wife shares with us some pages from her diary in which she tells us how she encouraged her husband to recount some of the stories he had heard. After that, the primary narrator's prologues are placed before the arrangement of the six stories. There is also only one epilogue in the collection, which comes at the end of the third story. In his prologues, the primary narrator mainly introduces the character-narrators in the stories and makes some comments on the storytellers as well as the context in which their acts of storytelling took place. Having introduced each narrator, he stays on the first level and leaves us alone with the character-narrator in the second level of the fictional world. The collection ends with some other leaves from the diary of the narrator's wife. The quoted notes from her diary both at the beginning and at the end of the collection have similar functions as the primary narrator's prologues and epilogue. They both are quite willing to convince readers of the realistic nature of the recounted stories in the collection.

Thus, as this paper argues, there is a fundamental contradiction between the mimetic pretensions presented on the first level of the storyworld and the author's statements in his preface to the collection. Specifically, the narrator's claims about the verisimilitude of the diegetic level are in direct contradiction with the author's acknowledgements of his own creative role in the existence of the narrative text.



The simulated mimetic discourse in *After Dark* is presented in the first narrative level, through the primary narrator and his wife. Contrary to his emphasis on the unrealistic nature of the stories in the collection, Collins simulates telling real stories by fabricating a history for them. The background stories of the primary narrator and his wife are the most important elements in creating the mimetic atmosphere. In the quoted pages from her diary, the primary narrator's wife depicts a lifelike situation that she alleges inspired her husband's story collection. She cites her husband's illness and her family's subsequent concern about their financial future as the primary motivations behind the construction of *After Dark*. The Kerbys hope to solve their financial problem by selling their book of stories. They thus find storytelling to be a practical method to make money, with the storyteller's wife, Leah, considering it the only available solution to her family's financial problems. In her diary, she tries to persuade us of her husband's storytelling abilities by highlighting the impact of his stories on the audience. She illustrates her point by recounting related memories: "I have often heard him relate that strange adventure (William is the best teller of a story I ever met with) to friends of all ranks in many different parts of England, and I never yet knew it fail of producing an effect. The farmhouse audience were, I may almost say, petrified by it" (Collins, 2019, p. 12).

Leah further uses the element of memory to highlight the realistic aspect of the collection by telling us how the "idea" of the book "originated" from herself (Collins, 2019, p. 10). As she remembers, one night while sitting around in the farmhouse, a young sailor named Foul-weather Dick told how he missed the comfort of his hammock and felt an uncomfortable sensation when he slept in a four-poster bed. In Leah's words: "The odd nature of one of the young sailor's objections to sleeping on shore reminded my husband (as indeed it did me too) of the terrible story of a bed in a French gambling-house, which he once heard from a gentleman whose likeness he took" (Collins, 2019, p. 11). In her account, she remembers how she felt and what she thought while listening to her husband's narration:

[T]he thought suddenly flashed across me, "Why should William not get a wider audience for that story, as well as for others which he has heard from time to time from his sitters, and which he has hitherto only repeated in private among a few friends? People tell stories in books and get money for them. What if we told our stories in a book? and what if the book sold? Why freedom, surely, from the one great anxiety that is now preying on us!" (Collins, 2019, p. 12)

In Leah's fabricated memories, the power of (realistic) storytelling, its impact on the audience's minds, and above all William's skill at it are highlighted. After William's narration of a story about a gentleman's adventure, she remembers how she raved to him about his story: "What an effect it had upon our friends! What an effect, indeed, it always has wherever you tell it!" (Collins, 2019, p. 13) Accordingly, the thought that his "fifteen years of practice as a portrait-painter" (Collins, 2019, p. 13) could help them make money through selling his skill and art. Despite her husband's "growing indifference" (Collins, 2019, p. 13), Leah tries different ways to stimulate his curiosity and keep him telling the stories he had heard so that she can write down them. She uses the power of her rhetoric and feminine attraction to persuade him. She even asks help from her husband's eye doctor, who has become a kind-hearted family friend.

The centrality of storytelling as an art of fabrication in *After Dark* is also highlighted and signalled in the dialogue between Leah and William that she recounts in her diary presented at the beginning of the collection. When William holds that he cannot write down his stories because he does not know "eloquent descriptions and the striking reflections" (Collins,

2019, p. 15), she convinces him to narrate his stories by arguing that the content of his stories (which she calls the truth) matters more than their format:

“Who is to do the eloquent descriptions and the striking reflections, and all that part of it?” said William, perplexedly shaking his head.

“Nobody!” I replied. “The eloquent descriptions and the striking reflections are just the parts of a story-book that people never read. Whatever we do, let us not, if we can possibly help it, write so much as a single sentence that can be conveniently skipped. Come! come!” I continued. (Collins, 2019, p. 15)

As highlighted in Leah’s apparently confessional account, she is the true founder of the collection, and her husband is the agent through whom the stories are told. He narrates the stories, and she records them. The book we read is the result of their close cooperation. Thus, the mimetic stance in *After Dark* is presented through a triple-voiced collection of stories on two levels: the narrator’s voice and his wife’s voice on the first level, and the voices of the six character-narrators on the second level.

In a similar manner to his wife, the primary narrator establishes the verisimilar foundations of his short story collection in his inaugural prologue: “I relate any of the stories which I have heard at various times from persons whose likenesses I have been employed to take” (Collins, 2019, p. 18). He stresses that the stories are not his own, stating: “Of myself I have nothing to say” (Collins, 2019, p. 18). He supports his claims by citing his first-hand professional experience, which adds to the realism of the work: “The one great obstacle that I have to contend against in the practice of my profession is [...] the difficulty of getting them [sitters] to preserve the natural look and the every-day peculiarities of dress and manner” (Collins, 2019, p. 19). Furthermore, he pretentiously claims he has had “contact with all sorts of characters” from his travelling experiences, has rich “experience of the world,” and feels as if he has “had painted every civilized variety of the human race” (Collins, 2019, p. 18).

As the primary narrator, William Kerby maintains his distance from the storyworlds he recounts by augmenting the mimetic or representational aspect of his narration. He purports to tell us only the stories of others. To make his account sound even more realistic and persuasive, he introduces himself as a mediator who previously heard the stories he is narrating from his sitters. He claims that the stories helped him to create realistic paintings. His emphasis on the verisimilitude of his narration is similar to the tradition practiced by the early English novelists such as Defoe and Richardson in the realistic prefaces they wrote to their novels. According to Brian McHale (2005), “The term ‘verisimilitude’ literally means ‘truth-to-life’ or ‘lifelikeness’; [...] It is the effect of realism achieved when states and behaviours in the narrative generally conform to its readers’ ideology and/or model of the world” (p. 627). In his prologues, which support his wife’s mimetic claims, the primary narrator tries to create a realistic atmosphere. His verisimilar claims are supported by the use of realistic narrative elements within the ensuing stories which are narrated by the character-narrators.

William defines his profession of portrait-painting as: “nothing but a right reading of the externals of character recognizably presented to the view of others” (Collins, 2019, p. 19). Similarly, narrative, according to the cognitive narratologist David Herman (2013), is a “sense making activity” (p. ix), and “storytelling supports humans’ sense-making activities” (p. 18). In Herman’s words, storytelling “affords a basis for registering and making sense of the intentions, goals, emotions, and actions that emerge from intelligent agents’ negotiation of appropriately scaled environments” (p. xi). The sense-making function of narrative is also true regarding the fictional worlds in which characters and narrators try to understand each other’s thoughts, intentions, and goals through their stories. In Collins’s collection,

William's act of storytelling has had two basic advantageous functions for him. It helps him paint better; as he admits in his prologue to the second story: "I can always paint the better when I am hearing an interesting story" (Collins, 2019, p. 46). Storytelling also helps him to peer into his sitters's minds by revealing their true character or natural expressions. According to his claims in the prologues, William uses the stories his sitters tell him to reveal their true nature in his portraits. As highlighted in his claims, he uses narrative in general and storytelling in particular to display the true, or realistic, qualities of his sitters. It is upon such a constructed fictive memory that he tries to persuade us to believe the truth of his stories. In his prologues, the narrator begins the stories he recounts in his book by reiterating the point that he only acts as a mediator in his collection, since his stories were told to him by the people who experienced them in the past.

Through storytelling, William invents the mimetic features of his collection by claiming that he relates the stories in his collection in the narrators': "own manner" and "own words" (Collins, 2019, p. 178). For example, in his prologue to the third story he reiterates this fake background: "I have repeated what was related to me, as nearly as possible in the very words of my sitters" (Collins, 2019, p. 72). He also uses an analogy of a painter-sitter that is similar to the author-reader pair. As a storyteller, he does what he used to do while painting when he was only concerned with one "great obstacle," or with "the difficulty of getting them [the sitters] to preserve the natural look and the every-day peculiarities of dress and manner" (Collins, 2019, p. 19). As an artist, the narrator tries to remove the "artificial circumstances" around his sitters so that he can "present" their "habitual aspect" (Collins, 2019, p. 19). He similarly tries to maximise the impact of his stories on his audience by reassuring us that he has meticulously reproduced the events narrated to him by his sitters, presenting himself as a realist author recounting the truth:

I have thought it best to tell the story in my own way—rigidly adhering to the events of it exactly as they were related; and never interfering on my own responsibility except to keep order in the march of the incidents, and to present them, to the best of my ability, variously as well as interestingly to the reader. (Collins, 2019, p. 72)

At the end of the collection, the primary narrator again highlights his editorial function: "I now purpose putting the events of it together as skilfully and strikingly as I can, in the hope that this written version of the narrative may appeal as strongly to the reader's sympathies as the spoken version did to mine" (Collins, 2019, p. 204). However, the fact that he highlights his own mastery of storytelling skill is in contrast with his realistic claims. In the process of translating the stories from their oral to verbal versions, the narrator, in contradiction to what he repeatedly claims, interferes in the order of the events and the events themselves. In other words, as the only controller of the format and content of narration, he has all the power and abilities. He embodies both the act of remembering and the object of remembrance. In the absence of any other narration from the recounted storyworlds to corroborate his claims of realism, William's stories, like the author's preface, cast doubt on the veracity of his assertions.

William tries to create a realistic story for his storytelling activity. As a result of an eye problem, William the portrait painter has stopped painting and therefore has become without income. His wife's, Leah's, behaviour reminds him of his experiences in a way that he gradually agrees with her in seeing storytelling as the only solution to the formidable obstacle in his profession and life. Thus, he draws a similarity between the way his portrait subjects were so mesmerised by their own storytelling that they revealed their true emotions, and the beguiling impact of his own storytelling on readers: "If I can only beguile them into speaking earnestly, no matter on what topic, I am sure of recovering their natural expression; sure of seeing all the little precious everyday peculiarities of the man or woman

peep out, one after another, quite unawares" (Collins, 2019, p. 178). The narrator uses "speaking" in the sense of storytelling. He has his sitters tell their stories that also "unconsciously" reveal their "natural expression." The beguiling intention is a two-sided technique used by the narrator. He deceives us in the same way he deceived his sitters and the audience who listened to the recounted stories narrated to them by him all night long.

In the prologue to his second story, William recounts a dialogue he had with a lawyer before listening to his story while painting his portrait. When he tells the lawyer: "I can always paint the better when I am hearing an interesting story" (Collins, 2019, p. 46), the lawyer objects to his opinion by saying: "What do you mean by talking about a story? I'm not going to tell you a story; I'm going to make a statement. A statement is a matter of fact, therefore the exact opposite of a story, which is a matter of fiction. What I am now going to tell you really happened to me" (Collins, 2019, p. 47). Like the lawyer, the narrator states that his retellings are rejecting fiction and defending fact: "His [the lawyer's] manners and language made such an impression on me at the time, that I think I can repeat his 'statement' now, almost word for word as he addressed it to me" (Collins, 2019, p. 47).

In his pseudo-factual narrative collection, William pretends to "remember" what he once heard. He recounts some of the "best stories" that he heard by accident. His stories are his recollections in the same way as the sitters told them to him based on their own "train of recollections" (Collins, 2019, p. 20). To enhance the mimetic aspect of his storytelling activity, he also highlights his mind's skill at recalling:

[M]y memory may be trusted. I may claim it as a merit, because it is after all a mechanical one, that I forget nothing, and that I can call long-passed conversations and events as readily to my recollection as if they had happened but a few weeks ago. Of two things at least I feel tolerably certain beforehand, in meditating over the contents of this book: First, that I can repeat correctly all that I have heard; and, secondly, that I have never missed anything worth hearing when my sitters were addressing me on an interesting subject. (Collins, 2019, p. 21)

By relying on a feigned design, the narrator emphasises the natural occurrence of the stories. He claims that he found himself accidentally listening to the stories he is recounting to us. Likewise, despite having previously called it "our third child" and "old friend," the book in its "new form [written instead of spoken]" seems "cheap and common" to Leah (Collins, 2019, pp. 356 and 357). In other words, the finished text is detached from its author as well as reader; a text does not have its own existence. Leah pleads with the readers to give existence to it by doing their own part in its construction, or reading it: "Oh, Public! Public! [...] if you will only accept a poor painter's stories which his wife has written down for him *After Dark!*" (Collins, 2019, p. 358).

As discussed earlier, despite the primary narrator's and his wife's emphasis on their mimetic act of storytelling on the first level of the storyworld in *After Dark*, the author's preface to the collection has a rather different function than the prefaces found in the early realist novelists' works, such as Defoe's and Richardson's, novels. Therefore, although there is not any authorial intrusion in the diegetic level in *After Dark* to designate the invented nature of the recounted stories, the author's paratextual preface to the collection is a counterargument to the mimetic claims of the primary narrator in the diegetic level. A paratext is an intentional sign of communicating the inventiveness of a narrative, or in Simona Zetterberg Gjerlevsen's words, "Paratexts [...] designate a narrative as a 'novel' or a 'romance'" (179). The authorial paratext in *After Dark* characterises it as an invented, or diegetic, narrative. This is counter to the primary narrator's claims presented in his six prefaces. Therefore, having read the preface before reading the primary narrator's and his wife's accompanying notes, the reader can hardly agree with the verisimilar nature of the

characters' statements on the first level of the storyworld. Similarly, the author's preface encourages readers to critically evaluate the primary narrator's and his wife's claims, and to view their emphasis on writing the stories down as a strong indication of their fabricated or invented nature, before being misled by the realistic appearance of the presented stories.

## Conclusion

Wilkie Collins's use of a framed narrative structure in *After Dark* effectively highlights the mimetic aspect of his narration. The two-level-structure of the storyworld is a narrative technique designed by the author to enhance the verisimilitude of the recounted stories. In his paratextual preface, however, Collins emphasises the role of his own imagination in creating the stories as well as structuring them in a framed narrative format. His statements in the preface, in other words, stress the diegetic or anti-mimetic stance of the act of storytelling in *After Dark*. The authorial preface's discourse serves an antithetical purpose to that of the characters' discourse in the two diegetic levels. As this article has demonstrated, although the narrator's and his wife's primary intention is to pretend that the recounted tales are true, or imitated, stories experienced by real people in the past, the author's emphasis on the centrality of a designing historical mind in his collection reveals the diegetic or narrative aspect of the stories. Furthermore, the authorial preface is a definitive proof of the fact that the primary narrator's six prologues and one epilogue, as well as the notes from his wife's diary, are in fact a part of Collins's narrative techniques designed to hide the fictional aspect of his stories. The authorial preface blurs the border between two classical modes of storytelling in *After Dark* as it is the author's explicit comment on the diegetic nature of his work. Thus, the fact that the six stories are acted out by the six character-narrators fail to remove their fabricated or constructed nature from our minds. Acting as his intentional intrusion in the storyworld's order and principles, the author's paratextual preface refutes the mimetic claims reiterated in the primary narrator's and his wife's biographical accounts. Additionally, by guiding the reader's act of reading, the paratext undermines the reliability of the primary narrators' discourse, such that the author's diegetic discourse dominates the story mood, despite the primary narrators' efforts to the contrary.

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## Research Notes

# Envy: An Insidious Emotion in Medieval Anglo-Norman Tradition of England

Haset: Ortaçağ'da İngiltere Anglo-Norman Geleneğinde Sinsi Duygu

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### Abstract

There are two main categories of emotion theories: basic emotion and componential theories. While these theories are generally focused on the contemporary world, they may provide new perspectives on medieval literature. Roman de Horn and Boeve de Haumtone are Anglo-Norman romances that tell the stories of noble, handsome, and good-looking heroes who become courageous along their journeys. Although they somehow begin their journey with bad luck, they both triumph in the end. All these seemingly spectacular characteristics of the heroes naturally evoke envy among others. Envy occurs when someone's autonomy or closely identified persons/property is threatened. In both romances, the heroes battle against false accusations made by their enviers. In this respect, the major concern of this article is to explore how the philosophical and emotional significance of envy performs in medieval tradition.

**Keywords:** Middle Ages, literature, England, emotion, envy

### Öz

Roman de Horn ve Boeve de Haumtone, yolculukları boyunca cesurlaşan asil, yakışıklı ve iyi görünümlü kahramanları anlatan Anglo-Norman romanslarıdır. Yolculuklarına bir şekilde şanssızlıkla başlasalar da sonunda ikisi de zafere ulaşmaktadır. Kahramanların görünüşteki muhteşem özellikleri, doğal olarak diğerleri arasında hasete neden olmaktadır. Her iki romansta da kahramanlar haset edilenler tarafından kendilerine iddia edilen iftiralara karşı savaşmaktadır. Bu çalışma, ortaçağ Anglo-Norman İngilteresindeki edebiyat geleneğinde hasetin nasıl ve neden önemli olduğunu felsefi ve duygusal bir perspektiften irdeleyecektir.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Ortaçağ, edebiyat, İngiltere, duygu, haset

### Introduction

Emotions represent composite mental phenomena, appeal to everyone and are a fact of life. Seneca, the Roman philosopher refers to the Greco-Roman term *invidia* as "a powerful and harmful passion" (Balint, p. 42). Aristotle defines that envy is pain at the good fortune of others' (Honeycutt, p. 10). Aristotle also states that emotions are a mixture of pain and pleasure, and one is specifically primary in each; emotions like shame, pity, fear, and envy inflict pain, and the pain of envy is disturbing (King, p. 133). In medieval understanding, an emotion is not concretely recognized, but envy is considered one of the seven deadly sins in the Catholic tradition. In the Biblical text, the envier is inferior while not denied that it causes harm to the envied; the focus is more on the envier as the one who is to lose at the end (Balint, p. 44). While medieval thinkers unquestionably depict envy as mischievous, modern thinkers regard it in the same category as other emotions and focus on its function. It seems that a more humanistic understanding evolved from the medieval to our ages in

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the evaluation process of envy. In this respect, is envy portrayed to emphasize the power and marvelousness of the hero? This article aims to analyze envy from a philosophical perspective and to concentrate on how envy is understood as a sin and emotion in medieval tradition. *Boeve de Haumtone* and *Roman de Horn* explicitly contain an envious villain who provokes the hero's great features while allowing the reader to get more insight into the understanding of the concept of envy in medieval tradition.

In *Roman de Horn*, Horn is orphaned as the Saracens kill his father, King Aalof, and he sets off to Brittany with his fifteen boys who share a similar faith with him. In Brittany, he is protected and educated by King Rodmund. He grows to be a skilled knight, and he is capable of marrying princess Rigmel. However, on his way to achieving his goals, he comes across difficulties and struggles through his journey of exile and return (Düzgün, p. 84). The plot combines features from romance and chanson de geste, and usually exemplifies the exile and return type, concerning itself with the deeds of a knight (Düzgün, p. 84). During this journey, Horn faces with enviers. He is envied for he is the most powerful and the best looking. Horn is a magnificent hero with a stunning look and is heavenly. Fighting against the Saracens in three lengthy battles, struggling with exile and long journeys away from his lover, he is also dealing with a deceiver. Wikele, described as an evil traitor is a grandson of Denerez, who accused Aalof, Horn's father of the noble Silauf, and is now repeating the same with Horn. Wikele is slandering Horn to King Hunlaf, which results in his second exile. It seems that the motivation behind Wikele's accusation is introduced as pure "envy" since the author utters the phrase "envy never dies" the first time when telling this part of the story (Weiss, l. 1875).

Similarly, Boeve, the hero of *Boeve de Haumtone* is going on journeys to fulfill his quest. Boeve is inauspiciously orphaned by his mother. She kills her husband to marry a young emperor. Boeve is sold to the Saracens, and brought up under the control of king Hermin in Egypt. The plot continuous with love between Josiane and Boeve, and he proves himself a devoted fighter and a lover by defeating all enemies throughout his adventure from Egypt to Damascus and then to England. Boeve fights against the Saracens or giants, but on the other hand, is faced with envious men. Several knights of the king Hermin attack Boeve. English Boeve is more handsome, stronger, and well-formed than others in Egypt. He not only wins over the beautiful princess Josiane, but he also gets the appraisal and the love of Hermin. This arouses envy among the king's knights towards Boeve. Langum argues that envy is an emotion that is destructive for both the "envier" and the "envied" and puts forward the presentation of envy in the Bible (p. 105). It is one of the seven deadly sins rather than a natural emotion inherent in human beings. It seems to be categorized as evil compared to other emotions like anger or fear because of its destructive nature.

Both *Boeve de Haumtone* and *Roman de Horn* include a hero that displays courageous deeds throughout his journey of exile and return (Düzgün, p. 57). Boeve and Horn have unfortunate beginnings in their stories but later turn out to be excellent knights and lovers. Boeve faces with his father's death and his mother's betrayal. When Boeve tries to fight against them, he is sold to Saracens by his mother and then sold to Hermin, the king of Egypt:

The Saracen merchants brought the child, paying four times his weight in gold for him. When they had finished with their purchases, they made their boat ready and sailed over the sea for so long that they brought the ship to land in Egypt. (Weiss, pp. 358-63)

The fact that it is a four-time payment is particularly attention grabbing. Is it because he is a count's son, or has he high value because he has so many features? It foreshadows his superiority and why he will be the envied character. Boeve's story begins early on before



he goes away; his struggle with misfortune precedes his fight against the enemies. He has a cruel mother and is left all alone with his faith. Similarly, Horn and fifteen other children along with him are sent to Brittany from hometown Suddene after king Aalof dies: “the story of Horn, fatherless and brave, and his fate at the hands of the wicked Saracens. [...] He was the first to find Horn hidden in a garden, with fifteen other boys of his race” (Weiss, pp. 1-18). He is also taken care of by Herland, king Hunlaf’s Senechal, and dubbed a knight. The dominant feeling is pity towards both Boeve and Horn. However, as their journey begins and they get stronger and luckier, they encounter enviers in addition to their admirers. They are born noble; they are good-looking and they somehow radiate nobility, which allows them to get support from other nobles. Furthermore, kings offer their daughters to marry these heroes, and this causes even more envy around them. All these privileges frustrate some men and result in hostile attacks on them. Both heroes are envied for similar reasons. Throughout the romance, their nobility is praised many times and presented as if it’s idiosyncrasy. The African king Rodmund kills Horn’s father, wants to kill the “most notable kin” since he is scared that they may grow up and take revenge (Weiss, pp. 40-70). However, he “pitied the children so much that he could not bear them to perish in his presence,” instead he decides to send them on a boat to the high seas leaving them to death (Weiss, pp. 140-70). So from the first moment Horn’s luck helps him not to be brutally killed but to be sent to his fate to the sea. Later, he arrives in Brittany, home of Hunlaf “for God granted them good fortune, sending them a wind that blew from the northwest and landed them” (Weiss, pp. 191-114). Here, again luck is on their side. The moment they arrive, Horn stands out from the others, and when they arrive somewhere as total strangers, they don’t meet cruel people, but they are welcomed with “pity” and “mercy.” Among the other fifteen boys, Horn is treated differently and often praised: “Herland saw Horn before all the others” (Weiss, pp. 115-37), and he is most often compared to the others and portrayed as superior to them: “but Horn surpassed them all as the daystar eclipses the lesser stars nearby” (Weiss, pp. 195-217). As Langum puts it, “the nature of envy is connected to the feelings of injustice”, that is to say, if two individuals are in the same class, they expect to be treated equally, and any fortune or advantage of the other hurts our natural sentiments of equality (p. 83). Horn is superior and more fortunate than the others and his superiority provides the hints that he is in line for enviousness.

Likewise, in *Boeve de Haumtone*, Boeve is presented to the reader as a “handsome and capable boy” (Weiss, pp. 37-44). However he is unfortunate to be orphaned at a very young age. His mother is so cruel and sells him to Saracens. He weeps “loudly for his father’s death” (Weiss, pp. 207-12). Instead of going away, he comes back to fight his stepfather and his mother, but he is not yet strong to beat them out. His mother sells him to the merchants and the Saracen merchants take him by sea and go to Egypt where king Hermin lives with his beautiful daughter Josaine. Boeve expresses himself clearly, which is unexpected for a very young, unfortunate little boy, and “the king heard him and felt great pity” (Weiss, pp. 386-92). Both heroes start haplessly, but because they are noble, handsome, and self-confident, they can turn their luck around, and the king approves them. Once more, these unearned advantages are the root of envy soon evident in Hermin’s close men towards Boeve. In these romances, the heroes’ physical appearance is another reason to be envied. Not only Boeve and Horn are born noble and overcome any misfortunes thanks to the pity aroused in whoever sees them, but they are also honored many times and depicted as more skillful and better-looking than others. After Horn arrives in Brittany he is taken to the king and is recognized as “the most intelligent, the boldest of them all and the most nobly born” even before he introduces himself (Weiss, pp. 157-75). After Horn tells the king who he is and where he came from, the king promises him not to harm more than his son and be “carefully nurtured” (Weiss, pp. 326-45). King Hunlaf appoints each of his men to be responsible for

each child to take care of them. Horn is on Herland's hand and is "well placed and well educated" (Weiss, pp. 369-86). Horn is brought up by noblemen and treated kindly, because he is "clever and brave. He was prized above them all -deservedly because he was their lord and also because in all ways, he was most accomplished" (Weiss, pp. 387-407). Once more, not all children are appreciated under equal terms on many occasions, Horn is repeatedly presented as better than the others in many ways: "he had so many talents that no one was worthier than he" (Weiss, pp. 387-407). He is skillful and much better looking, he becomes famous for his "great cleverness and great beauty" and yet in no way he grows arrogant. He is very handsome but not vain expected from good-looking men. All these positive aspects gathered in the same person bring the possibility of any men around him feeling inferior and hostile.

While Boeve is sent to another country, abandoned by his mother and has been left fatherless, he goes to Egypt with the merchants. He is presented to the king courteously, and the king is very grateful to have the child. The king is immediately interested in the child and says: "I never saw a child as beautiful as you before" (Weiss, 380-92). This again suggests that the hero's good-looking lets fortune smile on him. Most of the time, Boeve is the sweet, fair and beloved son (Weiss, pp. 237-43), and he is Boeve the wise (Weiss, pp. 297-302, 411-15), the brave-hearted (Weiss, 561-96), he is Boeve the noble (Weiss, pp. 635-41), and the renowned fighter (Weiss, ll. 740-49), he is fierce-looking (Weiss, pp. 1069-87) and powerful (Weiss, pp. 903-27).

While Horn has good physical appearance and strong personality, Boeve reflects enviable courage and bravery. He is only a child when he tries to convince the porter to let him be in and attack his stepfather. He has self-confidence, promises to take back his land, speaks "boldly" in front of the emperor and calls him to account for killing his father (Weiss, pp. 282-88). He is weaponless and fights and beats ten foresters, which also impresses Josiane, and is even more fearless and martial once dubbed a knight. He again shows self-confidence while faces with a battle with Bradmund and his four hundred men. He says he will easily defeat them (Weiss, pp. 561-96). While trying to flee from Damascus where on exile, he even fights and kills "a strong and fierce giant" (Weiss, pp. 1286-1312). He sends "his soul to the devil" although he is tired and hungry (Weiss, pp. 1313-61). All these traits that make him stand out from others also make him the target of harm. These come from envious people, which is natural in such cases.

Boeve and Horn are envied because they are noble and attractive. Princesses fall in love with these heroes. These noble and beautiful ladies are the most desired by many other men. These are the reasons that heroes have enemies and rivals. For instance, Horn "was praised so much in the king's court that rosy-cheeked Rigmel, the daughter of good king Hunlaf, came to hear of it- indeed there was none fairer than her in all Christendom" (Weiss, pp. 387-407). He attracted the attention of the lady who was unprecedented "in sixty kingdoms" even before seen (Weiss, pp. 408-21). He fights, succeeds battles and proves his prowess. He is already loved and admired by the princess, and this causes envy among others. Furthermore, as he attends an annual feast, he is "admired by all; no lady seeing him was not deeply affected and troubled by the pains of love" (Weiss, pp. 437-54).

Not only by the princess, but Horn is also instantly noticed by all women. It is comprehensible that other men feel inferior, and they are envious. At the feast, the king orders Horn to serve him as a cupbearer, and "all the other boys shall follow him" (Weiss, pp. 455-70). It is clear that Horn has other boys with him at the feast, but Horn is the only one praised. The reader has no information on how the others feel. It proves that an environment available for envy arises especially considering they are still boys. During the feast, Rigmel attempts to reach Horn in several ways, and she sends messages and

endeavors to have him by her. She wants him so much and strives, and one can observe how it may be envious for the men witnessing everything. Rigmel is in love and so excited about Horn that she does many things and offers him valuable things like “gold, apparel, horses, and minted silver” (Weiss, pp. 538-56). In addition, after Horn is accused by the enviers, he defends himself by trying to convince the king that he is not guilty: “You should not, if you please, so foolishly believe this evil, jealous men who hear me so much envy: I have done them no harm, by St.Vincent!” (Weiss, pp. 1920-40). He leaves Brittany as he is on exile, arrives in Westir (Ireland). However, his charm attracts the attention of the princess here too. The daughter of the king named Lenburc notices the picturesqueness and elegance of Horn. Although he conceals his identity and uses another name in Westir, he is accepted and welcomed here too. As in the case of Rigmel, Lenburc takes the initiative and tries to convince Horn to be with her again by offering him valuables. Yet, she is refused by Horn and becomes very unhappy as Horn “had hopelessly ensnared her” (Weiss, pp. 2513-32). Lenburc loves Horn and she is envious. The phrase “envy never dies” occurs the second time (Weiss, pp. 2580-99). Men, who are powerful, successful, or in the foreground in any way are destined for envy. Horn attracts the attention of the most beautiful ladies in the country. It is beneficial in every aspect for a young man to have both the love of the best woman and the most financial power.

Boeve, as only an orphan coming from a foreign country, is in a short time so caressed by the king that he says: “my only heir in this world is a daughter, and I will give her to you along with my kingdom” (Weiss, pp. 393-98). His words are not just an arrangement though it is reciprocal Josiane, King Hunlaf’s daughter feels so much love for the young man that she cannot think of anything else. Her first impression is: “how dashing Boeve looks! Lucky the woman who could be his beloved! If I don’t have his love, I shall die” (Weiss, pp. 453-59). Boeve attracts the attention of Josiane. This exclusively beautiful woman deserves to be desired by men, so the event that follows the princess meeting Boeve is to face with ten foresters who “had all treacherously sworn to kill him” (Weiss, pp. 460-63).

Foster suggests that “envy is present when one person has something a second person would like to have” (p. 168). In this respect, it is not hard to understand why these heroes are envied. These men have everything that they desire. They are surrounded by others where “social comparison” is inevitable, and envy usually occurs (p. 68). The Biblical context also provides information about envy in the medieval tradition. According to Balint, death comes to the world with the fall of Lucifer when he becomes envious of humankind because they are created in God’s image (p. 45). Furthermore, many conflicts take part in Bible and are allocated to “anger or hatred” that is actually rooted in envy and often results in murder (Balint, p. 45). Envy is an emotion, is considered a sin in the Biblical context, and it naturally “penetrates to our innermost being”, and we feel distressed when we realize someone around us has something we would like to have (Foster, p. 169). What makes it a sin is when this emotion is not passive but active and turns into the destruction of the envied. Horn is the envied as a result of all the special features he has. The text explicitly presents the nature of envy and how it is inescapable when one is in the public eye and loved and distinguished:

And King Hunlaf loved him as if he had begotten him because through him he held his kingdom in such great tranquility that there was no neighbor to harass him, for they all feared Horn and his stubborn pride. [...] And nothing he asked for was refused him; he was everywhere both extolled and loved. But Fortune cannot remain stable. Because this man was so handsome and valiant, I tell you many envied him... (Weiss, pp. 1751-73)

Envy is the natural consequence of such a fortune to Thomas, the romancier of *Roman de Horn* (Weiss, pp. 1751-73). The underlying reasons why the envied Horn is handsome, valiant, is extolled and loved. While Horn is enjoying all the privileges, being supported by the king and saved, being admired and favored, he has to fight. His envier Wikele is a “close cousin and kinsman” (Weiss, pp. 1818-38). Envy occurs after Horn comes together with Rigmel. The tendency of envy is to destroy the envied object or the possessor or in cases when it is not possible to destroy the envied the feeling induces the envier to humiliate or disempowering the envied (Weiss, p. 26). This characteristic of the envier can be observed in both romances. Both in *Boeve* and *Horn*, the envier plays tricks on the heroes and they choose something that would take away the most meaningful possession. In Horn’s case, he is asked for a possession that is very precious for him or is not possible to be given. Both enviers chose the same ways when they want to harm the heroes, telling the king a lie about his daughter, and accusing the hero of deflowering the princess.

The reason for this lies in another characteristic of envy. As Foster points out, contrary to other emotions like anger, sorrow, or fear, it is observed that envy is not acted out directly as it is “destructive to our self-image” (p. 166). The envier is too proud to admit that he is attacking solely because he resents the envied. He is not even aware that the hatred felt toward the person is pure jealousy. Wikele, who denounces Horn, asks Horn to give him the white horse that Herland gives him. Horn explains that Herland gifts the horse to someone else as a Christmas present and promises to give him another one, but Wikele has made up his mind to create a conflict and so he renders his denial as “mortal hatred” (Weiss, pp. 1839-58). Before the romancier narrates the story he quotes the proverb “...the old saying is true: envy will never die”, pointing out the universality of envy and giving the message that it is present ever after (Weiss, pp. 1859-79). Wikele sets out angrily, after Horn's refusal, to find King Hunlaf and tells a lie:

When I was in your chamber, some days ago, I observed that Horn lay with Rigmel, which seemed to me a shameful deed. Afterward, he said, whenever he pleased, 'I shall never wed her, but make her my paramour for as long as I like. I'll seize the kingdom from that old fool and with that; I'll certainly reconquer my realm.' And when I heard that, sire, I rebuked him. (Weiss, pp. 1880-97)

Telling the king, not any other lie but a specific one about his daughter and that Horn is misusing him, is guaranteed to make the king hate Horn. Wikele is envious of these advantages that Horn has: the king’s love, his beautiful daughter Rigmel, and the kingdom. It is evident that Wikele is envious. While Horn owns everything, Wikele does not. A very similar occasion occurs in *Boeve*’s experience of being envied and being exposed to slander. Düzgün states that: “the intimacy, brotherly relations and respect between Hermin and Boeve become the source of the enmity and jealousy of the other Saracen knights who are under the authority of Hermin” (p. 568). She furthermore focuses on the father-son relationship they have and the value Hermin gives to Boeve since he is “very reluctant to punish a young man he feels genuine affection” (Düzgün, p. 568). Interestingly in *Boeve*, the envier tells a lie in the same way to the king: “my lord king, you have a right to be angry when that wicked, manifest slave, Boeve of Hampton, has slept with your daughter, that’s an outrage” (Weiss, pp. 765-94). The enviers give harm to the heroes, and they are wise enough not to do it in a way that would risk them, they do it shrewdly. The king is very sad and disappointed to hear the news and this is actually what the envious men aim to achieve.

## Conclusion

Both Horn and Boeve have common features that cause them to be chosen as heroes however the same aspects make them victims of envious men. Both romances depict the journey of the heroes from orphanage to the chivalry (Düzgün, p. 57). *Roman de Horn* and

*Boeve de Haumtone* are filled with battles and struggles and in which they finally prove their heroism. While these heroes have to fight against many obstacles on their journey from boyhood to maturity, they have envious men around them. Envy in the medieval tradition is often considered one of the seven deadly sins however these romances depict envy as a natural emotion.

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# Green Romanticism? Exhibiting the Ecocritical Approach in Binoy Majumdar's Poems

Binoy Majumdar'ın Şiirlerinde Ekokritik Yaklaşımlar

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## Abstract

Green romanticism is a term that focuses on the symmetry and interconnectedness of both human and non-human entities. It is interested in re-reading and re-evaluating the writings of romantic writers using an ecocritical approach with an enlightened perception of the features of the ecosphere. The concept and ideas of green romanticism can be found in both western and eastern romantic poets. Binoy Majumdar (1934-2006) is considered the fallen star who has changed the "chaka" (wheel) of contemporary Bengali poetry with the use of scientific and ecological avant-garde symbols and metaphors. He considers nature as equal to a human being and incorporates both real "Nature" and physical "nature" into his works to create a "Body-ecology-text" nexus. This research paper examines the intrinsic green romanticism theme in Binoy Majumdar's poems and how it manifests itself.

**Keywords:** Binoy Majumdar, Green romanticism, Body-ecology-text, The Hungry Movement, Bengali Poetry

## Öz

Yeşil romantizm, insan ve insan dışı varlıkların benzerliklerine ve birbirine bağlılığına odaklanan bir terimdir. Eko-kritik yaklaşımın sayesinde romantik yazarların eserlerini yeniden okumak ve yeniden değerlendirmekle ilgilidir. Bu kavramı ve fikirleri hem batılı hem de doğulu romantik şairlerde bulabiliriz. Binoy Majumdar (1934-2006), bilimsel ve ekolojik avangart semboller ve metaforlar kullanarak çağdaş Bengal şiirinin yönünü değiştiren kayıp şair olarak kabul edilir. Doğayı insanla eşit görür ve "beden-ekoloji-metin" bağını oluşturmak için gerçek doğa ve fiziksel doğayı eserlerine dahil eder. Bu araştırma, Binoy Majumdar'ın şiirlerindeki içsel yeşil romantizm temasını ve bunun kendini nasıl gösterdiğini incelemektedir.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Binoy Majumdar, Yeşil romantizm, beden-ekoloji-metin, Bengal şiiri

Reflecting on the Sanskrit phrase "Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam," meaning "the whole world is one family" (Malik, 2017), ecocriticism defies anthropocentrism and desires to open up the possibility of considering non-human entities as the inhabitants of the world just as human beings. The first word, "Vasudhaiva," is made up of three Sanskrit words: Vasudha, Eva and Kutumbakam. Vasudha means the earth is the central or basis of everything, a place that provides our accommodation, food, and essentially everything we need to survive. Green romanticism, also known as romantic ecology or romantic ecocriticism, specifically can be considered a branch of ecocriticism that focuses on the intricate linking of romanticism and nature. Though Karl Kroeber at first familiarized the idea of ecological concepts within British Romantic Studies, Jonathan Bate's *Romantic Ecology* has brought the term green romanticism into the limelight (Hutchings, 2007, p. 196n2). Thereby, green romanticism is considered "an

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attempt to enable mankind the better to live in the material world by entering into harmony with the environment" (Bate, 1991, p. 40). Since then, this term has given birth to much attention, criticism, dialogue, and debate among critics and scholars.

Binoy Majumdar is considered an enigma, "a social explicator, as a critic, even as a reformer" (Goswami, 2013). He has his ups and downs in life, both silken shawls as an award and lifelong grief, trauma, and isolation. He is a multi-faceted person who is a brilliant engineer, mathematician, polyglot, and a genuine successor to the eminent poet Jibanananda Das. Intriguing natural and animistic objects gain a fresh charm and aura in his writings, which also echo love, mathematics, and the natural world. Along with mountain, tree, sun, moon, and flowers; Majumdar has provided an avant-garde look in writings, embracing unusual adjectives to present flesh, blood, fish, mosquito, ant, modern paintings, sculptures, and others. He has penned several notable books such as *Phire Aso*, *Chaka (Come back, O' Wheel)*, *Nakshatrer Aloy (In the light of the Stars)*, *Kabyasamagra (Collection of Poems)*, and *Haaspaataale Lekhaa Kabitaaguchchha (Hospital Poems)*. Among them, *Haaspaataale Lekhaa Kabitaaguchchha* has won the prestigious national poetry award (Sahitya Academy Purashkaar) and Rabindra Purashkaar for his *Kabyasamagra 2* in 2005. This paper examines Binoy Majumdar's romantic poems from the perspective of ecocriticism, implementing the concepts of green romanticism, deep ecology, politicized nature, and the "body-ecology-text" nexus.

### **Green Romanticism in Majumdar's Poems**

Green romanticism significantly compliments and appreciates the "green" as the importance of a green planet is much-talked-about. "Imagining the whole earth as our collective backyard" (Oppermann, 2012, p. 44), basically, green romanticism denotes the trendy "Go Green" initiative, but from its own literary, cultural, or postcolonial points of view. Several contemporary issues of today are essential to treat as soon as possible, as Bates (1991) recognizes them: "the greenhouse effect and the depletion of the ozone layer, the destruction of the tropical rainforest, the pollution of the sea, and, more locally, the concreting of England's green and pleasant land" (p. 9). Following this, green romanticism generally examines the junctures between text and the environment, and the nature-culture binary is investigated through this process. The concept of green romanticism is usually connected with notably Jonathan Bate's *Romantic Ecology: Wordsworth and the Environmental Tradition* (1991) and *The Song of the Earth* (2000). It fervently asserts that we have "one life" (Bate, 1991, p. 40) that is too precious to undermine the vast ecosystem.

The renowned "Chipko Movement" sees eye to eye with green romanticism in their mutual love for ecology. With the stern message "Our bodies before our trees" (Mitra, 1993), the Chipko movement romanticizes, politicizes, and symbolizes multi-faceted images. Besides, the Narmada Bachao Andolan (Save the Narmada Movement) and the Greenbelt Movement in Kenya are also in sharp alignment with the Chipko movement.

While these movements are the cultural outcome of people's love of nature, they simultaneously operate within a "Green Romanticist tradition" (Huggan, 2009, p. 7). Green romanticism exceeds them reserving its love for all, from a tiny seed to plants. It does not seek to limit the praxis of nature or ecology, rather it aims at re-reading and redefining the romantic texts with a polished understanding of ecology. Accordingly, Reno (2016) observes that there lies "ecophilosophy", which intensifies love in green romanticism and goes beyond a simplistic "tree hugging paradigm" (p. 30). Considering its wide depth and multilayered enterprises,

Reno (2016) also contemplates Romantics' love of nature as a "less idealized view of Green Romanticism" (p. 47). "Historical but not historicist" (Huggan, 2009, p. 4), it does not encourage the flight from the materialistic world or society, rather comprehends with a new understanding. In this regard, the Romantic age provides the early backdrop of green romanticism. At the beginning of political uprisings and industrialization, the Romantic age was associated with the broken thread of human mindfulness and ecology. Romantic literature has explored "the interconnection between the human and the non-human" (Mishra, 2017, p. 438) and reconstructed the forgotten connection between nature and human beings. Apart from this, Jonathan Bate (1991) positions Wordsworth in the middle of "the *Green Politics*" in *Romantic Ecology* and declares green romanticism as "a theory of ecosystems and unalienated labour" (p. 10). According to Bate (1991), Wordsworth has shaped the "home" by amalgamating him/herself with nature, creating wholeness and harmony (p. 103). Thus, Coleridge, Wordsworth, and other romantic poets are being redefined through the green romanticism concept.

According to Soper (1995), nature implies "ordinarily observable features of the world" (p. 125). Being an obscure figure, Majumdar has observed nature not only using "ordinary" imagery but also applying unique and revolutionary imagery, lyrics, shades, and colours. In his poem, the ideas of his beloved and nature have been overlapped, and consequently, the outcome comes as a multi-layered cake. His poem titled "25 February, 1962" explains the mingling of voice, tune, and air, "O snake, don't you know if there is a body and whose body? / Suddenly the white song of wild geese rises. / Voice-tune mingles with air, as if crying in content winter, / crying, wanting the warmth of moonlight. / There is excitement linking with the touch of a cold snake" (Majumdar, trans. mine). Majumdar's unrequited love for scholar and critic Gayatri Chakravorti Spivak is a well-known and "much-talked-about" fact and she is the subject of Majumdar's self-proclaimed love in his writings. His *Phire Aso, Chaka* is dedicated to Gayatri, and later on, he has changed the title to *Amar Isshori (To My Goddess)*. Gayatri-Chaka-Isshori these terms are mixed and have given birth to many myths, increasing the interests of intellectuals. His poem titled "7 June, 1962" from the same book contains his hopefulness about love, "we will be song, love in ideal country, / will mix in every skies of earth as structureless tune" (Majumdar, 2018, p. 76; trans. mine). The first word of the Gayatri mantra is "Om", which implies prana, life, universe, or absolutism, and the remaining words create the prayer for the ultimate liberation and bliss (Vardhan, 2018). Hence, the mention of Gayatri's name denotes the inherent craving for emancipation and love, also in a spiritual level. Majumdar is declaring his eternal love for Gayatri by expressing his desire to mix in "every sky of earth". Thus, romanticism and green both can be found in the writings, where he considers nature as equal to his beloved, denying anthropocentrism. His desire to fly in the sky and Gayatri's coming back in numerous poems are the archetypes of liberation in the shelter of nature. Another poem titled "26 August, 1960" exclaims, "though I don't know why, oh smile, oh pine! / Real cranes fly if human go near them!" (Majumdar, 2018, p. 8; trans. mine), as if Majumdar is a monk, entering continuously into different phases of life by liberating his soul by blending into nature. At this phase, this researcher suggests that the term "Écriture écologie" can be used in light of "Écriture féminine", a term coined by Hélène Cixous that means "female writing" (Klages, 2012) and Majumdar's writing can be stated as écriture écologie as he introduces every theme, shade, and colour of his writing based on nature. Green is the colour palette that he has selected to paint his poems to enhance the rejuvenating and refreshing aura of nature. He writes in a language that is evergreen, smells of greenery, and even his sorrows consist of the epitomes of ecological concepts. Deleuze and Guattari's (1983) declaration can



be compared in this context, "the human essence of nature and the natural essence of man become one within nature ... man and nature are not like two opposite terms confronting one another ... rather, they are *one and the same* essential reality" (pp. 4-5, emphasis added). Majumdar's writing is full of nature- the endless sly, flora and fauna, and tuning with Deleuze and Guattari's "one and the same" statement, Majumdar blends himself within nature.

### **Deep Ecology in Majumdar's Poem**

Norwegian philosopher and environmentalist Arne Naess (1973) popularizes the "Deep Ecology Movement" (p. 95), which seeks to challenge the anthropocentric viewpoint and this term has been closely connected with green romanticism. The word "deep" raises the question of our resolutions and ideals in regard to the environment. The deep ecology movement includes deep questioning, going down to root points, while the opposite version, the shallow approach, promotes technological and instrumental solutions. Approving the Deep Ecology principles eases the path of accepting the "ecosophy" which preaches the philosophy of ecological synchronization or equilibrium among indigenous people. Consequently, leading our lives by the wisdom of different places, cultures, people, and largely nature enables us to be more humanistic. The ecocentric ideologies also enable the urge to protect the earth and its inhabitants. Therefore, the deep ecology movement encourages to harbour respect for variety and diversity, which helps to identify the ecological wisdom. It is similar to green romanticism, as both ideas aim at linking human and non-human entities to maintain harmony and, most importantly, to protect the earth. Naess (1987) introduces the concept of "ecological self", which grows from the beginning of our childhood, embracing the immediate environment, home, our relationship with non-human entities and nature (p. 35). According to Reno (2016), "ecological love" or "ecophilia" intensifies grey matter in regions of the brain that control and theorize our emotions (p. 29) and Majumdar's ecophilia has also controlled his emotions rapidly. In light of this proposition, Binoy Majumdar's ecological self also acknowledges the necessity of accentuating the bountiful nature in his writing which transcends the anthropocentric romantic worldview. Majumdar (2018) shatters his narrow ego in the process of gaining ecological self, "A hungry tiger has no qualm / to the tough task of the location changing. / It is you who have no ideals, he can still come. / After a while, there rises cream on top of milk" (p. 29, trans. mine). The destruction of the narrow ego and turning towards one's true ecological self is a liberating and lengthy process, yet Majumdar emphasizes the waiting. His ecological self, revealing ecophilia, longs for green romanticism, which cannot be fulfilled without ecology or his beloved. Green romanticism centres around "the green earth because it recognizes that neither physically nor psychologically can we live without green things" (Bate, 1991, p. 40). The second part of his poem "Duti Kabita" opens up another paradigm, "God-like bird flaps its wings rapidly / landing on the ocean bank, shore, rig, delta" (Majumdar, 2014b, p. 23, trans. mine). Majumdar compares the bird with God, if according to the deep ecology, everything is equal, then God is the cause where everything occurs for reasons. Accordingly, the "archetypal image" of garden, or in a broad sense "nature", is related to "the feminine principle of fertility and abundance" and "the pre-patriarchal Earth-goddess" (McKusick, 2011, p. 20). Conforming to this idea, Majumdar surpasses his limitations and mentions his beloved as "Isshori" or Goddess and later on matches a non-human entity with God as well. According to his view, not only nature and human are equal but also he transcends and idealizes them to a spiritual position. Therefore, a kind of "cosmic egalitarianism" (Huntington, 2017, p. 6) takes place and Majumdar merges himself continuously with nature, portraying intense ecophilia.

### Any “Politicized” Nature?

The green romantic movement denies the claims of new historicist scholars such as Jerome McGann, Marjorie Levinson, and Alan Liu who state that natural romanticism derives chiefly from “as a mode of displacement of the political failures of the French Revolution” (Huntington, 2017, p. 1). Responding to Alan Liu’s (1989) argument that there is “no nature except as it is constituted by acts of political definition made possible by particular forms of government” (p. 104), Kroeber and Bate have established the amalgamation of green and romanticism that will shatter Liu’s new historical criticism.

In contrast, Bate (1991) argues that it is obstructive to state that there is no nature in challenging times when it is mandatory to “address and redress the consequences of human civilization’s insatiable desire to consume the products of the earth” (p. 56). But is apolitical and ahistorical romanticism the rightful answer?

Moreover, “The Hungry Movement” is the literary movement launched by several poets including Binoy Majumdar, Shakti Chattopadhyay, Saileswar Ghosh, Malay Roy Choudhury, Samir Roychoudhury, and others during 1960 in Bengal. The poets have labelled themselves “Hungryalists” and coined “Hungryalism” from the word “Hungry” used by Geoffrey Chaucer. Their pamphlet, named “Manifesto of the Hungry Generation”, states, “Poetry is no more a civilising manoeuvre...” (Das, 2019) and the poets have wanted to “disturb the reader’s mind that was filled with preconceived colonial ideas” (Imtiaz, 2016). Consequently, it has received hatred and protests from the government and elite society. Majumdar has submitted his poems to the Hungryalist Bulletins, but later on, he left due to contradictory and debatable reasons. One of his published poems in the bulletin is “8th March, 1960”, “Endangered cranes fly, escaping ceaselessly, / since it is known, that underneath her white feathers exist / passionate warm flesh and fat; / pausing for short stalls on tired mountains” (Majumdar, 2013).

But it should be perceived that Majumdar has always been a lonely passenger rather than being tied to a bunch of poets in their journey. Feeling disinterested, he left the movement, and thus the rest of the poems cannot be associated with the movement. Besides, the Neo-classical age has concentrated on social and contemporary issues and the poems of Dryden and Pope reflect scientific and philosophical issues. The Romantics have wanted to break the cycle by taking shelter in natural assets. Even so, it is contradictory to say Majumdar has done so, mimicking exactly the romantics. Liu’s (1984) famous (or infamous?) comment about Wordsworthian nature as “an imaginary antagonist” (pp. 538-39) indicates the unfeasibility of experiencing the natural world that is not systematically moderated or shaped by culture/history. Wordsworth, who is considered one of the greatest romantic poets, has chosen nature as a backdrop in most of his writings. That being the case, to only construct and label his writings as the outcome of the failed French Revolution not only maximizes the ongoing problems but also does not bring any solution. The same saying goes for Majumdar too. His fewer poems have aimed to break the conventional norms of culture, but to restrict them in the boundary of the Hungry movement will deny the readers the ability to fully savour the taste and will be reductive. Nature is a goddess and also a lady with flesh, bone, and a desire for Majumdar. Contradicting Liu’s (1984) statement, “most capacious theme of Wordsworth’s life work, I believe, fits that of the nineteenth century generally” (p. 540), Majumdar’s poems transcend the time-cycle, history, and culture as they are not romantic in any form, which is considered backdated as he states, “length, weight and time- / these three worldly units / are talked about too often / like there's nothing else in the can...” (trans. Aryanil). He has indulged and applied scientific materials to his poems along with the flora and fauna. Majumdar muses, “Can I smell

my own hair? / Marvellous sights have been seen. / A full moon was to have risen last night -- / only a quivering sickle appeared! / It was an eclipse" (trans. Jyotirmay). This is in good agreement with Majumdar's theorem of poetry, this theorem asserts, "appearance 2 → feelings 2" (Phire Aso, Chaka, 2018, p. 91, trans. mine). As there is no appearance 1 in the poetry, a reader connects the poem with his life; therefore, it becomes a personal poem and turns into a more general object rather than just holding the memory of the poet's. For example, in his poem "Okalponik", Majumdar (2014) muses, "I will enter inside of you, O' my city, I will enter silently / sometimes in spring, sometimes in rainy season when secret jealousy anger / will lose against this pen" (p. 55, trans. mine). In light of the theorem of poetry, this city, the poet's getting lost in its maze, the anger, or jealousy can be associated with anyone. As a result, it will produce appearance 2 and feelings 2, consuming appearance 1 and feelings 1, giving it a more universal result. It is therefore difficult to say that Majumdar's "nature" is totally divorced from ideology, politics, culture, or any philosophical idea. Instead, it can be said that he worships nature and has incorporated the environment into his writing.

### **"Body-ecology-text" Nexus**

Though Freud's position is anthropocentric in most cases, the statement of his (1930), "our bodily organism, itself a part of that nature" (p. 86) indicates the body ecology. Body ecology, a micro-ecology, is a practice of self-care that also aims to care for people through lifestyle selections. This discipline has derived from "philosophical naturism, deep ecology, and holistic body-mind practices developed since 1850" (Andrieu, Nobrega and Sirost, 2018, p. 17). It's a holistic way of living that includes preserving one's "inner ecology," improving one's physical and mental well-being, and becoming an ecological human—according to this theory of body ecology, humans become ecological when natural resources enter their bodies. Without knowing about the body's inner harmony, it is impossible to perceive the outer ecology. Creating a "micro-micro-situation" (Andrieu, Nobrega and Sirost, 2018, p. 18), the natural elements generate an internal effect on the physical body. Correspondingly, Majumdar's poems can be brought to attention. In light of body ecology, Majumdar's poems awaken inner harmony and create the path for the consciousness of the soul with the touch of natural entities. His poems of *Phire Aso, Chaka, Aghraner Anubhutimala (Series of Feeling in a late Autumn)*, despite their exquisite poetic language and narrative, portray implicit graphic descriptions. But after spreading countrywide controversy and criticism of having crudeness and obscenity, his *Balmikir Kabita (Poems of Balmiki)* was banned after its publication. From an alternative angle, if Majumdar had been a western poet, things might have turned out in a different way, but trauma and isolation have turned Majumdar into a vulnerable situation. Narayan Chandra Sen, a renowned researcher on Majumdar, has described 'Balmikir Kabita' as a continuation of 'Balmikir Pratibha' by Rabindranath Tagore (Ghosh, 2019). Majumdar muses in this regard, "I understood at the age of twenty-five that the theory of creation among the human, non-human and plants is equal" (qtd. in Ghosh, 2019). The presence of this "oneness" has awakened his internal sensations, along with the sources of natural elements. He additionally states, "Body is mind and the mind is body, from this absolute came everything—light, sky, poetry, body everything" (Majumdar, 2014a, p. 122, trans. mine). His emotions, thrills, and atmosphere are all perfectly captured in text, so there grows a "body-ecology-text" (Ryan, 2019, p. 166) nexus. Majumdar embraces the real "Nature" and bodily "nature" in his text and a raw example of the re-returning in the bodily "natural" self is a poem titled "1<sup>st</sup> July 1961", "I know it wouldn't hair anew; pain sits / calm on sorrowed thoughts like a nocturnal fly- / on the way back from hospital, in momentary mind. / Sometimes unawares, / I know, the pain will wither / with the

falsity of a child urinating in sleep” (trans. Aryanil). Nonetheless, Majumdar enters into “a nocturnal fly”, then again leaves that body to enter into a sleeping child, and lastly transcripts it into a text to gain a spiritual and transcendental “body” where everything is equal.

### Conclusion

When ecology is considered “holistic science” (Bate, 1991, p. 36), green romanticism or romantic ecology admires the green earth as it distinguishes that, being “a single vast ecosystem” (Bate, 1991, p. 40), we cannot live without it. Green romanticism does not celebrate “imagination” or the escapist mentality of the materialistic world; rather, it aims at creating a physical world of equality and harmony. “As a retreat from the world, [but rather as] a new way of comprehending the world” (Coupe, 2000, p. 15), it becomes a new branch of ecocriticism and teaches how to (re)read “green” in literature, or more specifically, in romanticism. It claims that romantic poems can be analyzed, as ecocritical writings and current ecology is the (re)appraisal of romanticism. This paper has highlighted the importance of green romanticism, as it is not mandatory for romantic poets to write by being influenced by ideology, politics, culture, or history; on the contrary, labeling romanticism as “politically influenced” will only serve to undermine and constrict the goals of ecocriticism. Furthermore, Binoy Majumdar can be correctly termed a “green romantic” poet. He has lived an impressive life- physics, mathematics, biology, Russian language, coffee house, hungry movement, Gayatri, love, nature, Jibanananda, parents, mental asylum, sun, moon, and trees- all are disseminated and scattered in his life. Contributing remarkably to Bengali poetry by breaking the conventional poetic style, Majumdar revolutionarily has applied scientific materials and a unique sense of natural objects in his poems. Following Schiller’s (1985) statement about poets, “they will either be nature, or they will seek lost nature.” (p. 191), Majumdar has lived both lives splendidly. Human and non-human entities are treated equally in his writing; instead, he adds some natural elements that are often overlooked in writing. As a “Hungryalist”, Majumdar has been a part of opposing politics, but unlike Liu’s claim, it is complex to ascertain that Majumdar is fully influenced by culture and ideology. As Schiller (1985) proclaims poets as “the guardians of nature” (p. 191), alternatively, it can be asserted that Majumdar was influenced by both “Nature and nature” (life and ecology). Bharata and his Rasa theory can be mentioned here: Majumdar has measured “Anubhuties (feelings)” as the equivalent of rasa and divided it into four categories: “ujjibak, uttejak, nistejak, and apradhan” (Chatterjee, 2019, p. 9). Majumdar has embellished his “green” poetry with “feelings” by redefining rasa theory in his own unique manner. By not being anthropocentric, he celebrates life and nature to the full extent in his poems, his beloved also turns into a living nature by the touch of ecological elements. Constructing a home within the materialistic nature and appreciating both human and non-human entities, Binoy Majumdar’s poems can be observed through an ecocritical lens as having an underlying notion of green romanticism.

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# Linguistic Obscurity in Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*

Joseph Conrad'ın *Karanlığın Yüreği* Adlı Eserinde Dilsel Belirsizlik

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## Abstract

Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* intensively presents modernist particularity shown in the form of linguistic obscurity. This paper draws on Friedrich Schleiermacher's hermeneutics to argue that it has latent meanings and is presented through two categories: "silenced language" and "voiced language." The former reveals the deception, death and hurt brought by colonial conquest. The latter is best exemplified by Kurtz's Intended typified as an archetype of the Victorian woman, by which Joseph Conrad intends to criticize the self-deception of many in the colonial era. In short, linguistic obscurity respectively reveals Conrad's critique of colonialism and his concern for humanity from the two different paths.

**Keywords:** Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness*, obscurity, silenced language, voiced language

## Introduction

In modernist literature, language is in crisis, for "its simple relationship to the world, of naming and describing, no longer appeared to apply transparently, as ambiguity, irony, misunderstanding and the ineffable seemed commonplace" (Childs, 2002, p. 62). Highly related to these modernist features, Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* is intensively characterized by a notable linguistic feature: obscurity. In his previous study, Caitlin Vandertop argues that it is "a form of protomodernism that seeks to undermine Victorian realism's pretensions to transparency and the stability of meaning" (2018, p. 692). This strongly isolates Conrad's work from traditional realism. On another level, Ella Ophir relates the obscurity to Conrad's inner feelings, by which she argues that "language to Conrad often feels unnervingly detached from anything of substance within or beneath it" (2012, p. 345). Therefore, the obscurity not only reveals a unique artistic feature but also Conrad's exclusive state of mind. In Frances B. Singh's article, it has been further discussed as a "hyperbolic language," and it "point[s] out that real outrages have been committed" in the Congo (2007, p. 206). Consequently, readers are highly likely to sense what Joseph Conrad intends to insinuate: the critique of colonialism.

Typically, in *Heart of Darkness*, the language of the female figures exemplifies the linguistic obscurity, and it is presented meaningfully in both silenced and voiced ways. The former can be seen in Marlow's description of the old woman's look and the latter his conversation with Kurtz's Intended. In this paper, the old woman's look is defined as a silenced language, for it conveys something meaningful in a silent way. In comparison, Kurtz's Intended eloquently expresses her faith in Kurtz. Accordingly, her language is defined as a voiced language. In what follows, this paper aims to find out the significance of linguistic obscurity by means of these two relatively separate but closely related paths.

## Silenced Language

Apart from the forms of linguistic obscurity, it must be noted that the whole story is

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narrated by Marlow, considering Schleiermacher's argument on language and mind<sup>1</sup>, here, the obscurity of silenced language possibly functions as a sign, which signifies Marlow's inner thoughts. Based on this, Schleiermacher's grammatical explication and psychological explication are employed as analytical devices. The former focuses on linguistic features, the latter inner thoughts brought by the features. Besides, Schleiermacher also regards language as "a linguistic designation" (1998, p. 9), which implies that grammatical explication precedes psychological interpretation in literary study.

In the novella, the obscurity of silenced language is presented on the occasion that Marlow is in the waiting room in the sepulchral city: "I began to feel slightly uneasy (...) the other scrutinizing the cheery and foolish faces with unconcerned old eyes" (Conrad, 2006, pp. 10-11). The episode shows that Marlow feels something mysterious at this very moment, which is revealed through two crucial adjectives: "uneasy" and "ominous." Then, the two women are knitting black wool feverishly. The adverb, "feverishly," further strengthens Marlow's mysterious feeling by describing the two women's action in an abnormal way. After this, Marlow is greatly shocked by the old woman's facial expression, which seemingly insinuates something, but what it is not clear. Consequently, the scene, especially the old woman's look, produces a sense of obscurity.

The scene further brings Marlow the sense of uneasiness, which undoubtedly arises from his surroundings. This is supported by the phrase, "something ominous in the atmosphere." The phrase emphasizes the very existence of ominous signs in the material world. Thus, it is likely to support that Marlow is encompassed by uneasiness. In the following narration, Marlow endures a sense of tension, for the noun, "conspiracy," powerfully hints that Marlow is involved in an unspeakable secret and the passive voice, "I had been let into some conspiracy" (Conrad, 2006, p. 10), further mirrors that Marlow is taken into the conspiracy, not on his own will. Therefore, Marlow's uneasiness results from his surroundings. However, in Marlow's description, the two women seem unaffected. They say nothing at all. Neither can we find some words implying their opinions nor their participation in the "conspiracy". Then, why does Marlow only emphasize the male's uneasiness?

In *Heart of Darkness*, Marlow once said, "They live in a world of their own" (Conrad, 2006, p. 10). In a relevant study, Nina Pelikan Straus argues that Marlow is "installed in a world from which the Intended and all leisurely women are excluded" (2004, p. 204). Therefore, Marlow's opinion on women suggests that women are naive creatures and they have little contact with the external world. In this respect, the narrator Marlow is implying that it is men who have connection with the external world. This further highlights males' participation in the "conspiracy" that made the experiencing Marlow uneasy. Mariwan Hasan et al. argue that in modernist writings the emphasis of anxiety and insecurity is a very notable feature, "which differs modern age from Victorian mood which concentrates on confidence and assurance" (2021, p. 37). Therefore, Marlow's uneasiness is not only a mirror of the anxiety and insecurity of his sex, but also of his age.

Behind this sense of uneasiness, a sense of uncertainty also arises. He said, "I don't know—something not quite right" (Conrad, 2006, p. 10). Therefore, in a narrative order, Marlow's sense of uncertainty arises after his uneasiness, which demonstrates a progressive course. Besides, quasi simile can also be found: "It was just *as though* I had been let into some conspiracy" (Conrad, 2006, p. 10). The construction, "as though," renders Marlow's following description suspicious. Fetson Kalua points out that Marlow "displays hesitancy and uncertainty about what he sees and speaks" (2014, p. 13); Therefore, Marlow seems to

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<sup>1</sup> Schleiermacher admits that language demonstrates the utterer's thoughts. See *Hermeneutics and Criticism and Other Writings*.



hint: "I feel I am in a conspiracy, but the feeling may not be true; I don't know if I am right, but I think something seems not quite right. Based on this, a sense of uncertainty is presented" (Conrad, 2006, p. 10).

Then, by delivering his sense of uncertainty, what does Marlow intend to do? Ian Watt argues that "*Heart of Darkness* embodies more thoroughly than any previous fiction the posture of uncertainty and doubt and one of Marlow's functions is to represent how much a man cannot know" (2004, p. 174). This echoes the adjective, "unknown," in the description of the scene. So, it seems that the narrator Marlow attempts to show the unknown in the experienter Marlow's upcoming journey. To sum up, Marlow's sense of uncertainty is based on uneasiness. Therefore, the above analysis proves that the obscurity of silenced language, namely the sign, reveals itself on the basis of the sense of uneasiness and uncertainty in a progressive way.

Bernard J. Paris argues that in *Heart of Darkness*, there are two Marlows: the younger Marlow "who is the subject of the tale and the older Marlow who narrates it" (2005, p. 20). What makes this distinctive and clear is the grammatical features presented in two sentences: the first one is "I began to feel slightly uneasy." The second one is "I don't know—something not quite right." Apparently, the former is simple past tense, the latter simple present. According to Wen Bing and Tang Shuhua, simple past tense refers to an action happened in the past and represents a person's moment in the past (2019, p. 69), whereas simple present tense refers to an action happened in the present moment, which represents a person's current situation (2019, p. 46). As a result, the first sentence is related to the younger Marlow and the second the older Marlow. Based on this, the analysis of Marlow's understanding of silenced language splits into two paths: one to the younger Marlow, the other to the older Marlow.

Largely influenced by Schleiermacher's assertion on psychological explication, Marlow's description of silenced language can be understood from two perspectives. The first one is Marlow's moment of life at which he perceives the silenced language. The second one is his moment of life at which he understands the silenced language. The former corresponds to the younger Marlow, the latter the older Marlow.

First, focusing on the younger Marlow, we see a Marlow who is unaware of what will happen in the future. Even feeling uneasy and ominous, he does not change his determination to embark on the mission. Marlow observes the old woman carefully, paying close attention to her posture, "sat on her chair"; her slipper, "flat cloth"; her headwear, "starched and white"; her facial expression, "swift and indifferent" and her glasses, "silver-rimmed." All these, no matter phrasal verbs or phrasal adjectives, are telling us that Marlow is, in this uneasy and ominous atmosphere, highly alert to his surroundings. This may lay a foundation for his tremendous shock when he sees Kurtz for the first time.

Lao She argues, "Conrad cuts the narrative process into pieces, and the narration jumps, time and again, backward and forward" (An, 2018, p. 35). Accordingly, it seems that Marlow's sense of uneasiness is cut into two parts by his observation of the old woman. Evidence can be found in the adjective, "uneasy," and the verb, "troubled" from two parts separated by Marlow's observation of the old woman. Both adjectives reflect Marlow's feelings, so they connect the two parts together. Furthermore, Marlow's observation connects his uneasiness with the old woman's look. In consequence of this, her silenced language hints at Marlow's journey into the unknown.

Second, different from the younger Marlow, the older Marlow has "a sober realization of the darkness" (Galef, 1990, p. 135). Bernard J. Paris argues that Marlow "is trying to produce an effect on his audience" (2005, p. 55). Then, what effect does Marlow try to produce? For one

thing, as Peter Childs argues, “Conrad’s main objective is to put us into intense sensory contact with the events” (2002, p. 179), so the effect Marlow tries to produce might be “intense and direct sensory contact” with his uneasiness. In other words, Marlow tries to produce an intense and direct sensory contact with the secret laying deep in the dark Continent.

Then, how does Marlow produce the effect of intense and direct sensory contact? According to Schleiermacher, “descriptions of journeys can be understood equally as a manifestation of the mind of the travelers and of those who are doing the describing” (1998, pp. 102-103), so the older Marlow’s utterance manifests his mind which connects him with the younger Marlow. Because of this, by reading the older Marlow’s narration, readers can sense the younger Marlow’s uneasiness. In this way, readers have an intense and direct sensory contact with the younger Marlow’s uneasiness, and words become a bridge of thoughts. This can be justified by the simple present tense: “I am not used to such ceremonies; I don’t know—something not quite right” (Conrad, 2006, p. 10). By saying these, the older Marlow directly tells his audience what he is thinking right now and he is trying to show them his sober realization towards the darkness in the Congo through his sense of uneasiness back on that day.

The other effect that the old Marlow tries to produce is his implication of the falsehood of his childhood belief. Rino Zhuwarara argues that “Marlow himself is driven into Africa by his desire to fulfil a childhood dream about the Congo” (2004, p. 223). Patrick Brantlinger argues that “Africa was a setting where British boys could become men but also where British men could behave like boys with impunity” and “a great testing—or teething—ground for moral growth and moral regression” (2004, p. 71). Therefore, Marlow’s journey relates his childhood to his adulthood and Africa becomes a place to testify his childhood dream. Marlow, “after his return to Brussels, ‘the sepulchral city’ (Conrad, 2006, p. 70), experiences mental and physical decline” (Ahn, 2019, p. 714). Therefore, when the old Marlow is narrating the story, he is aware of what happened in the Congo. As Rino Zhuwarara claims before, Marlow was “driven into Africa by his desire to fulfil a childhood dream about the Congo” (2004, p. 223). Thomas Dilworth argues that it is “the idea,” namely the faith in colonial conquest, that makes Marlow and his audience deceive themselves (1987, p. 521). In this way, through his failed chase of his childhood dream, Marlow intends to show us the deception of colonial conquest and the deception drove him to chase his childhood dream. By means of this, Marlow implies the falsehood of his childhood belief of conquest and exploitation.

In his article, Jonah Raskin discussed Conrad’s change towards great powers. He mentions that “the earlier Conrad believed the rhetoric of colonialism, while the later suspected that greed and thirst for power lay behind claims to progress” (1967, p. 118). So, the two Marlows very likely implies the two stages of Conrad’s attitude towards colonial conquest: the younger Marlow is the one who was in belief of the justification of colonialism; the older Marlow is the one who suspects the truthfulness of colonialism. Therefore, the old woman’s silenced language functions as a sign which signifies two essential meanings: one represents Marlow’s journey to the unknown under the deception of colonial conquest. The other is the older Marlow’s eventual understanding of the cause. Jonah Raskin also regards *Heart of Darkness* as “a criticism of colonialists in Africa” (1967, p. 113) and “every single action in the story is doomed to failure” (Amara, 2019, p. 7). Additionally, “most men who pass through their door [the door guarded by the two women] are bound to either meet their deaths or undergo the most traumatic experience of their lives” (Saeedi, 2015, p. 551). Therefore, the obscurity of silenced language in fact implies that colonial conquest brings nothing, but deception, death and hurt.

## Voiced Language

In a sharp contrast to the old woman's silenced language, Kurtz's Intended's conversation with Marlow reveals a voiced language. In this paper, what is considered is not its phonetic features, but its way of presentation and its underlying meaning. As "a gentlewoman of an industrialized, imperialist society" who loves Kurtz (Dilworth, 1987, p. 520), Kurtz's Intended has also been discussed exhaustively. For instance, Thomas Dilworth regards her as a possessor of Kurtz to the very end of his life (1987, p. 519). He also comments that she "believes in the elevated ideals that ostensibly justified Kurtz's participation in Belgian imperialism in the Congo" (2013, p. 326). This confirms that Kurtz's Intended is created as a disciple faithful to colonial conquest and her voiced language might signify something relevant. Similarly, Patrick Brantlinger argues that "Marlow's lie leaves Kurtz's Intended shrouded in the protective darkness of her illusions, her idol worship" (2004, p. 76). Besides, Kurtz's Intended is not only seen as an emblem of a kind of "horror" (Straus, 2004, p. 206), but also a woman isolated from the external world and "frozen in time" (Saeedi, 2015, p. 545). Apparently, commentators have realized her particularities. However, they seem to pay more attention to her symbolic meanings, rather than her utterance itself. Given this, this paper defines it as a voiced language and argues that the obscurity of it functions as a sign, reveals her nature and signifies the deception of colonial conquest.

In *Heart of Darkness*, Kurtz's Intended appears as "an emblematic token of civilization" (Saeedi, 2015, p. 544) at the very end of the novella. In this closing chapter, the obscurity of the Intended's voiced language is distinctively presented in a conversational style: "I laid the packet gently on the little table and she put her hand over it. ... "You knew him well," (...) "You knew him best," I repeated (Conrad, 2006, p. 74).

Obviously, the episode demonstrates a complete but failed turn-taking.<sup>2</sup> It is complete because there are two indispensable speakers: Marlow and the Intended; it is failed because Marlow in fact conveys nothing at all. In the beginning, the Intended seems to be in the grief of Kurtz's death, which is seen in the phrasal noun: "mourning silence." Nevertheless, she seems to continuously and progressively brag Kurtz's positive influence over others, which is verified by the subsequent two verbs, "admire" and "love." In Merriam-webster dictionary, "admire" is "to feel respect and approval for (someone or something)"<sup>3</sup> while "love" means a "strong affection for another arising out of kinship or personal ties" and the "affection based on admiration."<sup>4</sup> Thus, admiration precedes "love" and "love" is based on admiration. This proves the continuous and progressive features of the Intended's utterance, which confirms that the Intended has unrealistic confidence over Kurtz. Besides, from a grammatical point of view, the two verbs are predicates and transitive verbs. Their objectives are the same: Kurtz. This proves that in the Intended's belief, it is Kurtz who must be admired and loved. Furthermore, the following repetitive exclamatory sentence, "How true!" further exposes her deviation from reality. According to Cambridge English Dictionary, exclamatory sentence is a sentence containing a strong emphasis<sup>5</sup>, so they can be seen as her emphasis of her unrealistic confidence. Due to these, her voiced language is built on subjective falsehood and pretension. Schleiermacher argues that "without words, the thought is not yet completed and clear" (1998, p. 8). However, in this context, although the Intended's voiced language is constituted by words, its essential meaning is not clear: what does her voiced language signify? In other words, the obscurity

<sup>2</sup> This term can be found in George Yule's *The Study of Language*. 5th edition, on page 143, published by Cambridge University Press in the year of 2014.

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/admire>.

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/love>.

<sup>5</sup> <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/us/dictionary/english/exclamatory-sentence>.

of her voiced language functions as a sign. Yet, what it signifies is not clear.

By adopting Schleiermacher's grammatical explication, it is possible to perceive the essentiality of her voiced language. On the whole, there are three vital features characterizing the conversation and demonstrate the ultimate meaning of the obscurity. The first one is syntactical feature. For instance, the Intended uses declarative sentences, such as "You knew him well"; "And you admired him!" It seems the Intended is stating a fact: Marlow has a close relationship with Kurtz. However, in fact, their relationship is not as intimate as the Intended believes. Consequently, this linguistic feature reveals the Intended's subjectivity. Apart from the declarative sentences, the tag question: "Was it?" is also notable. By saying this, the Intended is not only trying to emphasize Kurtz's importance, but also the authenticity of her faith in Kurtz. Moreover, the Intended interrupts Marlow by adding, "Love him," to his utterance. On the one hand, it seems that this is the content she wants to hear. On the other hand, she is anxious to overtake Marlow's utterance. Thus, this corresponds to Thomas Dilworth's argument: she "dominates the interview" (1987, p. 513). Thus, it is reasonable to believe that her utterance reflects her dominance over the interview. Again, there are more external features. For one thing, there is no phatic communion.<sup>6</sup> Neither does she inquire the relationship between Kurtz and Marlow. As soon as she sits down, she says, "You knew him well." So, it seems that she knows everything about them and there is no need to ask. Consequently, her overconfidence reflected through her dominance over the interview can be seen as her alienation from the truth of Kurtz's depravity. However, the extreme eloquence of the Intended brings a doubt: Why does she behave in this way?

To begin with, the Intended's utterance likely mirrors her inner thoughts. Some notable features may support this point of view. The first one is the adverb, "well," in her utterance: "You knew him well." It seems that the Intended is sure that Marlow has an intimate relationship with Kurtz. Then, in her following utterance, she says that "it was impossible to know him [Kurtz] and not to admire him [Kurtz]." Here, she uses the verb, "admire," to hint that Marlow must admire Kurtz, which is in fact merely her subjective view. After this, the Intended interrupts Marlow with the verb, "love." As she tries to express the idea that it was impossible not to love Kurtz, her subjective interpretation again is shown to us. Besides, what is more notable is that her insinuation is progressive and it seems that she is trying to persuade Marlow to believe in Kurtz. In other words, the Intended is trying to persuade Marlow to believe in what she believes. In addition, the Intended claims that "I knew him best." She uses the superlative degree, "best". This also reveals the Intended's overconfidence. However, she is confined within her house and unaware of the external world, which renders her as the embodiment of "the simplistic notion of the Victorian 'Angel in the House'" (Morgan, 2007, p. 1). Consequently, the obscurity of her voiced language reveals her naive nature, which further exemplifies her as an archetype of the Victorian woman.

Then, by presenting her naivety, what does Marlow intend to convey? Bernard J. Paris argues that Marlow "is motivated less by loyalty to Kurtz than by his feeling that women cannot deal with the truth and that the unreal world in which they live must be preserved" (2005, p. 53). Therefore, Marlow intends to show how women treat the physical world and why they must be prevented from truth.

This intention results in his distinctive behavior in his conversation with the Intended. This is the third notable feature. During the interview, Marlow intentionally avoids answering

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<sup>6</sup> Words, phrases or sentences concerning greetings or opening statements. e.g. How are you? Good morning!

the Intended's "questions."<sup>7</sup> For instance, when the Intended says, "you knew him well," Marlow uses the noun, "intimacy," to respond. Then, she expects Marlow to admit that he admires Kurtz, but Marlow uses the adjective, "remarkable". Moreover, in response to the Intended's interruption, Marlow says nothing. This is seen in the phrase: "silencing me into an appalled dumbness." All these violate the Cooperative Principle (The Maxim of Relation), and Marlow seems to shun intentionally, so in fact their conversation fails and nothing is exchanged at all.

In fact, Marlow responds by mimicking. This can be seen in Marlow's repetition that "you knew him best" (Conrad, 2006, p. 74). Then, why is Marlow "mimicking?" Florence H. Ridley argues that Kurtz's Intended is "a symbol of all he [Kurtz] had meant to do, one with the noble plans he carried out to Africa, his painting of a figure bearing light, his report for the Suppression of Savage Customs" (1963, p. 50). According to Schleiermacher, "speaking is the external side of thought" (1998, p. 7). Therefore, Marlow's "mimicking echo" can be seen as his acquiescence in her connection with the darkness. Besides, Marlow says, "with every word spoken, the room was growing darker" (Conrad, 2006, p. 74). In this way, Kurtz's Intended is connected with the darkness. The comparative degree, "darker," echoes the "black" wool of the two women at the "door of darkness." Pouneh Saedi argues that this is "a color later on used to describe the singularity of Marlow's experiences on the other continent" (2015, p. 552). Because of this, the connection between the Intended and the darkness in the Congo becomes clear.

Then, why does Marlow hint at the connection? Thomas Dilworth argues that the Intended "may be a kind of lie" (1987, p. 518). Thus, Marlow realizes that the Intended is deceiving herself and her idealized ideas are "heavily eroded by the obscure currents of self-deception" (Ophir, 2012, p. 342). In this sense, for Marlow, her voiced language becomes "a means of deception" (Paris, 2005, p. 70). Consequently, the obscurity of the Intended's voiced language not only reveals her naive nature but also the deception of colonialism.

## Conclusion

On the basis of Schleiermacher's hermeneutics, although the means of expression of silenced language and voiced language are different, they both function as signs that signify Conrad's critique of colonialism and his concern for humanity within certain historical background. The former, in a silenced way, criticizes colonial conquest based on Marlow's life of two stages. The latter, in a voiced way, presents the universal deception of colonialism upon the people of Conrad's era. Consequently, in *Heart of Darkness* the obscurity, namely the sign, not only demonstrates Marlow's perception of the physical world, but also reveals Conrad's concern for people's inner world. Ultimately, it enlightens that what is presented is not necessarily true and we need to pay more attention to details in order to extrapolate the truth of our world. Additionally, in this paper, only the obscurity of language is selected as an example. To gain more insight into the obscurity of *Heart of Darkness* and its implications, other focuses and theories might be indispensable in the future studies.

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<sup>7</sup> Although the Intended speaks in a definite voice, her utterances can be seen as a form of questions without the use of interrogation.

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