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Irish Nation but Which Language? Cultural and Linguistic Nationalism in Late Nineteenth-Century Ireland

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Abstract. In modern history Northern Ireland has been home to uneasy community relations. The construction of a collective identity which embraces ethnic and religious diversity, and attracts the politically antagonized Protestant and Catholic communities seems to be a key to the settlement of conflicts. But one of the factors preventing a firmly established inclusive Northern Irish identity is disorientation among Protestants concerning their national belonging. Although by now it is only political loyalty to the United Kingdom that most Ulster Protestants share in a sense of Britishness, they also feel distanced from a communion with Irishness.

This complicated Protestant identity kit, however, becomes more explicable with insight into Ireland's colonial history. In addition to being politically and economically dependent on Britain, the loss of most of its native traditions and ancient vernacular by the late nineteenth century made Ireland a cultural colony as well. The failure of previous fights for political freedom made a group of primarily protestant intellectuals define and decolonize the Irish nation in a cultural sense, thus aiming to shape an independent Irish identity.

The following study is mainly concerned with approaches to an ethnically and religiously inclusive Irish identity present in Protestant writings of a cultural-nationalistic orientation at the dawn of the twentieth century, and explores the linguistic identities that the authors, in their different nation-versions, associate with a culturally sovereign but largely English-speaking Irish population.

Keywords: Ireland, Irish-Gaelic, English, national language, native language, national and linguistic identity, cultural and linguistic nationalism, Protestant

1. The connection between the transformation of Protestant identity and the emergence of cultural nationalism in late nineteenth-century Ireland

The Irish language movement gaining new momentum in the 1970s and spreading over both the northern and the southern states of Ireland is primarily associated with the Catholic population. This view is underscored by survey figures which, for instance, indicated as few as 5.500 Protestant Irish speakers from a Northern Irish population of over 1.5 million in the late twentieth century (Pintér 165-66). By contrast, in the late nineteenth century the Irish literary and language revival movement had Anglo-Irish Protestants as its leaders, and appealed to wide Protestant circles. Evidence of the latter was a public meeting in April 1899, held in support of a demand for the teaching of Irish in national schools where “All classes and creeds were represented [...]. Nationalists and Unionists, Protestants and Catholics, were equally earnest in their advocacy of the language” (in Nowlan 45).

With regard to this significant change in the Irish language loyalty of the Protestant population, Terence Brown (“British Ireland” 73-75) argues that in post-Partition Northern Ireland Unionist Protestants lost or abandoned their previous Irish self-perception and constructed a “British Ireland” identity, and that this transformation of identity was a reaction to “a narrow, largely catholic and aggressively Gaelic version” of Irishness which gained ground in the Irish Free State from the 1920s. In Brown’s view northern Protestants felt that the southern, overwhelmingly Catholic state deprived them of an all-Ireland cultural consciousness which they still considered to be their own in the early twentieth century, despite their political affiliation to Britain.

Going a few decades backward, the question arises why Protestants with British roots took the lead in the popularization of cultural and linguistic nationalism in an Ireland of overwhelming Catholic majority. The answer lies in a changing social status of the Protestant population in the nineteenth century. After the 1829 Catholic Emancipation, the Irish Protestant community, particularly its dominant Anglican elite, experienced successive power crises. In 1869 the Anglican Church of Ireland was disestablished, and this was compounded by growing religious scepticism and secularism in a new generation of Irish Anglicans, due to the spreading Darwinian ideas. At the same time, the political leaders of Catholic Ireland increasingly looked upon the Anglo-Irish Protestant world as an alien culture.

In fact, several dominant figures and writers of Irish cultural nationalism came from deeply religious Protestant families, often with ecclesiastical or rectory backgrounds (Kiberd 422-23). It seems that the incapability of embracing the faith of their fathers along traditional lines, and the refusal “to follow the clergyman’s calling” implied a quest for a new identity by “the scions of the rectory” (Kiberd

424), and the sons of the spiritual-religious leaders of the Anglo-Irish community were now aspiring for the role of the nation's cultural leaders. The three centers of gravitation shaping Protestant attitude to Irish culture in late nineteenth-century Ireland were the Trinity College of Dublin, the Literary Revival Movement and the Gaelic League.

2. Trinity and the cosmopolitans

Since its foundation in the late sixteenth century, Trinity College Dublin had been the bastion of English-Anglican culture. Nevertheless, Henry Grattan, Wolfe Tone, Robert Emmet and Thomas Davis, Protestants instrumental in the construction of modern Irish nationalism, all attended Trinity (Rollestone 973). It was also at Trinity that philological research in Irish culture and language gravitated in the late eighteenth century. This tradition was then followed in the nineteenth century by such Protestant figures of the Gaelic Revival as Standish O'Grady and Douglas Hyde, both Trinity graduates. However, certain leading lecturers of the College developed an impatient and arrogantly dismissive attitude towards cultural revival. As Lady Gregory put it, "the Chinese Wall . . . separates Trinity College from Ireland" (in Vance 167).

Although both groups belonged to the Anglo-Irish elite, a clear division has been established between the movement centered around William Butler Yeats and Douglas Hyde, and the circle of Trinity intellectuals, labeling the former as 'national' and the latter as 'cosmopolitan' (Brown, "Cultural Nationalism" 517, Vance 167-168). Whereas both Yeats and Trinity intellectual John Eglinton considered English to be the most suitable means of modern literary expression in Ireland, Yeats maintained that Irish literature should be about great themes of the nation's past, but Eglinton insisted that modern Irish literature, like all great literature, should deal with universal human questions (Eglinton, "National Drama" 956).

While investigating an appropriate literary representation of the modern Irish nation, Eglinton distanced himself from anything traditionally Irish. In his *Bards and Saints* (70-74) he describes the Anglo-Irish as "the heirs of a superior culture," and identifies the Irish tongue with the isolated and backward "peasant hinterland," to which he adds, in the tone of the Anglo-Saxon empire builder carrying the white man's burden, that "it is fitting that the peasantry should have the language of a superior culture imposed upon them. Where the peasantry, or the main body of a population, receives that superior culture and civilization, the product is a genuine nationality" ("Bards and Saints" 71-74). Despite the fact that Eglinton did not speak Irish, he claimed that it "lacked analytic power" and "had never been to school" (in Kiberd 157). On this ground he feared that the revival of Irish, which was the main objective of Hyde's Gaelic League, would intellectually isolate

Ireland from Europe, condemning the “Irishman to speak in his national rather than in his human capacity” (Eglinton, “Bards and Saints” 73). By claiming that “the ancient language of the Celt is no longer the language of Irish nationality. And in fact it never was,” Eglinton (“Bards and Saints” 70) disrupted common roots between Irish language and nation, and connected the formation of the latter to its absorption of English-language culture.

3. William Butler Yeats and the literary revival

By contrast to Trinity cosmopolitans, Yeatsian cultural nationalists advocated a return to Ireland’s Gaelic tradition, to the energies of the “source.” They suggested that a rediscovery of the riches of old Gaelic literature “would generate a sense of national self-worth and of organic unity” (Brown, “Cultural Nationalism” 516, see also Yeats, “Literary Movement” 39), and did not refrain from cultural chauvinistic remarks either:

Alone among nations, Ireland has in her written Gaelic literature . . . , the forms in which the imagination of Europe uttered itself before Greece shaped a tumult of legend into her music of arts; . . . The legends of other European countries are less numerous, and not so full of energies from which the arts and our understanding of their sanctity arose.” (Yeats, “Literary Movement” 42)

Yeats’s emphasis on the European values of Irish tradition could serve to construct a European-Irish identity, liberated from its British chains. In addition, the return to an ancient all-Irish cultural source could encourage the accommodation of an identity embracing socio-cultural plurality. Yeats believed that the message of pre-colonial Ireland, free of ethnic and religious divisions, would make the thinking of modern individuals receptive of diversity by “shifting the borders of their minds” (Yeats, “Magic” 62).

A major dilemma for Yeats was finding the language that would authentically express the identity of a modern, inclusive Irish nation. In fact, Yeats’s Irish Literary Revival Movement “sought to supply the Ireland of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century with a sense of its own distinctive identity through the medium of the English language” (Brown, “Cultural Nationalism” 516). This approach appears reasonable for shaping the self-perception of a population which had, over centuries of colonization, shifted from Irish-Gaelic to English speech. Nevertheless, this Irish-English duality required theoretical reconciliation from cultural nationalists who claimed that there was inherent antagonism between Irish and English cultures. In fact, this apparent contradiction was highlighted by Yeats in the following two questions: “Can we not build a national tradition, a national

literature which shall be none the less Irish in spirit from being English in language?" (in Kiberd 155) and "Should [national literature] be written in the language that one's country does speak or the language it ought to speak?" (in Kiberd 164). Yeats's personal answer to these questions uncovers the dilemma of an Irish national writer with English as his mother tongue: "No man can think or write with music and vigour except in his mother tongue. . . . Gaelic is my native language, but it is not my mother tongue" (in Kiberd 253). On a national level, Yeats tried to dissolve the seeming opposition between Irish nation and English language by shifting emphasis from language to a richness of emotion, love of color, quickness of perception and spirituality as the "true marks" of Celtic nature, and by attempting to develop "sentimental connections" between the Anglo-Irish and the Irish nation (Cairns and Richards 67).

Yeats's flexible linguistic attitude also meant that, unlike Eglinton, he considered language retention important in the western rural countryside. There Gaelic linguistic continuity was accompanied by preserving Gaelic values and a tradition of life which existed in Ireland before Anglo-Saxon "commercialism" and "vulgarity" flooded it (in Kiberd 139). With reference to the revival of Irish-Gaelic, Yeats welcomed the spread of the native tongue if it led to bilingualism. As he wrote: "We are preparing, as we hope, for a day when Ireland will speak in Gaelic . . . within her borders, but speak, it may be, in English to other nations" (Yeats, "Literary Movement" 39). Yeats never claimed that the restoration of Irish would cause isolation for the country but he considered English as a channel enabling the Irish to keep lively contacts with other peoples and integrate with European culture. As is revealed here, at the turn of the twentieth century Yeats regarded English as a potential *lingua franca* between nations.

From among the varieties of English having evolved in Ireland over eight hundred years of colonial history, Hiberno-English showed the most similarity with Irish-Gaelic. Hiberno-English had been developed by Irish natives since the seventeenth century to facilitate communication with English-language settlers. By this process the Irish produced a "grafted English" which was comprehensible to other speakers of English but still showed Irish-Gaelic influence at every linguistic level, and truly reflected the cultural perspective and modes of thought of a people whose ancestral mother tongue was Irish (Todd 71-90). This form of speech showed conceptual harmony with Yeats's idea of expressing a genuine Irish identity in English. Consequently, while several Irish-Catholic nationalists despised Hiberno-English as a "hopeless half-way house" and a "bastard lingo" which is "neither good Irish nor good English," and celebrated standard Irish as a discourse matching Standard English, Yeats crusaded for the formal recognition of Hiberno-English dialect, which, he said, was "an imitation of nothing English" but the only "good" English used by Irish masses, reflecting Irish thought (in Kiberd 173-74). He also stated that Hiberno-English was a new linguistic idiom which "the Irish

people themselves created,” and which at its best was “more vigorous, fresh and simple than either of the two languages” between which it stood (in Kiberd 162-63).

4. Douglas Hyde, the Gaelic League, and the “Irish Ireland” idea

The most daring linguistic objective was envisaged by Douglas Hyde and the Gaelic League. They set out to restore the daily use of Irish for a population of which only 0.8 per cent was monoglot Irish speaker by the end of the nineteenth century (Denvir 20). Despite this fact, the Gaelic League, founded in 1893, became an all-Ireland mass movement by 1900. According to the League’s leading principle, saving the national identity of Ireland was unattainable through the medium of English. Consequently, they considered Irish speech vital to an authentic linguistic expression of Irishness.

Douglas Hyde, founder and leader of the League until 1910, had been born to English speaking Protestant parents in Western Sligo, but he acquired Irish as a child from peasants in Roscommon County, and in his adult life he became an Irish-language enthusiast. His *The Necessity for De-Anglicizing Ireland* (1892) has been the most passionate lecture ever delivered in support of Irish-Gaelic. For Hyde Irish-Gaelic formed the cultural ground upon which a uniquely Irish identity could be constructed. In his line of thought cultural and linguistic decolonization meant the prerequisite for a sovereign nation. But in order to embrace Irish-Catholic as well as Anglo-Irish Protestant, this decolonizing process had to be inclusive, and not exclusive, thus elevating the Irish people to a higher level of national existence.

In order to decolonize Ireland in a cultural and linguistic sense, Hyde and the Gaelic Leaguers advocated a program of restoring “Irish Ireland.” In Hyde’s words:

I appeal to every one whatever his politics—for this is no political matter—to do his best to help the Irish race to develop in future upon Irish lines . . . because upon Irish lines alone can the Irish race once more become what it was yore—one of the most original, artistic, literary, and charming peoples of Europe. (11)

The “Irish Ireland” idea rooted in a reaction to Ireland becoming part of a single, integrated cultural zone of which England was the center, and Ireland, having lost its native tongue and tradition, was reduced to a mere imitation of Victorian England (O’Tuathaigh 56). The program of “Irish Ireland” aimed at liberating Irish thought and mentality from a state of dependence on English culture. Consequently, Hyde blamed the Irish themselves who “apparently hate the

English,” and decry their “vulgar” culture, but at the same time continue “to imitate” it; who “clamour for recognition as a distinct nationality,” but at the same time throw away with both hands what would make them so (Hyde 2-3).

In Hyde’s concept of “Irish Ireland” the Irish language was postulated as a binding force for the nation, but this had to face two obvious contradictions. Firstly, by the late nineteenth century the Irish population had largely become English speaking, and secondly, it held a fairly negative attitude to the ancient tongue. Beyond this, English was the printed medium of nineteenth-century Ireland: newspapers, political and literary texts capable of appealing to a modern nation all came out in English. In George D. Boyce’s words: “English was the medium through which nationalist Ireland became a political reality” (254).

We should ask why Hyde chose the restoration of Irish as a source for constructing a modern Irish consciousness. Because he considered the liberation of Irish culture to be the primary step to the liberation of the Irish nation. He was convinced that Ireland’s cultural separation from Anglo-Saxon civilization necessitated a linguistic separation at its core. Thus, in Hyde’s version of an Irish nation, regained independence is symbolized by a revived Irish language. Hyde expects Irish to serve as a motor for the cultural elevation of the nation, and cultural elevation to create an inclusive Irish nation.

Douglas Hyde destined the Irish language to integrate a modern cultural nation, which is uniquely Irish but embraces both Catholic and Protestant social elements. In one interpretation Hyde was an idealist because the restoration of Irish was unrealizable with a largely English-speaking population, and his “Irish Ireland” identity myth failed to prove legitimate for large sections of the Irish people at the dawn of the twentieth century. But, seen from another perspective, his conception of Irishness projected the image of a modern civic nation, which embraces internal otherness, and shifts emphasis from beliefs in blood, ethnic and religious bonds to the decision of the individual as the basis of national belonging.

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“Up Like a Rocket, Down Like a Stick”: The Rise and Demise of the Celtic Tiger

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Abstract. As the most globalized nation in the world, Ireland produced its own global-village idiots, who, through greed and corruption, killed the Celtic Tiger which as it collapsed plunged Ireland from great wealth to asking or not asking for massive loans. After reviewing the historical and economic background, the essay discusses relevant literary works from Brian Friel’s *The Mundy Scheme* to Paul Murray’s *Skippy Dies*.

Keywords: Celtic Tiger, housing bubble, corruption, greed, *The Mundy Scheme*, *Skippy Dies*

The Hungarian Foreign Minister, Dr János Martonyi, says Ireland is “extremely important and relevant” for his country as its government negotiates entry to the EU and endeavors to catch up with more developed countries. . . . “Ireland means catching up can be done. It is seen in Hungary as the main inspiration, model, and image of that process. If we really want to maintain diversity we have to stick to identity—that is also the Irish message.”

(Quoted in Paul Gillespe) *The Irish Times*, 4 April 2001

“Ireland was rich, its people were not . . .” (Fintan O’Toole 92)

“I can take anything except another season of adolescent fantasizing.”
(Tom Mac Intyre 23)

In discussing cultural history, especially recent cultural history, the temptation is often to ignore the human dimension in favor of broad sweeping generalizations about the times, its cultural productions and its actors upon the national or local stage. This lecture will be no exception as I yield to this temptation but before I do I would like to put a human face on the price paid for this sordid story of greed, corruption, and vanity, which we know as “the Celtic Tiger.” The first face belongs to a young Trinity College student, Simon Phelan studying Civil Engineering. When admitted to Trinity, the Irish economy was growing 5.4% per year and unemployment was low at 4.4%. This spring with the economy down over the past year by 7.5%, of the 100 students in his class only two have had job interviews—that is, as of April 2010, no one has a job or been offered a job. Many in his class are searching abroad for work.

The second face is middle aged and worried because of having two young children and a thirty-year mortgage on a house. He is Robert Peelo, 35 and an Irish public servant in the Garda or Irish Police force. Previous to this year and for several years his salary rose at a predictable rate of around 6% per year. This year he received no raise but instead suffered a deep cut in salary of 18%, which means a decrease of 24% in expected income and 18% in actual income. At the same time an old Irish code of ethics prohibits anyone in the Garda from taking on any other work but that of policing. So he works all the overtime he can get, but that, too, is diminishing (Shah).

The third is a friend in her fifties who, having raised a family, went back to university and took a part-time job in an office where she quickly became a key person in increasing the office’s productivity. Last January her official work evaluation gave her the highest marks, then in February she was called into the manager’s office and summarily dismissed as the last-hired-first-fired—an act that will inevitably lower the office’s productivity (private communication).

All three are the innocent victims of increasing unemployment, decreasing net worth, the bursting of the biggest housing bubble in history, corporate and individual greed, and short-sighted government action designed to paper-over previous inaction rather than to address the fundamental economic and political swamp that led to this economic and social disaster. At the McGill Summer School for 2009, over forty invited Irish scholars, politicians, and public figures discussed and debated the current economic turmoil and the vast majority of them concluded that the political culture left over from the British colonial period that helped create and perpetuate cronyism, a belief in being embattled, and the necessity to protect “our own” against “them” had contributed greatly to the current malaise. The exceptions to this were the Fianna Fail politicians, most notably Brian Lenihan, the Minister for Finance who, in denial mode, proclaimed that “the vast majority got something out of the Celtic Tiger. It was not something for bankers and developers”! (82). True, most people made a few euro as they plunged deeper into

debt and dutifully paid their payroll taxes, but it was the developers and bankers who made millions and paid little or nothing into the public treasury. In a further nod to patent absurdity, Mr. Lenihan’s recipe for getting out of the mess was to return to the spirit and program of “1922 when the British cleared everything but the typewriters out of the country” (90). Such nostalgia played a significant role in the demise of the Tiger and the government’s obvious inability to deal with the consequences of its own disastrous economic and social policies.

1. The historical background

Historically, Ireland went from “the sick man of Europe” in the 1980s (O’Toole 16) to the wealthiest nation in Europe in the late 1990s to one of the PIIGS (Portugal, Ireland, Italy, Greece, and Spain) in danger of sovereign default in the first decade of the new century. The contemporary historian of Ireland, Roy Foster correctly observes that “for Ireland, it is the rate of change in the last thirty years of the twentieth century that is the most bewildering” (3). That and the increased social inequality brought on by the excesses of the Celtic Tiger.¹

Ireland joined the European Economic Community in 1973 as one of the poorest nations in Western Europe and remained such until 1992 when coincidentally it joined the Euro Zone in signing the Maastricht Treaty. The Taoiseach or Irish Prime Minister, Bertie Ahern would later—and in slightly less than one hour—easily account for this stunning change in a talk he gave round the world, “How to Grow Rich the Irish Way.” He revealed all—for only a mere €30,000 speaking fee. I am, however, willing to share his formula for creating national wealth for slightly less: Ahern’s formula for getting rich consisted of three main actions all to be carried out within the context of massive globalization. 1. Low personal and corporate taxes; 2. a “business-friendly government”; and 3. light business and banking regulation, if any. Now, it is true that Ireland is the world’s most globalized economy and for a brief few years Ireland became very rich, but as for the formula itself, I believe it is highly suspect, if not wildly inaccurate.

Ireland became so very rich so quickly in part because it had been so unusually poor for a European country because of its own peculiar colonial history that led to its non-participation in major European economic revolutions, such as industrialization and modern farming methods. According to Ray Mac Sharry and Patrick White “[i]n 1922, over half the labour force was engaged in agriculture and two-thirds of the population lived in rural areas” (41). Little changed from 1922 to

¹ Carmen Kuhling and Kiernan Keohane in their extensively researched study, *Cosmopolitan Ireland: Globalisation and Quality of Life* document “the increased polarization between rich and poor . . . and . . . the dependence of the Irish economy on global, specifically US-based multinationals” (16).

1972. Employment outside agriculture was sparse and wages were low, which led, in turn, to high immigration. “Today [2000], just one in ten work on the land, while two-thirds live in town” (41). In the 1950s tentative measures were taken in an attempt to improve the economy, but most of them failed or produced only temporary, small results.

Nor did joining the EEC in 1973 solve Ireland’s basic problems of poor education, an inferior health system, meager pensions, and an infrastructure that featured inadequate roads and an antiquated telephone service. Irish education varied from very good primary education to poor quality free secondary education—the latter only recently introduced in 1967. Higher education consisted of only two universities: Trinity College in Dublin and the National University of Ireland with campuses in Dublin (UCD), Cork (UCC), and Galway (NUCG). Various attempts to change any of these deficiencies resulted in little or no progress and in the process Ireland acquired a huge national debt that ate 70% of all taxes collected in interest alone. The Irish did, however, learn from their mistakes and in the late 1980s things changed for the better.

More significantly, a new broad general agreement was reached that future European Union grants would be used to improve the foundation of Irish society through financing expensive changes to higher education, while at the same time improving Irish infrastructure. Ireland lacked significant national resources. Irish agriculture could not greatly expand. But the Irish work force could be and was fundamentally changed through free education both at the secondary and the tertiary level. To meet this exponentially expanded need all higher education in Ireland became free for all students; universities expanded, while new ones together with technical institutes became established. The result was an educated work force that became the envy of Europe as it proved a central inducement in attracting foreign investment to Ireland.²

Besides investing in education, government, labor, and business all agreed to “A Social Compact” that emphasized the creation of “A Caring Society” that would provide the needed education along with health care, pensions, and other social services in return for labor peace and increased productivity (O’Toole 18-19). In the political realm, political stability was achieved through a series of coalition governments.

How much each of these efforts contributed to Irish prosperity is a matter for historians to debate. What we do know is that an educated work force combined

² Fintan O’Toole ruefully and rightly notes that “[a] rare reason to be cheerful after the bursting of the Irish bubble was that 42.3 per cent of the population aged 25-34 had completed third-level education, the second highest rate in the EU” (18). A high degree of foreign investment is, however, a very mixed blessing as may be seen in “the Irish microcomputer assembly sector [that] experienced serious job losses and plant closures. This reversal . . . clearly demonstrates the vulnerability to changing circumstances of a branch-plant economy such as Ireland’s” (Egaraan and Breathnach 137).

with a new Irish work ethic led to greatly increased productivity and foreign investment, a vibrant, expanded middle class, and an increase in population as Ireland began to attract rather than export immigrants.³ All of these phenomena were capped off by the election in 1990 of Mary Robinson as President of the Irish Republic who brought with her a positive view of the value of being Irish. Thus the Irish were well on their way to having a prosperous nation of which they could all be proud when greed and corruption combined to destroy such promises.

2. The Village Idiots

The English Royal Astronomer, Martin Rees once declared that “the global village will have its global idiots,” and he is surely right. As the most globalized nation in the world, Ireland produced a host of global idiots and, unfortunately, they were often put in charge of its financial and political institutions as well as its several property development companies. Through greed and corruption they killed the Celtic Tiger within a few short years bursting the housing bubble and plunging the country into steep economic decline.

It would be difficult to overestimate the role of corruption in this debacle. The *Rowntree Report on Political Corruption in Ireland* concluded in 2002 that “[c]orruption is a central theme of Irish life and politics. Ireland is now regarded as one of the more corrupt European Union countries” (quoted in Kuhling and Keohane 30). Or, as Fintan O’Toole phrased it somewhat more polemically when describing the role of “[Betie] Ahern, [Charlie] McCreevy and . . . Mary Harney,” the heads of government:

They had an opportunity that was unique in Irish history. . . . and they blew it. They allowed an unreconstructed culture of cronyism, self-indulgence and, at its extremes, of outright corruption, to remain in place, with fatal long-term consequences. . . . they practiced the economics of utter idiocy . . . (19-20).

The politicians were not alone in their rapaciousness and short-sightedness, however. Foremost among these people who epitomized greed and corruption was Seán Fitzpatrick. As president of the Anglo-Irish Bank he was never shy about making loans, especially to himself for at one time in 2007 he owed his bank 129 million euro! (O’Toole 192; see also Fottrell). Moreover, he made sure the shares of his bank traded at a good price by loaning each of the bank’s 15 directors one and a half million euro each with which to buy this same bank’s stock! (Fottrell). And he believed in the rapid circulation of money and so improved the bank’s

³ For a detailed discussion of the change from a net yearly loss of population to spectacular gains, see Piaras Mac Éinri.

balance sheet through an incredibly complicated scheme that increased his deposits one year by six million euro at no cost to anyone—not even the bank and did this not once but repeatedly (O’Toole 206). Since the Irish celebrate St Patrick’s Day for the better part of a week, the Guards showed considerable restraint in waiting until Thursday 18 March to arrest Seán Fitzpatrick. (For the full story, see Fottrell.)

Another paragon of corruption, greed, and bad taste, Seán Dunne was a larger than life figure worthy of the great Latin satirist Petronius, whose work, *The Satyricon* includes one of the best set-pieces in western satire, “Dinner with Trimalchio”—a marvelous exposé of Roman society at its nadir. Trimalchio, an incredibly wealthy, willfully ignorant, and somewhat arrogant man, gives a huge dinner party for the sole purpose of displaying his considerable wealth while inadvertently demonstrating his amazing bad taste. In this memorable and wildly comic set-piece Petronius succeeds in heisting the Roman *nouveau arrivé* with his own petard.

In a similar period of excess in turn-of-the-century-Ireland, as the Celtic Tiger grew in strength fueled by Irish taxpayers’ money, driven by greed, and sustained by corruption, much of society succeeded in reaching new heights of extreme bad taste. Trimalchio might have felt right at home in this Ireland of omni-present ostentatious displays of newly acquired “baubles, bangles, and bright shiny [hotels],” with huge fleets of high-end automobiles creating traffic jams, newly-constructed houses on their way to becoming palaces, million-euro multi-day and -night parties, and jet-setting politicians who eschewed prop airplanes, trains, or automobiles to jet around the tiny island of Ireland in real jets.⁴ In all this rampant extravagance, one Irish person stood out above all the rest, one who would prove worthy of being named “The Trimalchio of the Celtic Tiger Era,” and that was property-developer, bon-vivant, and host-extraordinaire, Seán Dunne. Seán Dunne built many hotels and houses whether they were needed or not (O’Toole 116). He conceived of the enormous Dockland development project planned to include the new home for the Irish National Theatre—the Abbey Theatre. With three other developers he bought the *Christina O* “venue for the wedding receptions of Onassis and Jackie Kennedy in 1968 and of Grace Kelly and Prince Rainier in 1956” (O’Toole 2). The four Irishmen bought Onassis’s famous yacht, however, using taxpayer’s money to finance 80% of its purchase price. But all these schemes pale in comparison with the extremes of his wedding and his subsequent reckless investments in land.

First the wedding: Seán Dunne’s wedding took place “in a seventeenth-century villa on the Italian Riviera” with a highly select invited guest list of “bankers and footballers, designers and theater directors, not to mention . . .

⁴ For example, Mary Harney in eighteen months took two dozen flights “to exotic destinations like Galway, Cork, Kerry and Shannon” (O’Toole 90).

political deal-makers” gushed the newspaper that employed the bride (quoted in O’Toole 1). Fintan O’Toole summarizes the extravagance:

The party cost 1.5 million, but was merely a prelude to a longer, more lavish nuptial celebration. . . . Forty-four guests were taken on a two-week cruise around the Mediterranean. The cost of chartering the yacht is 65,000 a day, not including food, drink, and fuel. The fuel charge was 575 an hour. (1-2)

When he returned to his native Ireland Seán Dunne went on a land-acquisition buying spree purchasing two famous Ballsbridge hotels that he planned to demolish and replace with a grandiose highrise. He paid €260 million for the pair—a fabulous price—and then completed the land parcel by acquiring a small piece of ground for what was “believed to be one of the highest prices paid for a piece of real estate ever, anywhere”. . . [at] “€195 million an acre” (O’Toole 3). I dwell on this example to give some idea of the extravagance to which greed and unbridled lust for wealth could and did lead. What interests me as a student of literature is how Irish writers reacted to this unparalleled situation—How did such Tiger-excesses transmute into literature and in what forms?

3. The Taoiseach and the Irish theater

Brian Friel in a 1969 far too-neglected play, *The Mundy Scheme* presented some of the weaknesses and the greed that would lead to the rise and demise of the Celtic Tiger. The leading character, also a Taoiseach, is F. X. Ryan, a compilation of all the conniving politicians that ever cut a deal or betrayed a colleague in the name of financial gain and/or increasing their power. Long before the Tiger began his long slouch towards the Golden Euro, Friel dissected the greed, irreverence, ambition, and extravagance that would feed it. In *The Mundy Scheme* he pillories Irish cupidity, especially in its politicians—a subject apparently no longer welcome on the Irish stage (see the negative contemporary reviews of Sebastian Barry’s *Hinterland*). The premise of the scheme developed by a Texan-Irish-American Homer Mundy, Jr. and therefore appropriately named after him (196) is simplicity itself: Irish Americans long to return to Ireland, to return, as they put it, to “the old sod.” So why not make it possible for them to do in death what all of them wished to do but so many failed to do in life by turning the sparsely populated and useless West of Ireland into a huge American cemetery. The scheme has everything to recommend it: an increase in scheduled Aer Lingus flights landing in the west, a boost for the political party in power, more income for the Church, fuller employment for the impoverished west, and not least, of course, returning a sizable profit to the various politicians and bureaucrats involved in conceiving of and implementing the scheme.

What is prescient about the play is Friel's notion of turning a profit by filling vacant land with cemeteries. Slightly less than thirty-five years later developers would hatch a similar scheme that would fill the vacant land in and around small villages with large tracts of houses ostensibly for rent but in reality built almost solely to collect a state subsidy for the building itself. The result is that dozens of villages are, in effect, more empty today than they were before the building spree (O'Toole 116). The County of Leitrim, for example,

ended up with almost one in three of its houses empty and with hundreds of houses built in villages like Dromod or Leitrim village that recorded only a very small increase in actual population. It is a strange housing boom that leaves such places literally emptier than they were before.

The state . . . [subsidized] around €2 billion in all—the building of houses whose purpose was to provide shelter, not for real people, but for the taxes of their builders. (O'Toole 117)

Unfortunately thus far such Celtic Tiger excesses have yet to produce a Petronius with his unflinching comic vision or a Juvenal with his righteous outrage—though Fintan O'Toole does come close at least in his outrage—and thus far no Horace, gentle but barbed. The office of Taoiseach itself was lampooned by Tom Mac Intyre in *Only an Apple* (2009) by focusing on the Taoiseach's vanity and self-importance, but leaving untouched the issues of greed and to a less extent, corruption. When Sebastian Barry's fine satiric play, *Hinterland* earlier debuted in Ireland in 2002, however, many reviewers panned it—not because of its dramatic qualities or failings but because its target, Charles Haughey, the former Taoiseach at that point had lost his wife to cancer and was rumored to be not too well himself. (The play suggests he has prostate cancer, hence its multiple-punning title.) Reviewers thought it unfair to kick a man down on his luck even if, according to the Moriarty Tribunal, he had taken payments of “€11.56 million between 1979 and 1996 (equivalent to €45 million in contemporary [2006] values and ‘granted favours in return’” (Foster 89; see also O'Toole who notes that this sum equaled “171 times his total salary payments as a full-time politician” [27]).

For the retired Taoiseach, Johnny Silvester in *Hinterland* “politician” becomes a term of contempt even as he abuses the public trust to line his pockets believing that simply his being the head of the government of the country and bringing about economic well-being justifies his taking whatever he can for himself. By definition as head of state he must be above the law. There is one law for the small and the weak and the middling, another for the powerful, and yet another for the one on top, such as himself. Barry is clear that this Taoiseach has indeed made sacrifices for his country. He is no Tricky Dickey Tierney who'd “sell his country for four pence—ay—and go down on his bended knees and thank the

Almighty Christ he had a country to sell,” as Joyce so memorably pilloried the sleazy Dublin politician of another year (102). No, this is a man who believes he is entitled by the sacrifices he made of family and friends to help himself to the public coffers. Nor, as he says, do the Irish people begrudge him wealth but see it as deserved. Only the media—those archetypal begrudgers—object, or so he would have us believe. “I’ve gone from king to criminal in the space of a couple of years. Did I not serve this country well? Did I not create this plenty they now enjoy? I couldn’t have done what I have done without being the man that I am. . . . There is not a drop of blood on these hands” (32).

As the historian Roy Foster documents, by the time he became Taoiseach in 1979 and throughout the rollercoaster ride of the next twelve years, Haughey never lost his sense of entitlement. In some ways [reflected in the play] he kept it to the end of his life” (77).

Later in Act Two, Johnny grants an interview to a spirited young undergraduate, Aisling, who is doing a term paper at UCD. In the course of the interview he reveals the convoluted way he laundered money (54). Aisling, in her turn, asserts that her father, who teaches Modern Irish History in the Hinterland of Galway, was also precocious when young and that he also held considerable promise, but, unlike Johnny Silvester, he never sold out for cash. He thus represents many of those who believe they have been betrayed. To which Johnny rejoins:

Look, I made this country. How you live, how you are, the clothes on your pretty back, even your damned confusion in the face of reality—you owe it all to me. I made you, Aisling Dwyer. Asked the hard questions, long ago. The father of the nation. . . . I have the whole country against me now. . . . They will never understand. It’s because they’re comfortable, afflicted by comfort. (59)

This encounter between Johnny and Aisling relates explicitly to Barry’s theme of the Great Man of Our Time—the politician who comes from humble beginnings, rises through the ranks to govern the country, but who along the way succumbs to those temptations presented to people in positions of power. Such temptations are usually classified in newspaper and television accounts primarily under the headings of money and sex but which Barry more carefully groups under the rubric of hubris—hubris that dares identify the good of the country with the good of the man governing the country. “I am the giant of the modern era. The age of Silvester will take up many a chapter in the history of Ireland. Whatever you do to me now, no one can erase me” he boasts (82). Thus Barry, like Friel before him, strikes at the hypocrisy of this genial paragon of corruption who amassed a fortune but not from his Taoiseach’s salary.

4. Property developers, immigrants, Tiger children, and novels

Thus far no writer has taken on the property developers who butchered the rural landscape causing untold future ecological disasters and current economic and aesthetic ones. Those developers made their money solely in *constructing* the houses not in selling or leasing them. Thanks to outrageously generous government subsidies engineered by their friends in high places, developers never had to take seriously the capitalistic prospect of selling their new houses in order to turn a profit. Such Potemkin-like tracts remain today a potent symbol of the Tiger's cynical greed.⁵

And it is exactly that cynical selfish greed that Anne Hagerty coruscates in *One Day as a Tiger* (1997). In Hagerty's novel an entirely irresponsible, feckless young man causes the death of his brother and indirectly that of his parents, betrays everyone who attempts to befriend him from his Trinity tutor to his one-time girl friend. Worse still, he seduces his sister-in-law then runs away with her to France where together they live it up in five star hotels, indulge in glamorous clothes and extravagant meals, and spend their days at the racetrack backing losers putting everything on the credit card. The novel's title, *One Day as a Tiger* reflects the little time needed to destroy love, friendship, husbandry, while indulging in waste, revenge, greed, and extravagance—that ubiquitous leitmotif of the Tiger.

Much of the Tiger's economic prosperity was fueled by relatively cheap immigrant labor, personified in the UK by the "Polish Plumber," but there also were Polish bartenders and bouncers, Hungarian laborers and cleaners, Lithuanian pimps and prostitutes. Chris Binchy in his third novel, *Open-handed* (2008) delineates how such immigrants become exploited by various Irish hotel owners, landlords, managers, and sex-traffickers. Yet the most memorable character in the novel may well be not an immigrant but the Irishman Sylvester who sees himself as a most sophisticated operator wise to the ways of the world and whose grand plans for gaining a Tiger fortune hinge on his being admitted into a consortium formed in order to buy Prague real estate. His grand plan unravels, however, thanks to his naïf belief in his superior knowledge of the world and in his ability to access important potential business partners by impressing them with his business acumen. At the conclusion of the novel, as he leaves a hotel having tipped extravagantly a Polish prostitute, he discovers that his precious yellow bag

⁵ The Irish scheme is reminiscent of that of Grigory Potemkin, a Russian minister who in 1787 built fake villages in the Crimea to impress the Empress Catherine with the worth of her new conquest along the banks of the Dnieper River. Irish developers built row upon row of new homes which unlike Potemkin Villages were real as far as construction went but fake as housing for real people. The vast majority were never sold and never occupied and the result was the creation of desolation and not as in Potemkin Villages to hide desolation.

containing €100,000 is missing. Losing a sum that large is serious enough, but, far worse for Sylvester is the fact that the €100,000 is not his money but belongs to his four partners in that Prague real estate scheme. He only had it in trust as he was responsible for personally couriering the cash to Prague—an assignment given him by his “partners” that should have immediately set off alarm bells. Unfortunately, he is too blind to see that these euro notes must be part of an elaborate million-euro money-laundering scheme involving deflated Prague property which the reader realizes involves money from the drug trade. Binchy makes use of the well-known Irish phenomenon of “family businesses established in the heroin-trading flats . . . [that] cemented their money and power in these years: the black economy of bundles of cash transported in sports holdalls operated across the social spectrum” (Foster 85).

Sylvester’s role is, therefore, only that of a convenient tool for these drug lords, his erstwhile “partners” who will not be happy with *his* losing *their* money. A small man acting out a tiny role on a large stage littered with pitfalls and trapdoors none of which he sees let alone recognizes as dangerous. What links *Open-handed* to *One Day as a Tiger* is the similar focus on the leitmotif of Tigerish greed, blatant disregard for other people, and blindness to the consequences of impetuous actions.

Paul Murray’s *An Evening of Long Goodbyes* (2003) also satirizes Irish greed, innocence, extravagance, excessive self-interest, and naïveté and does so with wit and satire. As Chekhov one hundred years ago, so Murray satirically lambastes the *nouveau arrivé*, with special attention given to the huge fortunes made in mobile phones. “In mid-1999, a series of linked government measures was announced, designed to get Ireland into a leading position in the race to become the country of choice in Europe for electronic-commerce business” (Mac Sharry and White 298). As Barry had done in *Hinterland*, Murray dwells on the consequences of unimagined wealth that brings in its wake corruption, scandal, and the ever-present tribunals. The dead father in *The Evening of Long Goodbyes*, for instance, like Barry’s retired Taoiseach made a lot of money that he carefully hid in various bank accounts located around Ireland—an action that Charles Haughey was famous for. Charles’s father put money in trust funds under various names and in off-shore blind accounts in order to avoid taxes or worse. The checks for his mortgage payments were never drawn on the same bank twice. He hid the money so well that his heirs in desperate need of funds to avoid foreclosure on their house and lands cannot locate a single account.

But worse, the father, who for Charles epitomizes ingenuity and wisdom, becomes progressively identified with sleaze reflected in his various sexual adventures with under-aged models. To compound his offences, while blatantly illustrating both his stupidity and contempt for others’ opinions, he often conducted such escapades in the family home.

As Charles discovers the unsettling truth that his is actually a house of financial, moral, and artistic decay, the axes ring in the orchard as the bank forecloses. The dystopian reality of his family so apparent to the reader slowly if partially dawns on Charles forcing him to acknowledge his beloved sister's death or, at least, permanent absence, his ineffectual, alcoholic mother and depraved and probably crooked father, and, perhaps even more difficult, his own hopes deferred or cancelled. The Celtic Tiger's promise of largess lies elsewhere and with others as Charles at the end of the novel labors at long last in a real, if menial job. Like an old dog, he, too, has been tossed out on the rubbish heap, but without hope of rescue.

Murray's second novel, *Skippy Dies* (2010) paints a far darker, far more tragic portrait of the price the Celtic Tiger has exacted on families and particularly on the young. An excellent portrayal of the world of wealthy Irish teenagers at the time of their initiation into experience, the novel spares no one charged with caring for or educating the young. Time and again this Tiger absents itself leaving its cubs to raise themselves in a hostile environment with little or no protection from predators. Or, to change metaphors, this is the under-belly of the Celtic Tiger where parents neglect children and/or keep them out of sight by enrolling them in high-priced boarding schools leaving themselves unencumbered and free to play, make money, enjoy life. But as in the disaster brought on by the demise of the Tiger itself, the result for the young ranges from death and maiming to insanity and neglect as their boarding school, like the proverbial house of cards or the Celtic Tiger itself, collapses—"up like a rocket and down like a stick" (Joyce, *Ulysses* 371).

Hopefully, Irish fiction and drama will continue to examine the demise of the Celtic Tiger bringing before the public the corrupt, inept, and callous. Perhaps someday soon an Irish Petronius will appear to answer the very real need for biting satire. For today, there are few or no cranes to be seen on the Dublin skyline as the building trades remain idle, banks have collapsed including all investment banks and a few of their officers have been indicted, several multi-nationals have left for greener pastures and cheaper labor, while far too many small firms, such as Hughes & Hughes bookstores have closed their doors. Houses have lost so much value that a high percentage are now "under water," while those people with mortgages they can no longer pay have lost their homes. Far too many innocent people, such as those three with whom I began this essay have paid and are continuing to pay a fearful price for the greed and corruption of others. I hope that this part of the Irish model will not continue to be what inspires Hungary or any other country.

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Interart Representation in the *Künstlerdrama*. Word, Image, and Music in Contemporary Irish Plays

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Abstract. Theater as a “hidden magnet” (Kandinsky) and a “hypermedium that incorporates all arts and media” (Chapple), proves to be a most natural space where conventionally distinct medial forms of articulation can exist and operate together. It is particularly true of different forms of art in the *Künstlerdrama*. The paper interrogates, through three contemporary Irish plays—Frank McGuinness’ *Innocence* (1987), Thomas Kilroy’s *The Shape of Metal* (2003), and Brian Friel’s *Performances* (2003), which foreground a painter, a sculptor and a composer protagonist, respectively—how one form of art can interact with another without annihilating it, how borders between separate art forms are crossed, how each form of art, present in their own materiality, amplifies the voice of the other, and how meaning and signification is formed as the accumulative effect of word, image, and music.

Keywords: Irish drama, *Künstlerdrama*, interart, intermediality

Leonardo da Vinci in his *Paragone* (debate about the competition between painting and poetry) calls upon the Hungarian King Mathias to judge whether poetry or painting is the superior form of art. With a little cheating, he gets a poet and a painter to bring birthday presents to the king; the poet his poem that glorifies the day of the king’s birth, the painter the portrait of the king’s beloved. Little wonder that Mathias chooses the painting and then justifies his choice by maintaining that painting is superior to literature because it affects our “nobler” senses, the eyes whereas poetry penetrates our minds through the ears. The

argument continues by pointing out that arts appeal to “the harmony of the soul” which is born in moments when the proportions of objects become visible or audible, and since they can be perceived in painting all at once, while in poetry can be made manifest only stretched out in time, the latter cannot impress the soul in the same way (86).¹ In this argument there lies one of the chief distinctions between literature and the fine arts, one being a temporal, the other a spatial form; whereas pictorial time is a condensed time, poetry operates, by necessity, in succession as it unfolds line by line. This distinction is elaborated on by Lessing in his famous *Laokoon* essay (1764), then further developed by Hegel, Heidegger and others. The contest between different forms of art recurs from time to time in philosophers’ and artists’ contemplations, thus, for instance, Kant and Schlegel believed that poetry was the superior art form, later Schopenhauer, Mallarmé, Verlaine, Walter Pater, Oscar Wilde, George Steiner that music was superior to all other arts, to the perfection of which every other form aspires. But already in the mid-nineteenth century composite arts, opera and theater became regarded as the highest form of representation by Wagner and Hegel, respectively. In modern, and even more in postmodern arts, when various forms of representation are combined and mingled in a wide variety of intermediality and multimodality, the contest has lost its validity. Today it is a commonplace that all media are mixed. The question most usually arises *how* the art forms are mingled in the various degrees of combination, referencing, and intermediality, how far the distinct forms of art can still remain themselves, and how meaning is created within and in-between those forms.

Theater has always been especially suitable to combine and integrate several forms of art, in interaction with each other without extinguishing any of them but rather allowing them to amplify the voice of one another. Theater offers simultaneously visible and audial, spatial and temporal experience, both condensing and stretching out in time, relying on the accumulative effect of word, image, music (and often other art forms as well). It does not translate one form of art into another, nor does it root the interpretation of one in the structure of the other, but allows them to live together. This is why Wassily Kandinsky suggested that the stage operates as a “hidden magnet” in which the different arts affect one another (qtd. in Chapple 31) and Chiel Kattenbelt calls theater a “hybermedium that incorporates all arts and media” (29).

This is especially true for the *Künstlerdrama*, which, similarly to the *Künstlerroman*, thanks to an artist protagonist, naturally leads to the thematization of essential questions and dilemmas of the existence of art and the artist, the nature of artistic creation, the relations between art and life, the subject and “objective” reality, the individual and the community, the differences between artistic and non-

¹ My translation into English from the Hungarian translation.

artistic value systems, and the role and function of the artist in the contemporary world. But the *Künstlerroman*, however graphically it presents art work through verbal evocation, still remains within the confines of verbal expression, whereas theater, in its physical medium is able to make artifacts visibly and audibly present on the stage. Visual art or music onstage conveys an immediate impact never entirely expressible in words or action. A work of art might reinforce or contradict the words of the artist with a direct effect on the audience, making them immediately feel art's power as well as contemplate its significance within and without the play. The genre itself, but more particularly the work of the artist-protagonist onstage then raises intriguing questions of (re)presentation and further layers of self-reflexivity.

In Irish culture the ancient role of the artist as healer, prophet, and spiritual leader of the community, survived longer than elsewhere in Western Europe. Hence Yeats, preoccupied with the artist and his function in society at the time of the Irish Renaissance, could still evoke the life-forming power of art in his poetry, drama, and essays as late as the beginning of the twentieth century. In *The King's Threshold* (1904), for instance, the artist very directly influences creation:

the poets hung
 Images of the life that was in Eden
 About the childbed of the world, that it,
 Looking upon those images, might bear
 Triumphant children.² (111-12)

Yet Yeats continually juxtaposes the omnipotence of the artist with the insensitivity, lack of understanding and even hostility of the world towards it. The 1921 revised version of *On The King's Threshold* does not close with the glorification of the martyrdom of the poet who died in a hunger strike protesting against the artist being deprived of his ancient rights and prestige but rather with the disillusioned words of his disciples:

nor song nor trumpet-blast
 Can call up races from the worsening world
 To mend the wrong and mar the solitude
 Of the great shade we follow to the tomb. (143)

² Yeats's idea of art's such direct, reality-shaping function has ancient and medieval antecedents, such as, for example, in the Greek Heliodorus' third-century novel, "The Ethiopian Story," in which the Ethiopian queen looked at the Andromeda picture on the wall when she conceived her child and the child looked like the figure in the picture, or in Soranus, the doctor-writer's story quoted by St. Augustin, the tyrant and crippled Dionysios put a beautiful picture in front of his wife to conceive a beautiful child (Freeberg 217).

Although Yeats's disillusionment in the possibility of creating Unity of Culture and the strengthening of his irony through the years is obvious, his faith in the might of art survived, as for instance, his late play, *A Full Moon in March* (1935), demonstrates in which the Swineherd-poet-suitor's severed head sings in the royal court and impregnates the Queen. In contemporary Irish drama the power of the artist has become much more problematic, his/her role as shaping, serving, influencing the community and humankind became doubtful even for the artist him/herself, nevertheless in the "second Renaissance" of the Irish drama *Künstlerdrama* gained frequency, especially in the plays of Brian Friel, Tom Murphy, Thomas Kilroy and Frank McGuinness. Perhaps the necessity of reflecting on Ireland's postcolonial identity-problems and uncertainties and on the social, moral, spiritual transformations offers a special role to the artist even as late as the 1960s, -70s, and -80s, who still can work as a diviner, having, in Seamus Heaney's words, the gift of "being in touch with what is there, hidden and real, a gift for mediating between the latent source and the community" (qtd. in Kiberd 109).

Here I will take a look at three contemporary Irish plays, Frank McGuinness' *Innocence* (1986), Thomas Kilroy's *The Shape of Metal* (2003), and Brian Friel's *Performances* (2003), which foreground a painter, a sculptor and a composer protagonist, respectively. All three are set at the meeting point or on both sides of life and death, deploy works of art visually or audibly present onstage, and offer different consequences of the co-existence of art forms. But instead of the somewhat misleading (and clichéd) statement of intermedial theories that meaning is created in the interstitial spaces, in-between the distinct art forms, I would suggest that meaning is rather formed as the accumulative effect of the art forms, mutually influencing, enhancing and reinterpreting one another, in the combined space of the different arts.

1. Frank McGuinness: *Innocence*

Frank McGuinness' *Innocence* focuses on Michelangelo Merisi Caravaggio (1573-1610) as its protagonist. Caravaggio, belonging to the tradition that tends to condense whole narratives into pictures, is an eminently suitable artist to exemplify the relationship between image and word and theater. His paintings are most dramatic, partly due to their extreme physicality, partly to the sharp contrasts between light and darkness often without transitory shades in-between—his characteristic *chiaroscuro* effect—with which, replacing the dominance of the line, he renewed contemporary (late-Renaissance) painting and introduced Baroque techniques. His eventful and scandalous life also offers a good ground to dramatize tensions between ordinary life and the artist's existence and value-system.

The protagonist of *Innocence* also embodies in his personality and lifestyle the sharpest contrasts: a self-exiled artist, hiding in the hovel of his prostitute-lover,

Lena, a homosexual who, moreover, acts as a pimp to the Cardinal, bringing him young men—his own models—while he himself also seduces or buys them, thus doubly offending the Church’s teachings on morality, yet always seeking spiritual light and believing “with a depth that is frightening” (27). His awareness of his own sinfulness and his desire for redemption manifests itself in every field of his life: in the duality of innocence and sin, gentleness and wildness, love and hatred, beauty and repulsion, haughtiness and humbleness and these dualities appear in his oeuvre in contrapuntal structure, contrastive light and darkness, and intense colors. McGuinness, in his turn, dramatizes those contrasts not only through the plot and characterization but also through the play’s structural features, which, together with the thoughts, ideas, and feelings juxtaposed, all correspond to the painterly *chiaroscuro* effect.

McGuinness makes the paintings visible without ever setting a single picture onstage, without ever showing the protagonist with canvas and brush in hand. Yet the stage becomes the site for both the painting process and the exhibition of the pictures with the help of words, composition, colors, gestures, human bodies, and movements—in a combination of verbal and visual effects within the kinetic possibilities of theater. The dramatic quality innate in the Caravaggio paintings increases through the embodiments of the painted figures by human actors—the two-dimensional pictures become three-dimensional. The author’s strategies for their revival range from verbal evocation, ekphrasis to emblematic presentation and *tableau vivant*.

Hiroko Mikami (*Frank McGuinness*) and Eamonn Jordan (“The Masquerade”) identify in detail the paintings called to mind in the play. Mikami suggests that “If Caravaggio’s theater is constructed from two-dimensional paintings, McGuinness, in contrast, would seem to ‘paint’ his three-dimensional pictures on stage through language” (54). Indeed, sometimes a painting is brought to mind through the simplest form of picture transfer, verbal evocation, for instance, when Lucius, one of Caravaggio’s models, relates how the painter dressed him up as a tree, with leaves around his head, covered with grapes, which of course, reminds audience and readers of *Bacchus*. In other instances language withdraws into the background and the audience can witness the picture’s genesis, for example, when Caravaggio is feasting with his young models, one of them, Antonio offers him a bowl of fruit and the painter “watches him holding the bowl, rearranging his hand and pulling Antonio’s shirt from his shoulder to expose the flesh” (17). Here the artist arranges his model for his painting *Boy with a Bowl of Fruit* and then immediately the picture itself becomes visible in a *tableau vivant* while at the same time all of it operates as part of the stage action. A more elaborate *tableau vivant* comes in the closing scene when Lena orders Antonio to strip, then arranges the red cloak around him and puts the cross into his hand so he becomes the image of Caravaggio’s *John the Baptist*. The border-crossing between word and image

through movement results in the transparency of the figure: the model of the original picture is substituted by this lowest of the low, a “rent-boy,” a male prostitute, who transforms, even transsubstantiates into John the Baptist, the herald of the Savior in front of the audience’s eyes. The classical division between arts according to spatiality and temporality gets suspended again in the scenic totality of stage performance in an *ekphrastic gesture*, which, similarly to ekphrastic narration, lends a sort of stillness, silence, stasis to the scene. The desire of ekphrasis, of the “verbal representation of visual representation,” as its best-known theoretician, W.J.T. Mitchell, puts it is to “still the movement of linguistic temporality into a spatial, formal array” (154).

A complex example of verbal and gestural counterpointing of light and dark, gentleness and rudeness, beauty and ugliness with the help of ekphrasis, is the scene when Caravaggio, after a quarrel, promises Lena to paint her “beautiful and angry,” then he “paints” her face in a poetic monologue, planting in it “the earth’s fruit and the tree’s leaf” so it becomes “a bowl full of life, full of Lena” (10). The multiple-layered ekphrasis evokes Yeats’s golden bird in “Sailing to Byzantium” and connects it with the chestnut tree in its wholeness of “the leaf, the blossom or the bole” as a metaphor of unity of art and artist (“Among School Children”): “A bird moves through the forest and the bird is golden because it carries the sun. The bird . . . feeds the tree with the sun. The tree feeds the leaf, and the leaf loves the tree, and the tree cradles the bird and Lena is the bird who is the sun and the tree and the leaf” (10). He caresses Lena’s face, then looks admiringly at his own hands as if carrying the print of her face, and in the next moment blows his nose into his hands. After the elevating words lifting the aging prostitute to the eternity of art he pulls the “portrait” down to the dirt with a single rude gesture. With this pictorial intertextuality and medial interaction the protagonist of the *play*, the *painter* Caravaggio *verbally* evokes the *poet* Yeats’s *poetic images* inspired by *mosaics* and *paints* them further in *words*—through verbally referencing the “verbal representation of the visual representation”—and fills Yeats’s motionless golden bird with life and movement before destroying in a physical gesture all that he has built up in words.

Caravaggio’s continual collating and uniting the lofty and the lowly, the human and the spiritual runs through the whole play, beginning with the opening sequence, which brings to the stage Caravaggio’s pictorial world spread in time. In the painter’s surrealist dream/nightmare vision the emblematic figures and objects of his paintings show up, among others the ubiquitous red cloak, the horse, the skull, and go through various transformations, haunting the artist, making visible his demons. The cloak first appears as a shape to be caressed in Lena’s lap like a child, which image evokes the *Penitent Magdalena*, who rocks something invisible in her lap (Mikami 59). Lena then tears the cloak from herself for it to become a mad horse, running wildly around amidst animal sounds, then “*wraps itself*

violently around CARAVAGGIO. Hands start to beat him. . . . Darkness" (1). But the next moment the cloak appears again as an ordinary piece of worn clothing in need of repair, exemplifying art's transforming force that can make ordinary objects or phenomena extraordinary. The red cloak anticipates the contrasts surrounding and filling the painter's life: wildness, violence, blood, death, betrayal but also gentleness, the Passion and transcendence and the combination of all these. Since the red cloak often appears around a Christ-figure, this scene alludes to the artist's self-aggrandizement, comparing himself to Jesus Christ. Thus in the opening scene several paintings are referred to through emblematic objects transforming into each other, the painter himself being among them first as an outsider, as a witness (as in several of Caravaggio's paintings) then as a participant, a fallible human being, and a victor and victim simultaneously (again, as in paintings, for instance, *David with the Head of Goliath*), a sinner and savior in one person.

Lena posing as the *Penitent Magdalena*—which will recur at the end of Act II where she more definitely cradles a non-existent dead child—introduces one of the central layers of meaning that goes through the whole play: the redeemability of the sinner. One of the greatest innovations in religious painting of the historical Caravaggio was exactly the fact that he modeled Biblical figures and saints on miserable beggars and prostitutes. Evidently, he did this not only for practical reasons (the availability of cheap models), nor only from painterly considerations (preferring naturalism to classical, idealizing painting) but also as a protest against the institution of the church and in the spirit of the original Christian teaching that the poor and lowly are most in need of salvation. He elevates them with a creating power imitating the Creator. Or, in Eamonn Jordan's succinct phrasing, "[b]y using the lowly, Caravaggio was in fact painting their potential salvation" (58).

The references to Caravaggio's paintings then evoke both their painterly qualities and through them their reaching out to spiritual light and dark. "I take ordinary flesh and blood and bone and with my hands transform it into eternal light, eternal dark . . . For my art balances the beautiful and the ugly, the saved and the sinning" (3). His art's dramatic illumination brings together the external and the internal, the visible and the invisible, the earthbound and the divine. As Caravaggio announces: "I paint as I see in light and as I imagine in darkness, for in the light I see the flesh and blood and bone but in the dark I imagine the soul of man for the soul and the soul alone is the sighting of God in man and it is I who reveal God and it is God who reveals my painting to the world" (4). His seeing himself as a co-creator with God is at one and the same time arrogantly self-confident and full of humility.

Yet McGuinness's artist-protagonist cannot influence reality as his ancestors were able to, which, however, does not exempt him from responsibility (Jordan 64). If nothing more, he can subvert accepted values, can transform reality into art

and his art can be purgative. A beautifully composed stage manifestation of this latter is a dream-scene, in which, in a combination of verbal, pictorial and theatrical effect, Caravaggio's dead or suffering models, his "victims" haunt him and he, raising a knife, says:

CARAVAGGIO . . . This is how I die. How I kill myself. This is how I paint. Living things. In their life I see my death. I can't stop my hand. I can't stop my dying. But I can bring peace to what I'm painting.

SISTER Then raise your hand in peace. Paint.

(SISTER *takes the knife from CARAVAGGIO. He raises his hands. Light rises from his raised hands, drawing WHORE, ANTONIO and LUCIO [his models] from the darkness.*) (55)

The light rising from Caravaggio's raised hands—the creative and healing power emanating from the artist—also reflects on the phenomenon that in Caravaggio's paintings light often seems to radiate from the figures themselves rather than coming from some external source. The painter in this moment is able to give love, life, and health, as he dries the hands of the drowned one, wipes off the disease from the face of the sick, kisses the abandoned in a series of ritual gestures, even though only in a dream. As Helen Lojek sums up: "Caravaggio's Christ-like ritualized cleansing of his models . . . embodies the effect of his art" (111).

McGuinness' painter-protagonist dies in the play but revives in his paintings. In Lena's dream, as she stands amidst his pictures in a bright room, he looks down from above, happily and at peace. She starts laughing because she suddenly realizes that looking from above, he "must see them all upside-down, and I knew then somehow we'd won, we turned the world upside-down" (59). The closing scene is the parallel counterpoint of this one, in which Lena proudly "shows" her composition of Antonio dressed as John the Baptist to the absent and dead Caravaggio and her laughter is echoed by the laughter of the painter, accompanied by music and light (62). The artist's task is to "turn the world upside-down" in order to reveal the deeper truths, the invisible values, to subvert the power of anomalous reality. This is represented in McGuinness' play through all the elements of drama and theater—plot, characterization, movement, stage images, and so forth, and a huge part is played by the various evocations of the artist's paintings. The last word and image belong to the artist: his revived painting and subversive laughter, through transgressing the boundaries between loftiness and ordinariness, life and death, proclaim the apotheosis of art in the eternal present tense of the theater.

2. Thomas Kilroy: *The Shape of Metal*

The sculptor protagonist in Thomas Kilroy's *The Shape of Metal*—the entirely fictitious, elderly Nell Jeffrey—shares Caravaggio's arrogance as artist in having allowed herself to live all her life as she wanted but without the earlier artist's certainty of his God-given talent and the divine power of art. A modernist artist, she is no longer tormented by sin in any religious sense yet she has plenty to feel guilty about especially as a mother. As transpires from the plot, she is responsible for her daughter, Grace's destroyed life (who disappeared and most probably died some thirty years prior to the play).

Artist as mother illuminates the closeness of biological and artistic creation. Ironically, here the dilemma of artist and family is not caused by the predictable pattern of artist neglecting parenthood in the service of his/her vocation. On the contrary, Nell's motherly love and over-protectiveness, complemented by the artist's "monstrous ego" (48) and impulse to act God-like, makes her insist on shaping her daughter's personality and life—with disastrous results. Her monstrosity derives from her irrepressible creative energy that strives to impose her will on both matter (art) and people (life).

The boundaries between art and life become blurred in a *coup de theatre* immediately at the beginning of the play when Grace's head appears as a "mounted head" haunting her mother. Grace's words: "Mummy kneading the head. . . . head on pedestal, absolutely still. Grace inside the silence" (11) could be heard in the theater as Mummy "in need of" Grace's head for her creation as well as "kneading," massaging it as a healing act and molding it into a sculpture, eternalizing her daughter through art which metaphorically kills her when putting her head "inside the silence." The speaking head thus puts the Keatsean ("Ode on a Grecian Urn") and Yeatsean ("Sailing to Byzantium") dilemmas concerning the relationship between art and life into palpable stage reality, while at the same time evoke the speaking head and severed head myths for Irish audiences and the Kőmíves Kelemen ("Kelemen the bricklayer") ballad for Hungarian readers.

The artist's work and the artist at work, do appear on stage in Kilroy's play, unlike in *Innocence*, and participate in the dialogue between life and death. Among Nell's sculptures two gain prominence. One is the speaking bronze head of Grace, which, at its first appearance, is a "*mounted head, speaking*" (11), but the second time the same bronze sculpture becomes "*a bronze death head on a plinth, a bronze head which speaks, the mouth moving but the eyes closed over, metallic*" (51). Even though the head itself speaks about its own transformation, the dominant sense it carries is that of finality and lifelessness. The Beckettian words evoke visions of death and desolation:

Cold. Cold metal. Peace. Silence. All finished. Nothingness. No feel, no fear, no sight, no sound, no touch, no taste. All finished. Nothing-nowhere-no when. Grace's head. Not Grace's head. All finished. (51)

The other sculpture, Nell's masterpiece, *Woman Rising from Water* carved in white marble, draws on entirely different associations. Stone, by its very nature, does not suggest the kind of lifeless finality that metal, especially bronze, this artificially created substance does. *Woman Rising from Water* is described in the stage directions as part of it being "*beautifully carved and polished to a high finish*" with one side looking "*as if it had been attacked and out of the rubble the woman's face emerges*" (27). Thus the sculpture is a metaphor for life, personality, and art, all in the making, alive with birth, change, and movement incorporating time in a modernist way, expresses a process rather than a fixed state. An allegory both of the modernist artist and the woman-artist in the act of inventing herself. The image itself reinforces the parallel between biological and artistic creation and their mutual reflection of each other since it is also another portrait of Grace—a sculpture that especially appealed to her and one with which she identified. Nell herself liberated the rising woman from the prison of polished, finished form, uniting mother and daughter in one image—all that she failed to do in life. But in contrast with one of her inspirations, Brancusi's *Sleeping Muse* with its male idealization of the female muse, a beautifully smooth, polished oval face, Nell's woman has an unidealized, "*far less benign, more witchlike*" (27) face, arising out of the traditionally feminine element, water, as an image of the new woman who wants to tell her own story.

The artist being female, moreover a female sculptor (of which there are so few), necessarily draws attention to gender problems in terms of social acceptance and artistic evaluation in comparison with male sculptors. Judith, Nell's surviving daughter—herself a feminist and a lesbian—while admiring her mother as an artist and praising her for her independence, falls into the trap of over-gendering art when reproaches her for "bowing the knee before two great male artists," "[k]owtowing to male greatness" when Nell expresses her admiration for Beckett and Giacometti (56).³ Being a passionate mother yet at odds with that role, Nell of course could easily be seen as the embodiment of the female and feminist artist struggling with social hierarchies. Yet Kilroy's sculptor does not suffer from lack of fame or any discrimination in the artistic world (her work has been given a whole room in the permanent collection of the Irish Museum of Modern Art in Kilmainham). Nor does she need to use her daughter's sculpted "head as a prop to allow her to fulfill the role" of "a phallogocentric artist" as Emmaleene O'Brien's

³ For more detailed discussion of the presence and influence of other artists on Nell's work see my essay "Thomas Kilroy's *The Shape of Metal*: 'Metal ... Transformed into Grace'—Grace into Metal."

extreme feminist interpretation suggests according to which her daughter's bust "becomes for Nell the phallus allowing her to take on a masculine role," since "a woman's desire for a baby is the desire for a penis" (O'Brien 141). I much rather agree with Thierry Dubost who contends that Nell "refuses to acknowledge the relevance of gender limits which her daughter traces" since "her vision of art takes her beyond gender issues," her quest goes deeper, to "earnest introspection" which then leads "to forms of artistic expression to which socially-constructed gender images may relate" (105). Nell's deepest, tormenting questions concerning art and artistic creation, her metaphysical quest for the "perfect form" that the artist, in her belief, should achieve but because of its impossibility, necessarily fails to achieve, transcend gender boundaries. Kilroy, when choosing a woman artist, "challenge[s] global stereotypical views of creation in a [way] different" from feminism and "expose[s]—beyond sexual questions—the falsely reassuring images that society conveys of artists" (105).

Nell's marble sculpture *Woman Rising from Water* polarizes this broader artistic dilemma, too. Whereas Nell keeps saying that all her life she wanted to create polished, finished forms, she finds Michelangelo's *Rondanini Pietà*—identified as the other inspiration of her statue—extremely moving just because of its unfinished, therefore deeply human quality.⁴ Articulated on the verbal level, the Yeatsian desire for perfection to be achieved in art and life counterbalances the overriding Beckettian notion of failure as the very condition and state of art. Just as completion, the finished quality of work becomes juxtaposed to unfinishedness, which is deemed more human. The presence of the sculpture, *Woman Rising from Water*, enriches and directly, visually mediates those dilemmas of the artist as it contains the tension between, and thus manifests *both*, the polished form and the lifelike unfinishedness.

Kilroy's belief that "form is discovered within the material" (Kurdi 261) becomes dramatized through the images of the two sculptures. Metal is shaped as the artist wants it whereas the beautiful white marble itself seems to have dictated the shape to Nell's sculpture as she freed the form innate in it. The bronze head, both in its medium and in its naturalism, suggests finality and motionlessness, so when it speaks as a mythical severed head, it comes to life through extra-sculptural means. The life of the stone statue, on the other hand, is created entirely within its medium as it carries movement within its more abstracted form. The one copying and through that killing reality, the other transforming and thus preserving it. All

⁴ This statue has been a puzzle to artists and art historians because of the different proportions of the upper and lower sections, and the existence of a third, detached arm of Christ left in the stone. Arthur C. Danto offers this sculpture as an example of the ambiguities in interpreting art works: of whether to simply ignore the extra arm because one tends to see what falls into the perception of reality or to accept it as intentional, figuring that "Michelangelo could have cut it out, had he wished to" (115).

this is not verbalized in the play's text but emerges as additional dimensions present through the pieces of art radiating meanings onstage.

The Shape of Metal's focal issues of giving "shape" to matter, giving form to life and life to art, self-reflexively comment on the playwright's art and on any art's form, including theater's nature and possibilities. The titular "shape of metal" does not change once the statue is created and the shape of stone, the marble sculpture becomes shattered by its creator herself yet they participate in shaping the intellectual center and the theatricality of the playwright's play. The paradox of artwork being finished, polished and yet remaining forever unfinished, changing, transpires also through the co-existence of the tangible objects onstage and the uniqueness and changeability of each theatrical performance.

3. Brian Friel: *Performances*

Brian Friel thematizes the word-music dichotomy in *Performances* through the protagonist, Leoš Janáček, the Czech composer. The playwright makes Janáček proudly declare that music is a "much more demanding language" than words, a more perfect medium for expressing feelings because music is "the language of feeling itself; a unique vocabulary of sounds created by feeling itself" (31). He continues by asserting that "people who huckster in words merely report on feeling" while "we"—that is, musicians, composers, singers—"speak feeling" (31). This echoes, among others, Kierkegaard's famous assertion that "Music always expresses the immediate in its immediacy; . . . Language involves reflection, . . . Reflection destroys the immediate, and hence it is impossible to express the musical in language" (qtd. in Scher). But is it possible to express in music what language says? Can music have meaning, content, plot, can it narrate? Musicians and music philosophers often maintain that "Music is all too transparent, a language so fine that no content can penetrate it" (Terada 92) and criticize the view that music can express something for deriving from the "compulsion to see music as another example of literary or painterly values" (Peter Kivy, qtd. in Terada 96-7). Yet recently it seems possible to bring together words and music in theory as, for instance, John Neubauer suggests that "all good listening is a 'collaboration' with the composer and that listening inevitably mobilizes our talent to emplot, making thereby use of stories supplied by our culture and its history" (qtd. Scher 16). In Friel's play *Anezka*, the contemporary PhD student who is writing her dissertation on Janáček, endeavors to read content into the musical piece, to enhance the importance of the literary within the musical medium. She does not even have to emplot the instrumental music since the emplotment is supplied by the composer's letters. The survival of these 700 love letters written to a young woman in Janáček's last years, at the time of composing his Second String Quartet called *Intimate Letters*, gives Friel a splendid opportunity to raise questions about

the importance of the inspiring life experience in the formation of works of art and whether the awareness of it illuminates the work itself. Or whether art elevates life or simply feeds on it? Such and similar issues inform the play-long debate between Janáček, dead for 70 years, and the student-scholar.

Anezka insists that Janáček's *Second String Quartet* is the expression of the composer's great passion for the young woman, Kamila, to whom he wrote the letters. Janáček, on the other hand, throughout the play keeps "performing" when trying to explain away the mystery of his great, stimulating passion for Kamila (more than thirty years his junior and married, having two children) and dismisses its significance as merely the embodiment of his desire for the perfect music. Anezka, the scholar dealing in words, knows all the facts, recognizes all the pieces of music when put to the test. But she hardly listens to the music, and refuses to stay to hear the string quartet play. She continually confronts Janáček's own memory and interpretation of the quartet's composition with the evidence of his own words in those letters that reflect on the creative process itself as well as the inspiration and the emotions leading to creation. But if Janáček in the present distrusts his own words in his letters, then how much truth and value do his present words of dismissal carry? Among the *words* opposed to *words*, which should be trusted? Even if the beloved young woman was actually an ordinary woman clothed into the dream-figure of the desired imaginative perfection that at last took form in the music, as Janáček insists, even then the work would never have been created without that personal experience—as evidenced in the imperfect and sentimental but honest words of the letters. Just as music transcends words, so the image of the desired young woman transcends the real Kamila, thus the object of Janáček's adoration was not so much a Muse as the catalyst of all those feelings and desires that are needed for creation and that make it possible for listeners to relate to the work and allow it to evoke their own feelings. The relationship between the individual, subjective feeling expressed in music and its effect on other people, that is, on the particularity and universality of the work and the emotions carried by it, also pertains to one of the dilemmas in the philosophy of music.

Friel is greatly indebted to George Steiner⁵ in answering this question. Steiner maintains that "It is in music that the poet hopes to find the paradox resolved of an act of creation singular to the creator, bearing the shape of his own spirit, yet definitely renewed in each listener" (62). As opposed to the impoverishment of language, the "exhaustion of verbal resources," the brutalization and devaluation of the word in modern civilization, "[m]usic alone can fulfill the two requirements of a truly rigorous communicative or semiological system: to be unique to itself

⁵ Friel duly acknowledges his indebtedness to Steiner's observations in the printed script.

(untranslatable) yet immediately comprehensible” (65). These statements recur almost *verbatim* when Janáček in Friel’s play recalls his feelings when alive:

I remember when I finished it [*the Quartet*] I really thought that—yes!—this time I had solved the great paradox: had created something that was singular to me, uniquely mine, bearing the imprint of my spirit only; and at the same time was made new again in every listener who was attentive and assented to its strange individuality and to its arrogance and indeed to its hesitations. (31)

But then, since he is not a philosopher but a true artist, he dismisses it all, with self-mocking laughter as “Vanity”.

Friel’s self-reflexive juxtaposition of music and words at his own, the writer’s expense, proves somewhat disingenuous. If music as it appears in the polished composition of *Intimate Letters* proves superior to language as manifested in the love letters and in Anezka’s comments, then the comparison itself already puts words into a disadvantageous position since neither the love letters nor, obviously, the PhD student’s speeches are meant to be artifacts. So what really compares with the String Quartet should be the whole play itself which is able to incorporate music in an inventive and meaningful way.

All this plays out in a liminal space, between life and death, life and art. Only the PhD student belongs undoubtedly to the matter-of-fact, real world. Does that suggest that all the other characters—the musicians and Janáček himself—are conjured up out of her imagination? If so, what does that say about the work itself? This representative of posterity still, 70 years after Janáček’s death, finds his life and love affair more interesting than his music? Her resistance to engaging with the music itself, its musical effect, might question its value. But again, if the whole scene, composer, musicians and music are evoked in her imagination, does it not attest to the music’s power to fill the space and to live on, whether she wants to listen to it or not?

In the final scene Friel’s play dissolves the contrast and contest between music and words when the music is played onstage, in the live performance of a string quartet, in Janáček’s (and the audience’s) presence and present, and the composer, now alone with his art, without the necessity to “perform,” turns back to his life and memories, reads into his own letters and becomes emotionally affected by them. In this richly ambiguous scene, with the last two movements of his *Intimate Letters* playing, Janáček listens and slowly leafs through his letters, “pausing now and then to read a line or two. Now he leans his head back and closes his eyes” as the stage directions instruct (39). In the Dublin Gate Theater performance, the actor (the Romanian Ion Caramitru), in addition, uttered a heavy sigh before the blackout, further emphasizing the full circle he has traveled back to re-live his one-time passion. Ironically enough, with the help of the only half-

understanding but enthusiastic scholar, the created work itself makes Janáček's unghostly ghost re-immerses in that passion. This scene confirms the "equilibrium" (38) of the two possible readings of his letters—as expressions of love and as metaphors for his musical creation—as he suggests a few minutes earlier. It also balances between the two truths, one of which holds that experienced passion becomes a significant part of the created work while the other claims that nothing matters only the work, everything else is "ancillary". The music-word contest thus covers a different dichotomy: that of experience, personal emotion *versus* the created work. In other words: life and art. By the end, when only Janáček's music can be heard, the re-evoked joy and pain of life seems to overwhelm him—for which he finds no words.

As a daring theatrical solution, Friel allows the musicians to play the last two movements of *Intimate Letters* onstage, for the last 12-13 minutes of the performance. As the music triumphantly moves on, it carries its own effect and lets the audience decide whether it "speaks feeling" or not. But, with another twist, since this scene comes *after* all the passionate appeal of Anezka to Janáček to admit that the music *is* the expression of his love for the young woman, the audience (and the composer himself onstage) cannot help listening to the music with that knowledge. Thus, the excavation of the important inspiring experience in life described in words, influences and colors the way the audience hear the music, which then, totally differs from listening to the same piece without any such information. Janáček's minimal stage gesture, his deep sigh clutching the folder of his love letters in the last moment indicates that personal passion distilled into the non-subjective emotion conveyed by music, evokes the very personal passion of love within the artist himself. And although I share Nicholas Grene's conviction that Friel, "in spite of his reverence for the superior expressiveness of music, in spite of his awareness of the deficiencies of the word, . . . creates a theater dependent on the persuasive powers of language" in which "at key moments . . . language . . . is sovereign" (39), in this case words and music no longer contradict or compete, but rather complement each other. It is their accumulative effect that produces the meanings in the "hidden magnet" of the theatrical space—as also in the other examples of the artist-protagonist's work present on the stage. Because, for the audience all that becomes manifest through the playwright's work, the beautiful, elegant play itself, which, created out of *words* on paper, highly polished *language* and strict structure, including *music* played by musicians and brought to life in the *performances* in the complex (heterotopic) space and composite art of the *theater* which can summon together past and present, the living and the dead, life and art.

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Dramatic Representation of a Culture of Violence in Sam Shepard's *The Late Henry Moss*

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Abstract. I propose an intertextual reading of Sam Shepard's 2000 *The Late Henry Moss* focusing on the play's ritual structure and the different interwoven levels and modes of discourse and narrative that grow out of each other and multiply the non-linear tapestry of the dramatic text. The aim of this "repetition compulsion"—to borrow a Freudian term—of the Moss brothers to retell and re-evolve their father's last days and the quarter-of-a-century earlier family fall-out is to render personal and implicitly cultural traumas into a conceivable and coherent narrative of their past, a form of knowledge and understanding that would permit breaking away and turning towards the future. I argue that the liminal sphere created within the play constitutes a flexible and fluid zone of experimentation for its characters where the remembering and/or (re)enactment of past experiences becomes not only possible, but a necessity. The painful and distorted ways in which the brothers attempt to lay the body/ghost of their father—story-telling, role-play, re-enactment in the form of flashbacks—do not result in mourning and working through the past and its traumatic events, but merely in digging it up and re-enacting it in all its violence. Thus the play becomes a "defamiliarizing" representation of family violence and war trauma that in today's multimedia-image dominated culture have become void of significance.

Keywords: Sam Shepard, *The Late Henry Moss*, culture of violence, separation rituals, doubling

It's an amazing dilemma when one begins to discover that you are living your life as a somnambulist . . . that you're living your life in a trance, in a dream. When that occurs, there are amazing things that take place. One is despair, and the other is a sudden awakening. There's another way of seeing and Henry Moss realizes that he's in fact dead although he's walking around. But there's nothing you can do about it, there's no alternative, he's a walking deadman, and that's the tragedy.

(Shepard interview in *This So-Called Disaster*)

Trauma and the complex and distorted ways in which the past haunts and defines the present constitute the central issues of Sam Shepard's 2000 *The Late Henry Moss*. By definition, trauma "describes an overwhelming experience of sudden or catastrophic events in which the response to the event occurs in the often delayed, uncontrolled repetitive appearance of hallucinations and other intrusive phenomena" (Caruth 11). Such a repetitive pattern characterizes Shepard's work: his open-ended and non-linear narratives re-fashion and re-organize central themes, symbols, and archetypes that make up the quintessential landscape of his plays, film-scripts, and short stories: an American West, the frontier—physical, geographical, social, and mental, populated by traumatized males searching for and trying to come to terms with the numbing legacy of their dysfunctional and violent fathers. Shepard's "Indian country," "a foreign and frightening mental and emotional terrain" (deRose 58) seems to have trapped these characters in a Freudian state of "repetition compulsion" (269), unable to assimilate, conceptualize, and lay these "ghosts" of the past.

"That is what great playwrights do," Larry Eilenberg, artistic director of Magic Theatre emphasizes, "they revisit their themes" (Winn E1).¹ Several critics and reviewers perceived *The Late Henry Moss* merely as a less powerful re-write of many of Shepard's earlier and stronger works such as *True West*, but lacking the intensity of the earlier play's imagery and suspense building.² Undeniably, Shepard

¹ San Francisco University professor of theater Larry Eilenberg was the artistic director of Magic Theatre at the time of *The Late Henry Moss*'s all-star-cast world premier with James Gammon as Henry, Nick Nolte as Earl, Sean Penn as Ray, Woody Harrelson as Taxi, Cheech Marin as Esteban, Sheila Tousey as Conchalla, and Shepard as director. Scenes from the production and rehearsal process as well as interviews with the author-director and cast are available on DVD, *This So-Called Disaster*.

² Nina daVinci argues that in *True West*, and implicitly in *The Late Henry Moss* "the two brothers have become abstracts of themselves," and she links these plays to the end-seventies *Buried Child* and *Curse of the Starving Class* through their use of food metaphors. Shewey in an article about Shepard's silence during the 1990s, "Hidden in Plain Sight" affirms that Shepard "could be and was accused of merely recycling familiar obsessions and autobiographical fragments to the point of self-parody" (79) in his 2000 play. Ben Brantley's review of the play's 2001 New York production argues that *The Late Henry Moss* "is crowded with echoes from stronger Shepard works" ("No-Good Dad" E1) while in "Giving Up the Ghost" John Lahr asserts: "At its best, Shepard's work is a kind of verbal

revives several hallmarks found in his earlier works, he revisits many of his themes—some autobiographical—and the mythic geography of the American West with its outdated, anachronistic myths of fertile and virile male figures and of fruitful land and its dysfunctional family structures, drunken and violent fathers, and absent mothers.

The Late Henry Moss proves, however, much more than a simple repetition of Shepard's earlier plays. It builds on his 1970 *The Holy Ghostly's* central character, a ghost named at that time Stanley Moss, and on his short story "See You in My Dreams,"³ as well as on Frank O'Connor's story "The Late Henry Conran" (1931).⁴ Through this rich intertextual and metatextual tapestry and the "subtly ritualistic nature of the play's action" that mingles the "use of grotesque, mythic archetype[s] with that of ritual and of domestic psychological realism" (Kuharski 502), Shepard creates a Turnerian liminoid and ludic sphere among his own plays and stories as well as other literary works, legends, and myths. He experiments with this highly sophisticated material in order to achieve what he hopes will be "the last play about that [his father's death and, more generally, father-son relationships]" (Shepard interview in *This So-Called*).

Together with critic Paul Taylor, I also hope that "Shepard will persist in his fertile failure to lay his father's ghost" (12), as his plays continue to reveal and focus on deeper and deeper layers and aspects of archetypal themes. Among these they resurface "the most common of all mythical conflicts" (Vernon 138), the struggle between brothers; the father-son conflict; the question of how past and present fuse into one another in the workings of the human mind. Shepard has always been deeply interested in the ways people construct reality and identity through narratives that seem to have lost any firm and stable foundation except that of the traumas of the past and the tragic violence that results from them—the curse and doom of Shepard's male characters.⁵ *The Late Henry Moss* picks up the figure

and visual jazz which surprises you with its penetrating leaps of associations and its startling voices" (108), but that *The Late Henry Moss* lacks this kind of intensity and novelty both in its images and dialogue. A similar argument appears in Brendan Lemon's 2001 review: "In a great Shepard piece images hit you full on" (13), but this play falls short of expectations.

³ The short story, originally written in 1989, published in the 1996 collection of stories *Cruising Paradise*, is set in the same small town as *The Late Henry Moss* and operates with a similar cast of characters and narrative structure.

⁴ In O'Connor's short story Henry Conran, the protagonist, after having been locked out of his house by his wife because of his drunkenness, leaves for Chicago where he lives for twenty-five years. From the marriage announcement of one of his sons he learns that he has been pronounced dead, so he returns to Ireland ready to charge his wife with a law suit for "[t]he character ye [Nellie, the wife] took from me [Henry]" (13). The O'Connor story ends with the wife overcome by "pure relief" (19) accepting Henry back into her life and thus back among the living.

⁵ This fascination with identity-construction is also demonstrated by Shepard's more than five-decade career throughout which he has been re-inventing and re-shaping his image and personality from being the rebellious teenager who ran away to New York City in the early sixties to become a rock-

of the war-traumatized father incapable of re-integrating into and fitting in the family, re-enacting the violence and brutality he saw and inflicted upon strangers within the home. The non-linear and retrospective plot broken up by flashbacks and doubling continuously shifts focus between the two layers of traumas re-manifested. Earl and Ray Moss try to work through the death of their father and their un-assimilated and un-accounted-for family tragedy twenty-five years earlier. The flashback scenes dramatize the narratives about Henry's last days before his death and his struggle to invalidate Conchalla's declaring him dead and his own more and more conscious realization of having lived his life as a walking dead-man.

The play brings both its characters and audiences/readers face to face with "perceptions only half-acknowledged like death" (Gelb 2) through its ritualistic nature that manifests itself on several levels, prominently focusing on the liminal aspects of the transitory processes represented. Henry Moss's journeys from being a "Living Man to Ghost Man to Dead Man" (Roudané, "Sam Shepard" 288), a progression of transfigurations that also encompasses another central phase that I will call "Liminal Man." His sons are subjected to and trapped in an extended liminality facing the difficulty and ultimately their incapacity to understand and master the past, undergoing the frustrating process of a failed rite of separation and passage with the "ritual elder" lying dead on his bed.

The three Moss males inhabit a liminal space set apart from society and from each other. They are drifters, always on the move and at the extremes. The temporal and spatial universe of the play is defined by a haunting past, dramatically cut off from any future dimension, situated at the margin of the human and natural environment. The older son, Earl comes to Bernalillo, New Mexico from New York where he is "in the packaging business" (25). He makes boxes, a product that in itself has no content, no usefulness, its emptiness epitomizing the life Earl is leading—without a family or any other connections. Ray, the younger brother, arrives from California, the other extreme of the country. Whatever is revealed about him appears in the form of negation: he does not have a family, he does not even own a car, and he has given up "working with his hands" (11). Therefore, he does not take their father's old tools that Earl offers him as an inheritance, symbolically refusing to take up the legacy.

and-roll star to discovering himself as a playwright and actor to becoming a director and later film star and short story writer. Several books have been published on Shepard's "identity dance" (Don Shewey's term) such as Leslie A. Wade's *Sam Shepard and the American Theatre* (1997), Martin Tucker's *Sam Shepard* (1992), and Don Shewey's *Sam Shepard* (1997). The playwright has proven elusive and ambiguous when interviewed as well, trying to sustain an extremely private and secretive existence as a writer and private person, but also being one of the most successful stars of the powerfully image- and publicity-oriented Hollywood film-making industry. In one of the few interviews he has granted, he declared that the idea, the need, and the pressure of coming up with an identity is just as puzzling as it is terrifying (Roudané, "Sam Shepard" 290).

The two brothers arrive at Henry's home on the outskirts of Bernalillo, a trailer at the margin of the desert. They embark "on a symbolic homecoming of sorts" (Roudané, "Sam Shepard" 289) that—as usually happens in Shepard's plays—fails to become a joyful reunion.⁶ They enter classic Shepard territory, "the wide empty country of the dead father and the absent mother" (daVinci 3). Henry's trailer represents a doubly liminal setting. It is situated at the edge of a little South-Western town, by the desert. It constitutes Henry Moss's self-imposed Turnerian "seclusion camp" where he stopped after having beaten his wife to near-death and having left his family, his "personal exile and asylum" (Kuharski 501). His long drive with the car windows open when he gradually lost connection with everything surrounding him meant his isolation from family, society, and natural environment. As he recalls in the flashback scenes, he drove with the wind in his eyes and face, with "no map," "[n]o destination" (112) till he ran out of gas—an ironic remark as "he ran out on everything" (Roudané, "Sam Shepard" 288): on all his human relationships and contacts. He isolated himself in a trailer with "barred windows," "like a jail cell" (5). This kind of spatial seclusion is consistent with Henry's in-between state: dead but not yet buried, within the flashbacks "walking and talking," "yelling and breathing" (77) but having been declared dead by Conchalla, he becomes caught up in a futile struggle to prove his existence.

His trailer also becomes a liminal space within which the brothers' rite of passage and their mimetic rivalry unfolds. The desert and Henry's hideaway within it become for them—just like the mother's home forty miles from Los Angeles for Lee and Austin in *True West*—the scene of their final confrontation with their father and with each other. It constitutes the site of their struggle to lay to rest not only the ghost of the parent but also the ghost of the past trauma that haunts them and seems to be shaping their lives and their behavior like a kind of *Fatum* or *Hubris* determining the destiny of heroes in ancient Greek tragedy.

For Henry, the desert functions as a seclusion place where he is, at least for a while, spared the pressure of having to validate his existence. The only person he has some kind of relationship with, Esteban, the former drunk perceives the desert with the sound of coyotes and soft music from deep Mexico as the space of peace. Both Henry and Esteban have proven unable to cope with human society and they have chosen to live on the margin only occasionally communicating even with each other. Language has lost its functionality here for the desert "is indifferent and inhuman" (Baudrillard, *America* 6). It is located outside the limits of the human gaze and sound, "outside the sphere and circumference of desire" (Baudrillard, *America* 63).

⁶ See, for example, Vince's homecoming in *Buried Child*, both brothers' arrival to the mother's house in LA in *True West*, Eddie's eternal returns in *Fool for Love*.

Esteban flees the desire to belong and experiences a purification from any sense of humanness and temporality. As the “beautiful women” vanished from his life when he was a drunk more than thirty years earlier, back in his “pueblo,” he has now disappeared from society to this place which proves “a natural extension of the inner silence of the body” (Baudrillard, *America* 68) and of time. Esteban represents the materialization of absence: he does not deny his past like Henry Moss does, but his past does not haunt him with a sense of doom that defines Henry’s present. He exists in a void and embodies non-presence characterized by imitation, the Baudrillardian “simulacrum”: the imitation of drinking, a pretend-drunkenness that he puts on for Henry’s sake, the imitation of womanly care and providing of nourishment in the form of the bowls of soup that he keeps balancing across the stage.⁷

The dramatic quality of the desert, however, surfaces exactly within the Mosses’ sensation of a failed existence. In their case, this geography of endless nothingness turns into a Turnerian liminal space: cut off from familial and social relations, suspended between past and future, that holds both the possibility and the danger of permanently trapping them in its own schema of absence with its lurking sense of non-existence and of identity turning into something fluid and elusive. Baudrillard asserts that “you always have to bring something into the desert to sacrifice, and offer it to the desert as a victim” (*America* 63). The Mosses are forced to sacrifice their sense of self and the secure illusion of an autonomous and stable subjectivity.

The West and the desert for the Shepardian male characters always represent a utopian place of endless and limitless possibilities for drifting and movement rather than for settling down and creativity. Like the sons in *Buried Child* who run towards some undefined westward destination only to realize that changing geographical locations do not automatically sever them from their biologically and genetically determined fate; or the members of the Tate family in *Curse of the Starving Class* who all fantasize about escaping to some exotic land; the brothers in both *True West* and *The Late Henry Moss* prove to be doomed to “wind up on the same desert” (53) as their fathers, as the mother in *True West*, returning from a seclusion of her own, from Alaska, phrases it with sarcastic resignation.

In *True West*, Austin and Lee struggle with each other in their vicious attempts to appropriate each other’s roles, and then against each other for a spot on the endless desert that holds their father and functions as the setting of the “true-to-life Western” of Lee’s script. The 1980 play ends with the haunting image of the

⁷ Baudrillard asserts that America itself has been a simulacrum from the beginning as it is the “sudden and unprecedented materialization” of the utopian thoughts of Europe (*America* 79), it builds the real out of ideas and materializes concepts as opposed to the European way of thinking that functions vice versa, conceptualizing reality and drawing ideas from the material environment. Thus, according to Baudrillard, America is the paradox of the “realized utopia” (*America* 79).

two brothers facing each other as if eternally suspended in a postmodern simulacrum of a Western gunfight, clinging to and reciprocally destroying each other like the eagle and cat in the parable concluding *Curse of the Starving Class*. Earl and Ray Moss come to their father's trailer to bury the dead Henry, and thus they enter both the liminal space of their deceased parent and start a rite of passage of their own. By forcing his brother to "[go] back through the whole story [of Henry's last days] . . . one more time" (22), and by making him confront and face the long-ago events that led to both Henry's and Earl's departure from the family home, Ray opens up the process that could lead to either their redemption and final laying of their ghosts or their inescapable damnation.

The brothers "are stuck in boyhood, dysfunctional in the current jargon" (daVinci 3) for they never grew up to become lovers, husbands, or fathers. Earl declares in the opening line of the play that "I was never one to live in the past" (6) calling to mind Cathy Caruth's argument regarding the necessary forgetting of all traumatic events: "it is only in and through its inherent forgetting that it [trauma] is experienced at all" (17). This rejection of the past is reproduced verbatim in Ray's closing line: "Well, you know me Earl—I was never one to live in the past. That never was my deal. You know—You remember how I was" (113), continuing the pattern of repetition. The brothers mirror each other—like the twin brothers in Albee's 2008 *Me, Myself, and I*—demonstrating a crisis of memory: what they have experienced and what kind of role model Henry proved to be are too awful to contemplate, or even remember. But they also double their parents, thus enacting the exact opposite of their own words. As Abbott argues, "Shepard's wanton sons transform themselves and their environment in ways that isolate and protect them from the world and, just as important, from their fathers" (198). They are terrified of becoming their father. Still, both Earl's and Ray's violence and drunken stupor are reminiscent of the late Henry Moss's behavior. They seem to be compulsively repeating the brutalities that Henry committed and re-enacting their childhood trauma of family violence that for them comes into existence and is acknowledged in its reproduction. Though Earl repeatedly rejects being equated with Henry, first warning Ray not to confuse him with their father, then cautioning Esteban that he "[is] nothing like the old man" (83), he does behave exactly like Henry both in his drinking and in his violent outbursts.

Earl is also forced into a doubling of his mother: the story of the terrible "blowout" of the night when Henry beat his wife and then fled the scene, is not only recreated verbally in Ray's and Henry's recollections, but also replicated on stage with Earl cast in the role of the victim, thus experiencing the traumatic event not only through appropriating the persona of the victimizer, but also becoming the protagonist of the victimized mother's narrative. For the brothers are forced to come to terms with the memories of their mother's beating by their father that they witnessed, a trauma that in Shoshana Felman's words "[has] not settled into

understanding or remembrance, [an act] that cannot be constructed as knowledge nor assimilated into full cognition, [an event] in excess of [their] frames of reference” (5). They now witness a crisis of representation, since language and story-telling prove inadequate in reporting what has happened. Therefore, they subconsciously are driven to role-playing in order to “testify.” Felman differentiates testimony from the mere reporting of events arguing that “what constitutes the specificity of the innovative figure of the witness is . . . not the mere telling, not the mere fact of *reporting* of the accident, but the witness’s [sic!] readiness to become himself a *medium of testimony*—and a *medium of the accident*” (emphasis in the orig., 24). Pre-existing categories and forms of narrative fail to convey the emotional charge of the events of that night. Being involved, unable to remain detached and objective, the sons fail in all their attempts to bear witness and thus transform the trauma into something comprehensible. They compulsively re-enact the night inscribing the trauma onto each other’s bodies, transforming the narrative of family violence into a shocking dramatization.

Accordingly, once familiarized with the events of Henry’s last days, as he becomes aware of the discrepancies among the different versions of the story, Ray decides to appropriate not only the role of the “detective” and storyteller he has been playing so far, but also a role within the story he has been trying to piece together: that of the violent “master” of the house. The role model was Henry Moss himself. He forces Earl onto his hands and knees and makes him clean the floor—like their mother used to scrub the yellow floor of their childhood kitchen—kicking and hitting him until he flees under the sink, just as their mother did trying to escape Henry’s blows. Ray verbally and physically bullies Earl in the same vicious and brutal, and at the same time, unmotivated and inexplicable manner as his model, their father treated his wife. He assumes the role of the perpetrator whose “brutalities appear to be partly mitigated by his own trauma, which he is acting out again and again” (Buse 178). He decides to take possession of the trailer symbolically filling the so-far empty refrigerator with groceries.⁸ As soon as he declares that he is going to stay, Ray is transformed into a double of his father who needs a victim to brutalize, and finds one in Earl, reduced to the state of the surrogate victim.

The liminal space Ray and Earl enter has a transformative effect upon them in the sense and to the degree that the place itself is transformed: it changes into an earlier version of itself through the flashbacks, a space haunted by the ghost of the still-living Henry and the mysterious powers of giving and taking life emanating from Conchalla, and into a metaphoric representation of the setting of the whole

⁸ The refrigerator also fulfills a symbolic function in *Curse of the Starving Class* where it is systematically opened and closed by the Tates and becomes a “member” of the family, functioning as the silent interlocutor and faithful listener to the soliloquies and monologues the characters deliver as failed attempts at communication.

family's traumatizing night decades earlier. This "fluidity" of the play's liminal space also characterizes the dimension of time. The events comprise two days which the brothers spend trying to reconstruct the story of their father's last days and fighting over the validity of their memories. Their reunion occasioned by such a culturally deeply ritualized event as the death of a parent should be a time of mourning and grief, of saying good-bye as Esteban suggests they should do so that the dead will not come back to haunt them. The departing of the father should involve rituals of separation, but the brothers only ironically refer to such rites. Ray comes up with the idea of burying their father themselves as they would do in the case of a dog (16-17)—echoing Albee's *The Sandbox* with the not-yet-dead Grandma placed in the sand to die. Earl does state that they should feel honored that they "have this small time alone with him [Henry]" (19) and that they should "treasure" that time before the morticians come, but his sarcastic comment of Henry being "processed into the funeral business" (15) undercuts the sincerity of his earlier remarks. He also firmly refutes the accusation of having spoken to his father while he was alone with the corpse for three days (15). Thus, his saying good-bye to the dead has negative connotations since only crazy people would act like that. Neither does he see any point in Esteban's lament when the neighbor complains that they were not present when "Mr. Henry" was finally taken away.

For Earl the time spent with the corpse is defined by Conchalla's instructions that nobody should touch the body for three days, which he obeys. His activity is reduced to retelling the story of Henry's last days, a narrative subverted by Ray's insistent investigations. For Earl's distorted version omits Henry accusing him of non-action in the family crisis. And again, the older son can be blamed for his passivity as in the present he is caught up in a perverse and paralyzing necrophilic voyeurism.

Ray perceives the time in the trailer as the occasion for a possible passage. He wants to see "the whole picture" (42), to understand what really happened to his father on the mysterious fishing trip he took before he died. He also wants to come to terms with his father's passing and with the family's past that led to the patriarch's "abdication" of his role as husband and father. For the past haunts them all, the Moss males seem to be trapped in time capsules where the passage of time has been suspended and the dimension of the future obliterated, a condition that Ray tries to break away from by inquiring into the family history. His mode of engagement with the situation demonstrates his willingness to work through the traumas they have suffered. So he questions Earl and Esteban about Henry's last days and even tracks down Taxi and interrogates him about the events preceding and following the fishing trip. All these reports, however, fail to transform into comprehensible and believable knowledge. The only conclusion Ray can draw from his inquiries is that stories are nothing but "fabrications" (68), family histories constitute the constructs of "a pack of liars" (68), and that he could find nothing to

confirm the validity of one or the other version of the past. The “reporters” all prove unable to bear witness adequately, paradoxically due to their attempted objectivity and detachment.

Ray makes a conscious and determined effort to “get at the heart of things” for “[s]omebody, somewhere along the line has to try to get at the heart of things” (68). But trauma by its very nature resists being represented directly. So Ray himself becomes a mitigator of “fabrications” as he offers Henry’s “irreplaceable” (91) 1931 childhood pictures to Taxi to be used as the base of a new family history that would rely on more than words for its truth value. He realizes that everything—memories, the stories people tell, even identity and origins—are mere constructs fashioned and re-fashioned according to one’s state of mind and circumstances, and that neither the photos nor the details he forced out of Taxi about his father’s strange trip and even stranger passing brought him any closer to a truthful testimony about their past and present condition.

Through Taxi’s recollections the story of Henry’s last days comes to life on stage in the form of flashbacks. Shepard ingeniously uses the theatrical convention of changing light-effects to merge present and past, and alternate between different layers of time, so that the father—a corpse in the present of the events, placed on the bed in the alcove—can come to life within the play not only as a verbal but as a physical actuality to testify “in the flesh” to his last days alive.⁹ In these flashback scenes the title character is allowed to act out the story different versions of which have been presented by Earl, Esteban, and Taxi. He becomes the protagonist of the dramatized narrative, while Ray turns into an outsider, on the margin, “invisible” to the ones re-enacting past events. During the flashbacks—separated from the linear, chronological unfolding of the story—Ray seems to shift into a trance-like state, a traditional theater convention that fulfills a double function here: It suggests that the scene displayed on stage is a dramatization of memory that Ray later scrutinizes and questions. The seemingly unconscious state in which he slips symbolically also refers to his inability to “see,” understand, and master the trauma, while suggesting his liminal separation as well.

The younger son plays the role of the neophyte who, together with his older brother, is forced into the ritual of Henry’s death where they both try to cope. Earl attempts to deal with the situation by following the instructions of the self-appointed ritual elder Conchalla, and later by adopting and re-enacting Henry’s habitual behavior: he makes Esteban take him to all the bars his father used to visit, gets drunk, and similarly to what Henry himself would do, abuses the helpful neighbor both verbally and physically. He proves to be the type of neophyte who learns, or rather should learn by re-enactment and role-playing.

⁹ Shepard also uses the technique of “reviving” the dead father in *Fool for Love* where the father sits in a chair throughout the action of the play and comments on his children’s acts and statements, but remains an inactive observer and reviewer of the unfolding story.

Ray attempts to cope with his father's death by ways that can be interpreted as what Turner calls "ritual instruction." He summons all who possess information—Earl, Esteban, Taxi—to tell him the story of Henry's life and death. And once this type of instruction proves inefficient all stories having been denounced as "fabrications," he changes strategies: he steps into the story himself appropriating Henry's role and re-enacting the traumatizing night that destroyed their family. This way he hopes to gain some control by fashioning the course of the story according to his own understanding of it. He first tries to recreate the past on a narrative level, but by act three he steps onto the level of action and into the center of events that set all of them into the liminal phase they have been unable to transcend and that has suspended time.

Earl still attempts to keep the past invisible, and thus as if nonexistent, and to continue to live in the present that is not destined to progress towards any future goal. He, however, is forced by his brother, and as it is revealed in the final flashback, by his father, to face up to the accusation of having run instead of trying to stop the violent attack on his mother. Henry charges his older son with inaction, making it impossible for him to entirely turn his back on the recollected events. Ray, who has been cast in the role of the victim as the abandoned younger son, decides to fight his brother and take control over not only the present but also the past forcing it into the foreground. And he also fails in this attempt. Although liminality could offer the ludic possibility of rearranging and recreating "reality," Ray—instead of taking control of the present by transforming the past into something onto which a future could be constructed—is overwhelmed by it. The past becomes an alternate reality that invades the present and changes it into a horrifying doubling of a narrative of violence and death. Instead of exorcising "the dead father's toxic grip" (Kuharski 500) and finding Turnerian "communitas" with Earl that could protect them by turning their violence against something or somebody other, their mimetic desire to own control over the past transforms them into enemies. Being unable to turn against their father or find a surrogate victim, a scapegoat, they remain suspended in the liminal state of fighting each other and duplicating their violent role model, the late Henry Moss.

Through mirroring Ray brings about this doubling. In the third act flashback Henry himself retells the story of the night he left his family, a recollection that leads to his understanding of his liminality, rather than to an absolution. He finally recognizes and admits, first of all to himself, that on the night he beat his wife he "killed himself" (112) emotionally and spiritually, a recognition that sets him free from suspended time and makes his physical death possible that "twenty-five years later is a mere formality" (Roudané, "Sam Shepard" 282). He acknowledges that both the grief he saw in his beaten wife's eyes and Conchalla's pronouncing him dead were accurate assessments of his state. His "deaths"—the physical one as well as the emotional and spiritual ones a quarter of a century earlier—were only stages

in his liminality launched by some trauma in the past that is untraceable and impossible to pinpoint in time, the “curse” that so often befalls Shepard’s characters.

Henry Moss exemplifies those father figures in Shepard’s body of work who have been afflicted by their participation in the Second World War. Henry, irritated by both the fact that Conchalla pronounced him dead in front of the whole jail community and thus everybody now thinks he is, and by Taxi’s obvious inability to understand him, bursts out in a soliloquy of fragmented and elliptical sentences rapidly thrown one after the other concomitantly revealing and concealing information about his past:

What did I ever do to deserve this [Conchalla repeatedly emphasizing that he was dead]? I’ve led an honorable life for the most part. I’ve served my country. I’ve dropped bombs on total strangers! I’ve worked my ass off for idiots. Paid my taxes. There’s never once been any question of my—existence! Never once. It’s humiliating! A man my age—to be forced into this kind of position. I’m too old to having [sic!] to prove I’m alive! (79)

It is not revealed what or for whom Henry worked, it can only be deduced from such outbursts that he served in the armed forces and fought in the Second World War. Similarly to Weston Tate in *Curse of the Starving Class*, for Henry Moss the war represents that traumatizing event in the past that displaced him and made him unable to communicate or make contact with his family and the world around him. He “is crippled emotionally” (Weiss 7); the only thing that still connects him to his family is the fact that they are the ones whom he uses to externalize his rage and violence. After the war he is unable to fit into a culture and society that expects from him so radically different behavior than the destruction he witnessed and inflicted upon others. He is marginalized, the outsider, forever longing to belong and wishing for a central position. His wife’s decision to lock him out of the house becomes the physical materialization of his emotional and spiritual state, thus it leads to such a devastating outburst of rage and violence on Henry’s part.¹⁰

The language describing that night of crisis as the “big blowout” with “explosions” and “windows breaking” (8) creates an imagery reminiscent of war-zone descriptions suggestive of the fact that Henry did not only “drop bombs on total strangers” (79) but also on his family. For him—caught up in the liminality

¹⁰ The same act of locking the war-traumatized father out of the house and the destructive consequences constitute the opening scene of *Curse of the Starving Class*: Wesley, the teenage son of the family is gathering the debris scattered on stage and he is trying to fix the door that Weston, the father broke the previous night, describing, in one of the most poetic soliloquies in Shepard’s oeuvre, the event as an invasion not merely of the house but also of his spirit and mind.

inflicted upon him by the war—the family members were just as different and strange as the “Japs” (79) he had killed. In conformity with the pattern of doubling that characterizes the whole play, that tragic night is also presented in two versions and two different time-frames, by two characters and from their different points of view: First, by Ray, he himself being already a “copy” of his father, and by Henry in the last flashback. Ray is in control of the “present” time on stage, but Henry dominates the flashbacks. The play thus turns into a dialectic of the two narrative levels, a fight to determine who owns the past based on the delusive hope that whoever wins, that will control the present.

With his physical death, Henry’s suspended time is terminated but not transcended. His liminality has been extended to incorporate his sons: time has stopped still for them and they have been propelled into the permanent “state of shock” (Shepard’s term) to which Henry’s death does not bring any closure. The illusion of the end, that Baudrillard defines as part of the fantasy of a linear history now moving in reverse and wiping out all the traces of the twentieth century (*Illusion* 5), deconstructing the illusion of well-defined and stable identities as possible “end products,” is annihilated by doubling: Earl and Ray have become mirror images of their parents, alternatively taking on the role of the victimizer and that of the victim. They are “doomed” (Henry’s favorite word to describe his own state, a term he wants to monopolize—33) to live within a perpetuated liminality they have inherited, without the guidance of a “ritual elder.”

The ritualistic structure of the play is made even more complex by the characters who function as the “mysterious Other,” who participate in the recreation of the past and alternately fulfill the role of “ritual elders.” Esteban, the friendly and caring neighbor functions as a surrogate wife to both “Mr. Henry” and his sons: balancing bowls of soup from his trailer to Henry’s and cooking menudo to heal the hangover of the Moss males. He also takes on the role of the story-teller revealing different aspects of Henry’s life. Their conversations seem to have been made up of the stories Esteban told about his former life, as Henry denied having had a past. Besides being a surrogate caretaker, Esteban also possesses certain knowledge and skills that make him an appropriate guide in the process the Moss sons are undergoing with the death of their father. He cautions them to say good-bye to the dead appropriately. He also seems to be in possession of the accurate data about Henry’s life in Bernalillo and his death for he is the only one whose vision and perception is not blurred and corrupted by alcohol. He says he always just pretended to drink together with Henry, never actually drank, a confession that for Ray makes Esteban a “pretender” and a fake, invalidating him as a source of information or guidance.

He is perceived and used both by Henry and then by Earl and Ray not only as a substitute wife in the sense that he feeds them and cares for them when they are drunk, but also as a testing ground and object of their erupting violence. They

abuse him verbally with their ironic remarks and vicious attacks as well as physically, trying to cast him in the role of a scapegoat. Esteban, however, defies these attempts by being aware of the position he is cast in as the object of the Mosses' violence and objectifying gaze, and thus nullifying their efficiency. Henry and implicitly his sons need him: he relates the story of how Henry used to stand by the window and wait for him to come. Esteban also creates the most ironic image of that type of male whose existence depends on whether the object of his gaze accepts being caught in this position and thus sustains the observer or rejects it thus depriving the observer of his "food":

EARL What satisfaction could you possibly get outta serving a man who was so damn ungrateful!

ESTEBAN It is like—feeding livestock—. . . Birds. . . They do nothing. They—live, that is all. They are just there. But they need you. They look to you. They wait for you by the fence. They know you bring them something. Every day they are there at the same time—waiting. They know the hour you will appear. Mr. Henry, he use [sic!] to wait for me like that. (85)

He consciously accepts and subjects himself to the Mosses' abuses, therefore becoming an "inefficient" victim.

Taxi, the other strange male in the Mosses' story, appears in both the present of the narrative on stage and the recollective flashback scenes. He is a clown-like carnivalesque figure summoned by Ray to tell the story of the fishing trip; act two is dedicated exclusively to Taxi's interrogation by Ray. But any story he tells or recalls is finally dismissed as a lie or a "fabrication," as Taxi is weak and empty. He does not even have a name, he is only identified by his job as a taxi driver; the Mosses occasionally refer to him sarcastically and ironically as "Taxi-man." He possesses neither the intelligence nor the understanding to make him able to sustain the validity of his stories—whether they are about Henry or Taxi himself. He is terrified of Ray and ready to deny anything, even his origins, once Ray questions them. He even moves according to Ray's commands, who seems to be playing upon Taxi as a playwright or a director would play upon the actors playing different roles on stage. Taxi is a true clown; a puppet moving and talking according to the wishes of the Mosses who become the puppet-masters using Taxi as a "substitute speaker" (Roudané, "Sam Shepard" 286). And when he fails to convince them of the truth of the words they themselves force him to utter, they turn him into a punching bag and he becomes the victim of their vicious mockery.

"Henry, immobilized because of his ghost-status" needs Taxi "to take up the question of his essence" (Roudané, "Sam Shepard" 286) and argue the case of his being alive with Conchalla. But Taxi fails because he does not understand the

essence and point of Henry's request. For him, being alive means walking and talking, yelling and breathing; his only ambition is to leave the taxi-driving business and become a pizza delivery man so that he can take pineapple combos to girls' dormitories at night. He also fails as a veritable storyteller: when Ray questions his identity, he tries to prove himself as a Texan through the fact that, according to their family history, Comanches slaughtered his great-great-grandmother. Shepard himself ironically remarks in *This So-Called Disaster* that Comanches did not slaughter anybody, just as Ray reacts to the story of the murdered ancestor: "Sounds like a story to me. . . . A fabrication, passed down from one generation to another . . . there's really no way to verify this little story of yours, is there? This little history?" (67-68). Instead of providing Ray with a narrative to which he could relate, Taxi's stories are transformed into a platform and example for the development of a thesis of narratology: stories are fabrications and even our reality is created through the constructs we build without practically any factual basis. Taxi, the displaced Texan, who cannot fit in even though his aspirations are less than down-to-earth they are so instinctual and basic, becomes the showcase of what Roudané calls "the rupture between the signifier and the signified" ("Sam Shepard" 281) where the authority and validity of texts becomes negotiable. This questionable quality of Taxi's stories spreads and problematizes the entire narrative presented on stage, functioning as a metatextual comment emphasizing the all-defining importance of interpretation and point of view.

Conchalla Lupina, the one female character in the play, only appears in recollected time, in the flashback scenes as if she were not entirely real, not even in the constructed universe on stage, but rather a "fabrication" of Henry's imagination, endowed with supernatural powers and superhuman insight into matters of life and death. She is doubly the mysterious and dangerous Other: she is the epitomized female with mythic powers of both giving and taking life and, at the same time, her ethnicity (Native American) sets her apart from the other characters as somebody different, with a closer and still authentic relation to nature, to life, and to death, a "knower," "doer," and "revealer." If Henry Moss goes through the transition of Living Man to Ghost Man to Dead Man, as Roudané argues, the second two phases being aspects of his Liminal Man state, Conchalla functions as the "ritual elder" in this process of passage.

Conchalla becomes the enhanced representation of how the Moss males perceive women: as sexual objects, strong opponents, mysterious and teasing, therefore desired and feared at the same time. In her presence, all the men are overcome by primitive fears and "a postmodern discomfort" due to "a sense of profound isolation from one's past, one's environment, and one's spiritual self" (deRose 67) that she has the power to make them conscious of. She pronounces Henry dead and forces him into a deeply troubling existential crisis of either fighting her to prove he is alive or accepting her authority and surrendering to her

powers. And Henry, having fought this kind of battle with his wife twenty-five years earlier, finally recognizes his defeat and subjects himself to the mysterious Native female.

“Doubly other and doubly desirable” and feared, just like the female characters in Shepard’s *Silent Tongue* “by virtue of their gender and their exotic race” (deRose 69), Conchalla possesses powers that make the men around her confess to their being active agents of their own destinies and acknowledge their denial and ignorance. She is able to link their past to their present. In the case of the Moss males, however, she does not project a future even though she has proven capable of giving life: she has brought the fish back to life, but only to gulp it down immediately afterwards, displaying a somewhat clichéd image of the enchanting female cannibalizing the male who falls into her trap.

The two mysterious Others, Esteban and Conchalla also “handle” the liminal symbols of the play. Esteban is in charge of feeding the patriarch and his sons, while Conchalla proves to be the grand master of movement, of cleansing ceremonies, and of death. The food offerings that Esteban makes and Henry as well as his sons refuse over and over again—similarly to Dodge who in *Buried Child* refuses to eat the bouillon prepared by the “surrogate” wife Shelly—are unable to re-empower and fortify the fallen patriarch exactly because of their source. Esteban is himself a simulacrum, a substitute, not the veritable “giver of life.”

Conchalla controls Henry’s life and death, and also the narratives referring to Henry’s last days: she remains the only one whom Ray does not interrogate, her version is never heard, thus a mystery impossible to verify or to refute. She empowers Henry to be able to recall the events of the traumatizing night when he “died,” and she offers him the opportunity to take a new perspective upon his life. And she appears to put the play itself into motion: the first two acts start with Henry and Conchalla dancing across the stage to the sounds of a “very sultry Mexican rumba” (5) and then “a more spirited mariachi piece” (47). She also controls movement in the flashback scenes: she bounces Esteban and hums Henry to death. She remains outside Henry’s “toxic grip.” She is the master of ceremonies of Henry’s process of dying but she is protected from its contaminating field: she performs the ritual cleansing necessary to separate herself from the dead by submerging in the hot water of the bathtub, the female and life-giving element that empowers her.

Cleansing the trailer that “stinks” and providing food appear to be Ray’s preoccupations as well. But once again, he is doomed to failure. In his case the scrubbing of the floor does not lead to purification but to a reproduction of the family’s tragic night, just as the colors of the blanket covering Henry’s corpse—red and yellow—reproduce the colors associated with that traumatizing event: the yellow scrubbed floor tiles with the mother’s red blood smeared all over them.

The liminal symbols used within this shifting and multi-layered narrative involve all the senses. The smell of the menudo cooked by Esteban on stage fills the auditorium.¹¹ Ray refers several times to the fact that the corpse stinks—just like Halie sarcastically notices in *Buried Child* that Dodge “is smelling up the house with [his] putrid body” (32), and that the whole place should be cleaned, or better yet, torn down, symbolically alluding to the fact that the legacy of the father cannot be mastered, and neither can the traumas that he inflicted upon his sons, therefore they should be wiped out of memory without a trace.

Sight and the eyes play a central role in setting apart the dead from those alive—a symbol that also constitutes the focal point of *Eyes for Consuelita*. Henry’s asking Taxi to look into his eyes and check whether he can discover any traces of life parallel the scene when Ray checks Earl’s eyes at the end of act two, the only time he steps out of the trance-like state he is placed in during the flashbacks, stating: “I see you Earl. I see you now!” (81). Sight here also means understanding: by experiencing the flashback, Ray learns that—contrary to what his brother told him earlier—Earl arrived to the trailer before their father’s death. In this context, however, “I see you” suggesting insight turns into an ironic statement, proving that eyes can be deceiving and the picture one perceives is conditioned by one’s mental, emotional, and spiritual state. Touching appears with a negative connotation as well: there exists a severe interdiction in relation to the corpse. Even the funeral attendants dealing with Henry’s body, struggle with the task, dropping the corpse on the floor before they are able to take it out of the trailer. Henry’s body seems to be clinging to his surroundings just like his violence clings to and is resurrected in the next generation.

The ritualistic structure of the play with its juxtaposed and intermingled multiple layers of narrative mixing present and past, shifting the focal point from one generation’s rite of passage to the older generation’s ritual death and back again, functions as a mirror for Shepard’s own attempts to exorcise the ghost of his own life, the memory of his father. At the same time, it also sheds new light—in the true sense of T.S. Eliot’s thesis that every new work of art re-interprets each previous one—on the large variety of intertextually evoked texts from ancient Greek tragedies to King Lear’s lament: “O, let me not be mad, not mad, sweet heaven!” tragically and ironically contradicted by the Mosses’ story; to the corpse on stage reminiscent of the final image of *Buried Child*: the dead patriarch lying on stage and the corpse of the baby in Tilden’s arms. It lures audiences into a liminoid sphere and forces them to take a new look at the rearranged and “de-familiarized” image of the American family disrupted by implosion and trauma, and feeding on itself in a cannibalistic and self-destructive manner; and the old myths upon which American culture has been constructed. The Mosses’ life story is turned into

¹¹ Shepard specifies in the stage directions that the cooking should be real.

information to be gathered and subjected to endless speculations, the site of total uncertainty. Shepard discloses a liminal culture where this ritual phase is only perceived as marginality and alienation rather than as a possibility for reconstruction and the achieving of a new perspective. It draws us into the ludic and ironic sphere of Shepard's works that have the power—like Conchalla's gift of breathing life into the dead—to reshape the whole literary universe, a heredity Shepard—unlike the Mosses theirs—accepts and reinterprets.

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Representation of Consciousness in Gábor Bódy's *Hamlet*

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Abstract. Starting from theoretical considerations regarding the relationship between the dramatic text and its representation, the present paper proposes to investigate the space construction in the Hungarian experimental director's stage/video adaptation of the Shakespearean play. The performance makes use of a "bio-radical" setting modeling the shape of a dissected human brain. On the one hand, the paper focuses on the multimedial feature of the aesthetic experience provided by the television version of the performance, blending both theatrical and cinematic space experience. On the other hand, the study argues that the performance initiates a fruitful dialogue between tradition and innovation, simultaneously evoking the emblematic character of the early modern theater and setting up a postmodern experimental stage. The consciously explored simultaneity of various representational and theatrical traditions/inventions results in a Neo-Avantgarde reinterpretation of the Renaissance *Theatrum mundi*, aimed at staging the micro- and macrocosmic (corpo)reality of the subject and its social environment.

Keywords: multimediality, experimental theater/film, space representation, new/imagist theatricality

Gábor Bódy (1946-1985) is primarily accounted for as a film director; nevertheless, for one performance his career crosses the institutionalized Hungarian theater. If we approach Bódy's relationship with the theater on broad terms, obviously we should not ignore the theatrical aspects of his film either, however, these do not constitute the subject matter of the present study.

Gábor Bódy was an innovator who strived to renew the language of the Hungarian film and to connect it to contemporary international trends. He made his first films within the framework of the Béla Balázs Studio; he was the first to direct films in the BBS already before graduating the profile of film and television directing at the College of Theatre and Film Art. It was within the BBS that he accomplished the *Film Language Series*, that is, the first experimental film project of the Studio, then his diploma film, the *American Anzix* (*Amerikai anzix*, 1975). He presented himself in front of the large public with his first feature film, *Narcis and Psyche* (*Nárcisz és Psyché*, 1980); he initiated the first international video magazine; he founded the experimental unit of the MAFILM. He held lectures on film theory; his studies on the aesthetics of film language showed the influence of János Zsilka's works in linguistics. In his theoretical writings Bódy significantly contributed to the semiotic theory of the film and elaborated his theory of seriality as well as his concept of the attribution of meaning related to the motion picture. Besides, he acts the main role of his third—and last—feature film entitled *Dog's Night Song* (*Kutya éji dala*, 1983). All in all, Bódy's experimentalism—and here I refer to both his theoretical writings and his artistic productions—presents a strong tendency of redefining the rhetoric of visual representation (whether films, theatrical performances or video installations) on aesthetic and (film-) philosophical grounds. Within the context of this career, it can be taken for granted that on Bódy's stage *Hamlet* (1982) also became a product of an experimentalist artistic endeavor.

When examining a *performance-text*, the investigation must indispensably start from considerations regarding the relationship between the dramatic text and its representation. When examining the status of the text as compared to its representation, we have to take into account both historical and theoretical aspects. On the one hand, the text/representation relationship is historically determined; from the end of the seventeenth century onwards the view that the text “precedes” its representation starts to spread, however, earlier theater used to be representation-focused, based on a more intimate relationship between the word and the body, the actor actually taking part in the fulfillment of the creative activity. Together with the gaining ground of the written word, the status of representation is gradually repressed; it gains an additional quality, a secondary significance, becoming the servant of the dramatic text. Patrice Pavis regards this as a “historical accident” brought about by the act of recording the texts in writing, their repeated utilization, by the sophisticated rhetoric of plot and also by the quality of creativity attached to the director (175). Out of these historically determined factors two distinct views of the *mise en scène* have emerged and co-exist, namely the text-centered and the stage-centered ones. The co-existence of these two views reveals an interpretive urge of establishing a hierarchy between the text and its representation.

According to the text-centered views, representation “fills in” the dramatic text; Anne Ubersfeld uses the term “textual matrix” for the gaps of the dramatic text that the *mise en scène* serves to complete (qtd. Pavis 176). In this respect, theatrical representation is a medium which interprets the possible meanings of the dramatic text. Furthermore, the text-centered views regard the text as being a distant, absent reference, which normatively prescribes the space formation of the stage.

The stage-centered views reject the normative, derivative, cause-effect relationship between text and representation, and declare the autonomy of the *mise en scène*. According to Hans-Thies Lehmann, the *mise en scène* stands for an artistic practice that is “invisible” from the perspective of the text (qtd. in Pavis 177).

I would like to point out the relevance of these theoretical considerations related to the topic of my paper. In the social-political framework of the 1980s the Hungarian theater—and its reception—proved to be text-centered,¹ and could hardly come abreast of Western European innovative endeavors. The stake of staging a play in this period is, thus, to evade the oppressive political ideology, to make possible for the audience to “read between the lines,” to filter meanings resounding with the current—liminal—existential situation, to provide interferences. In his writing entitled “‘Dead Theater’—Cultural Vacuum” Gábor Bódy accuses the Hungarian theatrical culture of the decade of being out-of-date, of bearing the stigmata of obsolescence. In fact, the charges—in line with Peter Brook’s use of the term—refer to the customary theater-going practice, to the lack of originality of the performances, to the merely subscription-based relation between the theater and the audience, to the superficial cult of actors as well as to the museal, alien atmosphere within the confines of the theater. He summarizes what he lacks in this “malaise” of theatrical life as follows:

. . . it seems that our theaters regularly remain debtors of the culture of the *presence*, that is, of arts, which does not interpret, is not simply ‘culture’, but present-time *creation*, live failure or success, reflector of social-political questions, touchstone of ethical habits, visual sensation; which raises, whether scandal or enthusiasm, but surprise anyway, and offers the public the impression that we expect from every great encounter: namely that *we have changed*. (Bódy, “‘Dead Theater’” 83, trans. by me, J. P.)

¹ Árpád Kékesi Kun draws attention to the strongly text-oriented character of the traditional discourse of Hungarian theater criticism, which bears the imprints of Dezső Kosztolányi’s influential view. This discourse primarily pays attention to the verbal part of the complex, verbal and non-verbal semiotic system represented by the stage performance; it measures the success of the performance in accordance with the effectiveness of the recited text and reserves the attributes of creativity for the—almost mythical—figure of the playwright (Kékesi Kun, *The Revolt of Mirror Images* 147-61).

The cultural vacuum formed in the “official” theatrical life favored the revival of alternative artistic enterprises—amateur theater, happenings and performances—aimed at compensating for the deficiencies of the extant institutions, in other words, a kind of “underground theatrical culture,” which encountered the Avantgarde orientation of the other arts.² Bódy describes the characteristics of these alternative forms with the following words: sharp presence; expressiveness; everyday-like character; spontaneity; the assumption of failure; readiness for renewal (Bódy, “Dead Theater” 85). Although it brings a new air, the theater of the *presence* set against “dead theater” cannot fully represent the Hungarian theatrical life, due to its subcultural character; besides, these endeavors had mostly ceased to exist by the 1980s, they had become a legend. Under these circumstances, Bódy considered that the task of modernization was to be incumbent upon regional theatrical institutions and was to be fulfilled by the new views and concepts of young directors carrying out their activity within these institutions. Although the National Theater from Győr formed part of the official institutional structure, it allowed alternative, experimental endeavors and made several attempts to stage performances set against the ruling ideology, even at the expense of prohibitions.

The director under discussion conceives the reform of the Hungarian theatrical culture by subverting the customary ways of expression, by basically ignoring public taste, with the freedom of an experimental language reinforced by impulses of alternative concepts. Bódy is interested in the renovation of theatrical language in line with international trends; according to him, this renewal is possible through a specific combination of tradition and innovation. Thus, he strives for a twofold approach of the dramatic text: the setting is aimed at representing both a stylized imitation of the Renaissance emblematic theater and an abstract Neo-Avantgarde installation. In this way the performance seems to function both as a kind of representation coded in the Shakespearean dramatic text and as an original and autonomous contemporary way of staging. As follows, I would like to present my arguments in defense of this hypothesis.³

Bódy directed *Hamlet*—initially—as a theatrical production; then it was turned into a video film aimed at being broadcast on television. The transmediation—from staging to video recording—undoubtedly modifies the viewer’s aesthetic experience. In his study about the theatrical space experience written in the 1930s, Max Herrmann remarks that there is a fundamental difference between theatrical and film experience, as in the film the real space and the real bodies are absent (509). As long as a stage production is transposed into a film, the theatrical

² For an exhaustive analysis of the cultural discourses of resistance, and within, the functioning of theatrical subculture in the Kádár-era, see Havasréti (88-98).

³ The present paper is not aimed at carrying out a full performance analysis of Gábor Bódy’s *Hamlet*; its focus is deliberately limited to the formation—and poetics—of theatrical space.

features are apparently preserved; however, the fixed viewpoint of the viewer of a theatrical play is replaced by the changing perspective of the moving camera. The “camera eye” penetrates into the inner space of the stage and dissolves the prescribed distance between the viewer and the performance, better said, it alternates an outer, distant perspective with the possibility of following the significant details of the performance and of the actors in close-ups. In addition, the theatrical features are also modified by cutting and montage. In the case of Gábor Bódy’s *Hamlet* the video recording does not only serve as to make possible a revision after rehearsals, or does not only provide an archive of the theatrical performance; on the contrary, it is aimed at creating a new work of art, assigning a distinct quality to visual representation. All these contribute to the formation of “another stage” which is ultimately built up in the viewer’s imagination, as a symbolic scene of the imaginary.

The director’s intention offers a Neo-Avantgarde interpretation of *Hamlet* as a play and Hamlet as a personage. *Hamlet* as a play has known various interpretations throughout the past centuries; its readings are stratified upon one another in a palimpsest-like manner and complete—or play off—one another along the mainstream interpretive orientations of the respective period. As a classic, in the qualitative sense of the term, the dramatic text itself creates the links with the specific preoccupations and interpretive practices of different ages; practically each age produces its own *Hamlet*, as the sense of universal disorder and crisis—so profoundly elaborated in the (speech) acts of the tragic hero—is an iterative social, cultural pattern characterizing human existence (cf. Hankiss 22).

In this way, in the limelight of the experimental endeavors of the 1980s, the Shakespearean tragedy initiates a dialogue with Neo-Avantgarde action theories. The *mise en scène* presents Hamlet not only as a hero or a plotter, but also as a subject defining himself in relation to others, in relation to the surrounding social environment, reflecting on the social reality in which he has to place himself. While the title proposes an interpretation of Hamlet’s figure as the “armed philosopher,” the two parts of the television version of the theatrical performance divide, separate the two colliding spheres of Hamlet’s identity: that of the philosopher and that of the warrior respectively. Hamlet’s figure can be “read” as the allegorical embodiment of Reflection and Action; Hamlet’s dilemma becomes the dilemma of arts: should arts only reflect on the social milieu, or should they turn to action, that is, exercise an authority extending beyond the limits of the aesthetic? The Shakespearean world view successfully meets the endeavors of the Neo-Avantgarde artists to attack the secure position and world view of the spectators, to dislocate the category system of the interpreters and to orientate the theatrical discourse towards paradoxical dead ends.

Gábor Bódy focuses on a radical re-reading of the play, starting from a fundamental interpretation according to which the tragedy presents “how

Reflection changes into Action, how an open, young and inquisitive mind resolves to make the single, final bloody act,” but immediately amplifying this with a contemporary layer of interpretation, according to which Hamlet embodies a modern myth of the individual “whether Hamlet is regarded as the hero of subways . . . , the monster . . . of horrors, the political representative of truth or as a lonesome singer” (Bódy, “Hamlet” 189).

In this way, Bódy attempts a twofold orientation: on the one hand, to turn back to the early modern stage, to grasp and render the original feature of the play, on the other hand, to open it up for contemporary concepts of the individual and of the stage. Bódy also recognizes the tensions between the different ages, and proposes a stage adaptation that benefits from this tension and is thus based on “such tectonics that we can make conclusions regarding the future with as much of assurance as the past” (Bódy, “Hamlet” 190). In this way, the clash between the old and the new will be consciously explored in the performance, in which a suitable terrain is provided for a dialogue between different corpora of representational and theatrical traditions. The past dimension of the performance can be traced back to medieval mystery plays, while the future dimension points forward to the corporeal turn gaining ground in poststructuralist theories, emerging and becoming widely spread, in fact, after Bódy’s endeavors (cf. Kiss, “The Stage of Consciousness”).

The stage performance makes use of a “bio-radical”—Bódy’s expression—setting modeling the shape of a dissected human brain. Bódy’s stage design is aimed at the fulfilment of a conceptual project, namely, that of creating a “stage of consciousness,” through exhibiting, exteriorizing the human organism in its naturalistic physicality:

This space should be void, dark—cosmic—out of which planes, figures, performers are isolated by the single gleaming lights. Or it should be an organic labyrinth, passages in space-with-brain-neurons. A field which is suitable for separation and conjuncture alike. A section of the brain that sometimes works, but sometimes detaches itself with a stiffness as regards to picture and sound. It is a macrocosmos on the outside, a microcosmos in the inside. Yet it should be living, dynamic, rather than exhibition-like. (Bódy, “Hamlet” 189-190)

The scenery is devised as a total space construction, which consists of constructional elements—a dissected brain with its passages standing for blood vessels, plastic tubes standing for neurons and fibres—as well as additional light and sound effects. The movements and the proxemic possibilities of the actors were basically restricted to the spatial conditions provided by the brain-labyrinth. It should be mentioned here that the activity of the actors was not fully prescribed by the director; the actors were invited to become co-authors of the performance, in

accordance with the Neo-Avantgarde—and the early modern—staging practice. Besides, the performance fully respected the dramatic text; its Hungarian version translated by János Arany was neither cut nor altered.

Bódy's ingenious setting deconstructs the conventional arrangement of the theatrical space. The setting represents the interior of the hero's consciousness, but it is also aimed at representing the world of the interpersonal relations set up within the dramatic text. It represents the physical, the material, the corporeal, conceived as both a macro- and microcosm: "perhaps a monumental wall or quite 'small' like a skull" (Bódy, "Hamlet" 189-190). Several film procedures employed by Bódy indicate that the human psyche and cosmic universe are regarded as each other's mirror reflections.

For the Hungarian (reading) public, the depths of the human brain had already been explored, its minute vivisection had already been carried out by Frigyes Karinthy in his *Journey around my Skull* (*Utazás a koponyám körül*), written in 1936, one year before his death, creating in a way the pre-condition, the horizon of expectations of the radical stage design created by Bódy. The space design of the stage is based on a metaleptic inversion of the binary oppositions of interior/exterior, material/spiritual. The brain is the ultimate terrain of knowledge, representing a task for mankind similar to getting to know the cosmic universe. It is simultaneously a structure and a counter-structure, order and chaos; this is why it can be considered as a heterotopia in Foucault's sense of the term. At the same time, by displaying the dissected human brain, an epistemological interest in the play gets into the foreground. What is there to be known? Do mental "representations" have a real body of reference, or they get apart from reality, as in the case of Hamlet's much debated madness? Who knows and what and about whom?⁴ Is there a possibility to penetrate into each other's mysterious mental territories within the framework of our interpersonal relations? The staging centers on the mental processes presented in the philosophical play; in fact it is the brain, the mind that is pushed into the foreground as the main character of the play.⁵

A connection can be made between the preoccupation with the body in the twentieth century as well as in the Shakespearean age. The Renaissance exploration of—and experimentation with—human anatomy led to an epistemological crisis, together with a shift in the concept of the body as a signifier. Attila Kiss identifies this problem as the problem of Renaissance theater, regarded as a possible forum of the display of the human body:

⁴ This layer of meaning might have had resonances for Bódy's contemporary public as overhearing, the transmission of knowledge about others to certain political "organs" was a widely spread social practice.

⁵ In Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, there is a striking predominance of allusions to the mind and other organs, suggesting an anatomic view of the human body.

The thematization of the body, the production of corpses in Renaissance theater is a strategy of representation which tries to provide some kind of answer to the epistemological crisis. It is not satisfied with the commonplace skull of *memento mori*; instead, it experiments with the dissection of the body with meta-theatrical awareness, with a prolongation of the moment of death, with the setting of the abject onto the stage, so that, through these it should exercise a *total impact* onto the spectator, resulting in immediacy of experience. The theater becomes a semiotic laboratory, in which the *abjection of the body* tries to get through the ambivalences of appearance and reality, and tries to provide the presence of the signified through this impact. This is the body, the image system of wild violence, brutal mutilation and heterogeneous corporeality, which will be absent from modern theater built on the concept of the unified subject. The presence of *theatrical anatomy* separates, among others, the Renaissance *emblematic theater* from the modern *photographic theater*. (Kiss, "The Theater of Anatomy" 12, trans. by me, J. P.)

The meta-theatrical awareness, together with a renewed interest in corporeality turns back, among other trends and endeavors, in the Avantgarde, Neo-Avantgarde and experimentalism. Bódy's *Hamlet* avoids the tradition of modern theater and joins the tradition of Renaissance meta-theater; it is after this fashion that it attempts to bring a new quality into the relationship between the performance and the public. Attila Kiss argues that the *representational insufficiency* of theater is consciously thematized by metatheater, which permanently reveals that a representational experiment is going on, breaking thus the illusion of dramatic reality and attempting to create a total experience in this way (Kiss, "The Post-Semiotics of Testimony" 68).

However, the—mostly negative—critical echoes of the stage performance reveal an asynchrony as concerns the relation between creativity and reception.⁶ They disapprove of the predominance of the spectacle and formulate their objections in critical discourses revealing the—already mentioned—text-centered approach, outdated from the viewpoint of today's performance theories.

Árpád Kékesi Kun offers the term *imagist theatricality* for one of the "postmodern" theatrical orientations emerging in the Hungarian theater of the 1990s, defying the realist tradition by the very dominance/excessive use of the spectacle. Imagist theatricality confers an unusually significant role to the visual created within the theatrical space, it strives for achieving a dream-like spectacle, reinforced by various effects. Kékesi Kun distinguishes four trends within the theater of the end of the millenium; besides imagist theatricality he also mentions the

⁶ According to Árpád Kékesi Kun, it is only apparently that reception and creativity form a binary opposition; in fact they are mutually interdependent and in close connection within theatrical culture (Kékesi Kun, "Reception and Creativity in Theatre (Culture)" 9).

endeavors striving for radical reinterpretations, the Neo-Avantgarde trend as well as the performances representing a disharmonious beauty ideal. He offers the term *new theatricality* as a common term comprising all these orientations:

. . . the action unfolding on the stage is continuously put in quotation marks, the act of pretending and the viewer's empathy become impossible. Thus, through an extension of acting, new theatricality makes the situations on the stage relative, in this way it reaches a kind of 'meta-theatrical' dimension, the aspect of 'theater about theater.' . . . Thus, in the theater of a new kind of visuality the associative construction, the disruptions of style, the application of impressive effects, in short, all the elements of postmodern eclecticism serve to displace, to suspend and to continuously postpone authentic experience. (Kékesi Kun, *The Revolt of Mirror Images* 102-103, trans. by me, J. P.)

While in the theater of Western Europe the change of paradigm in the direction of new theatricality had already taken place in the 1970s-80s, we can only speak of isolated endeavors as concerns Hungarian theater, and Gábor Bódy's *Hamlet* is one of them. Additionally, while in the 1980s the theater of the spectacle was not recognized due to its unusual forms of expressivity, in the 1990s the critical discourse—under the auspices of the *performative turn*—comes abreast of these theatrical forms and offers an adequate theoretical terminology (see Fischer-Lichte 27-47). The concept of Gábor Bódy's *Hamlet* proves to be asynchronous with its age,⁷ however, as this paper has tried to point out, it can be linked both “anaphorically,” to the Renaissance tradition, and “cataphorically,” to critical discourses contemporary to us; as such, it can be rightfully regarded as a paradigmatic performance, a significant moment within the history of Hungarian theater.

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⁷ In connection with Bódy's *Hamlet*, Gabriella Schuller uses the oxymoron “synchronous asynchrony” (Schuller, “Performances Directed by Gábor Bódy and András Jeles”).

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The Voice of the Particular. Authorship and Reflections of Reality in Jane Austen's Correspondence

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Abstract. My essay is dealing with different roles mirrored in Jane Austen's collected letters, focusing on the stylistic and topical differences and similarities between the narrative style of her prose and that of the letters.

Austen's letters are addressed mainly to family members and friends (with a few important exceptions), their topic varying from exchange of information about family members and events concerning the Austens to personal reflections of the letter-writer, and some (very few but well elaborated) considerations about her own creations and the nature of fiction-writing itself.

A close reading of Jane Austen's correspondence also reveals the everyday reality of England at the time of the Napoleonic wars, serves as a background to Austen's well-known and ever popular novels, but most of all offers a precise description of the status of a woman writer in the last decades of the eighteenth century, the obstacles and possibilities to be found in her way. The way in which the writer of these letters matches different roles with different narrative voices through a span of 21 years makes her personal correspondence comparable to a virtual novel.

Keywords: Jane Austen, Authorship, Representation of women, Reception, Epistolary Style

Scholars and readers coming to Jane Austen's letters seem to share the opinion of R.W. Chapman, who in his introduction to the edition of the letters states that they do not offer an expected insight into the inner world of the creative

mind of the authoress, because they have been “robbed of their general interest by Cassandra Austen’s pious destruction of all that she supposed might possibly excite general curiosity” (Le Faye, *Jane Austen’s Letters* ix).

Chapman was not the first person to express his dissatisfaction and anxiety caused by the letters; Caroline Austen, the niece of the authoress, who was helping James Edward Austen-Leigh in putting up his memoirs of Jane Austen expressed the same kind of dissatisfaction, only this time connected to what is to be found in the letters preserved by Cassandra Austen, and not to what might have been there, and was lost forever.

There is nothing in those letters I have seen, that would be acceptable to the public. They were very well expressed, and they must have been very interesting to those who received them, but they detailed chiefly home and family events: and she seldom committed herself even to an opinion, so that to strangers they could be no transcript of her mind, they would not feel, that they knew her any better for having read them. (Le Faye, *Jane Austen: A Family Record* 249)

However, times are changing, and what seemed to be lacking any interest in 1926¹ or earlier, now provides us with a rich material concerning the socio-cultural relationship in England at the time of the Napoleonic wars, and above all it offers a precise description of the status of a woman writer in the last decades of the eighteenth century, the obstacles and possibilities to be found in her way. Although Caroline Austen was unable to sense “opinion” in the Letters, the reader of our days, equipped with a general knowledge of literary theory (hermeneutics, Bourdieu’s theories concerning the literary field, the role and meanings of irony etc.), might find that the writer of these letters was expressing her opinion in an exquisite, elliptical and intensely ironic way, showing many similarities with her novels.

1. General notes on the *Letters*

The series of Jane Austen’s letters continues through the span of 21 years. The first one dated in 1796 is a cheerful account of a ball written by a young girl of 20, deeply engaged in flirting. The last one dating from 1817 is written by a woman lying in her deathbed, yet trying to keep up the appearances of the cheerful, if a bit malicious letter writer. Austen’s letters are mainly addressed to family members and close friends with a few notable exceptions, those written to her publishers and to the librarian of the Prince Regent, James Stenier Clarke.

¹ The year when *A Memoir of Jane Austen*, edited by R.W. Chapman, appeared.

The majority of the letters addressed to Cassandra Austen are thorough accounts of everyday activities. Being single women depending on the support of their brothers, the Austen sisters were obliged to answer the call of their family, and to visit one or the other of their brothers' families whenever their service was needed to help a sister-in-law lying in childbed, or a widowed brother struggling with the problems of child raising. Whenever parted, the sisters exchanged letters every three or four days, these letters being the written forms of today's phone calls: long and capricious descriptions of journeys, family events, small gossips and allusions fully understandable only by the addressee. The letters addressed to her brothers (two of them in Naval Service) are much more conformed to the formal requirements of letter writing: these are properly written accounts of family events, carefully selected to cover all the major events a missing family member might be interested in. In time the circle of family letters is extended with letters to Jane Austen's nieces and nephews. To the motherless orphan, Fanny Knight she gives advice about matters of the heart, love, marriage and the perspectives of a young woman, to Anne Austen (who to the great luck of Posterity was trying to write a novel) offers a kind of creative writing course about how an adequate and credible atmosphere and character should be constructed. "You are now collecting your People delightfully, getting them exactly into such a spot as is the delight of my life; 3 or 4 Families in a Country Village is the very thing to work on." (Le Faye, *Jane Austen's* 275)

2. Aspects of the early reception of Jane Austen

Nowadays there is a strong cult of Jane Austen constantly strengthened by the numerous editions of her books, and the Hollywood or BBC film adaptations of her novels featuring favorite stars, numerous sequels written to her novels, and stories/movies about her life focusing mainly on the possibility of a romantic yet unfulfilled love-affair kept as a well guarded secret. Recently the cult of vampires and other supernatural creatures with the use of the postmodern bricolage technique even led to mashup-books like a *Pride and Prejudice and the Zombies* (Seth Grahame Smith, 2009), *Sense and Sensibility and the Sea Monsters* (Ben H. Winters, 2009) or *Emma and the Werewolf* (Adam Rann, 2009).

The activities of the numerous Jane Austen Clubs on the Internet, reading clubs, the general interest used by travel agencies offering Jane Austen tours to Steventon and Bath, or the offer of souvenir shops all show what Carole Houlihan Flynn said:

Austen is a cultural fetish, loving or hating her has typically implied meanings well beyond any encoded in her works. Because she has proved essential to the self-definition of so many contending interests—people who see

themselves as delicate escapists or as hard nosed realists, as staunch defenders of morality or as exponents of ludically amoral theatricality, as elitists or democrats, as iconoclasts or conventionalists, as connoisseurs or as common readers it is difficult to distangle the ‘real’ Austen from the acknowledged or unacknowledged agendas of those discussing her. (212)

However, this was not always the case, since for the first 50 years following her death in 1817, Austen was a minority interest and very little was known about her. She had her champions, among them Walter Scott, but not only the events of her life, but also her novels were largely forgotten, not read and used as inspiration by the emerging women writers of the nineteenth century (cf. Shattock 22-23).

As it is well known, Jane Austen spent all her life in the bosom of her family, and the family regarded her literary reputation as a family matter, most of the family members being convinced that the details of her life should not be shown to the public. Her brother, Henry wrote a short bibliographical note which was prefixed to the posthumous edition of *Northanger Abbey and Persuasion* in 1817, but only in 1870 did *A Memoir of Jane Austen* appear written by her nephew James Edward Austen-Leigh.

What is notable in this biography is that it presents “dear aunt Jane” as a ladylike amateur, writing occasionally and for personal amusement, whose life “was passed in the performance of home duties and cultivation of domestic affections without any self seeking or craving after applause” (Austen-Leigh 82).

As we can see, the emphasis is on the woman and not on her writing; the account of the authoress’ career is left out. In the following I intend to analyze Austen’s *Letters* from this double point of view: how the role of a woman and the life of a writer are presented and how these two—practically inseparable—aspects of life intermingle.

3. Representation of the woman

Contrasting her balanced and harmoniously built novels, Austen’s epistolary style (especially in her letters to her sister Cassandra) is a capricious mixture of “little matters” with ironical comments, jumping from one subject to another, as if she was putting down immediately everything that crossed her mind. This style, mirrored by the construction of the sentences (not respecting grammar, separated by dashes whenever a new subject appears) somewhat resembles the inner working of the mind presented two centuries later in novels using the *stream of consciousness* narrative technique. The opposition of polarities (themes apparently not connected to each other, states of mind, when labelling a purchased product or a person) gives a “not so quite triumphant account of the day” (Le Faye, *Jane*

Austen's 16) as presented in an excerpt from Letter 10, written on 27-28 October 1798.

Soon after I had finished my letter from Staines, my Mother began to suffer from exercise and fatigue of travelling so far . . . She bore her Journey however much better than I had expected & at Basingstoke where we stopped more than half an hour received much comfort from a Mess of Broth & the sight of Mr. Lyford, who recommended her to take 12 drops of Laudanum . . . Mary is quite well & uncommonly large. We met with no adventure at all in our Journey yesterday, except that our Trunk had once nearly slipt off, & we were obliged to stop at Hartley to have our wheels greased. . . . I went to Mrs Ryders and brought what I intended to buy, but not in much perfection. I gave 2s³d a yard for my flannel, & fancy it is not very good, but is so disgraceful & contemptible an article itself, that it's being comparatively good or bad is of little importance. I bought some Japan Ink likewise, & next week shall begin my operations on my hat, on which You know my principal hope of happiness depends.—I am very grand indeed,—I had the dignity of dropping out my mother's Laudanum last night, I carry the keys of the Wine & Closet, & twice since I began this letter, have had orders to give in the Kitchen. . . . Your letter was chaperoned here by one from Mrs Cooke, in which she says that Battleridge is not to come out before January, and she is so little satisfied with Cawthorn's dilatoriness that she never means to employ him again. (Le Faye, *Jane Austen's* 16-7)

Her epistolary style deliberately resembles the style of one of her much ridiculed characters, Miss Bates from the novel *Emma*, who is first presented as a “great talker on little matters” (Austen 21), then mocked by the protagonist of the novel, because in the middle of a conversation she is “flying off through half a sentence to her mother's old petticoat” (Austen 225).

The employment of every single and minor event as a subject is explained by the fact that writing letters was as much part of the duties of a woman as giving orders in the kitchen; therefore, Austen is in continuous search of subjects. Often, the lack of a subject motivates the act of writing itself: “Expect a most agreeable letter for not being overburdened with subject (having nothing at all to say)—I shall have no check to my Genius from beginning to end” (Le Faye, *Jane Austen's* 74-5). Yet she goes on through three pages writing about family members, gossips from the Navy, the unfitting haircut of one of their relatives and birth of another, visits from friends etc., concluding “But I say all that I have to say, I hope I have no reason to hang myself” (Le Faye, *Jane Austen's* 74-5).

To write letters full of subject in “even lines” and “close writing,” as at a certain point Jane Austen praises her sister's letter, was not only important in

supplying subject for the whole household and neighborhood, but also a matter of material need and courtesy. Since the addressee of the letter was usually required to pay postage upon delivery, the letter needed “to look as if they were worth the cost of postage” (Favret 136-7).

Among the polite “small talk” of the letters carried on with insistence through many pages one can come across surprisingly strong, even cruel comments on different aspects of a woman’s life, especially childbearing. “Mrs Hall of Sherbourn was brought to bed yesterday of a dead child, some weeks before she expected owing to a fright.—I suppose she happened unawares to look at her husband” (17). Or about the third pregnancy of her niece: “Anna has not a chance to escape . . . Poor Animal, she will be worn out before she is thirty.—I am very sorry for her.—Mrs Clement too is in that way again. I am quite tired of so many children” (336).

The dejected or sometimes harsh comment on childbearing is not necessarily the dissatisfaction of the authoress who called her novel *Pride and Prejudice* “my own darling Child;” it generates from the sad experience of life, as the news about friends and relatives dying in childbed abounds in the Letters.

4. Representation of the authoress

About a year before her death Jane Austen writes to her sister:

I often wonder how you can find time for what you do, in addition to the care of the House;—And how good Mrs West² could have written such Books & collected so many hard words, with all her family cares, is still more a matter of astonishment! Composition seems to me Impossible, with a head full of Joints of Mutton&doses of rhubarb. (321)

The theme of being an authoress and not an author, therefore being different and supposed to be inferior in quality, reappears many times in the letters presented always through an ironical distance mocking with the concept of inferiority as a woman/writer.

In a letter to one of her nephews who is trying to write a novel (like many other members of the family, as writing plays, poetry, short prose and charades was a characteristic activity of the Austens) she is giving polite encouragements while also characterizing the style of her own novels. “What should I do with your strong, manly, spirited Sketches, full of variety and Glow?—How could I possibly join them on to the little bit, (two Inches wide) of ivory on which I work with so fine a brush, as produces little effect after much labour?” (323)

² She refers to Mrs Jane West (1758-1852), a prolific writer of novels, poetry and plays.

We cannot find in the Letters the direct expression of a creative mind at work, there are little if any entries about how she conceived her own novels. The presence of a self-conscious authoress can be seen in the minute details, and precise observations given to nieces and nephews coquetting with novel-writing, and in a letter written to James Stenier Clarke, the Regent's librarian, who keeps on suggesting her subject for her novels to be written.

First he proposes Austen to portray "the Work the Habits of Life and Character and enthusiasm of a Clergyman" (La Faye, *Jane Austen's* 296), to which she responds in highly ironic false modesty. Herself the daughter and sister of a clergyman who, according to her *Letters*, was quite well read in the field of religious and theological works, rejects the offer claiming her gender makes her impossible to fulfill such a task.

The comic part of the Character I might be equal to, but not the Good, the Enthusiastic, the Literary. Such a Man's Conversation must at times be on subjects of Science & Philosophy of which I know nothing—or at least be occasionally abundant in quotations & allusions which a Woman, who like me, knows only her own Mother/tongue & has read very little in that, would be totally without power of giving.—A Classical Education at any rate, a very extensive acquaintance with English Literature, Ancient & Modern, appears to me quite Indispensable for the person who would do any justice to your Clergyman—And I think I may boast myself to be, with all possible Vanity, the most unlearned, & uninformed Female who ever dared to be an Authoress. (306)

The Regent's Librarian is not giving up, and suggests a historical romance about the family of the Regent to be written, making Jane Austen leave behind the mask of false modesty and present herself as a highly self-conscious authoress, ready to speak up in defence of her own style and subjects.

I am fully sensible that a Historical Romance founded on the House of Saxe Cobourg might be much more to the purpose of Profit or Popularity, than such pictures of domestic Life in Country Villages as I deal in—but I could no more write a Romance than an Epic Poem.—I could not sit seriously down to write a serious Romance under any other motive than to save my Life, & if it were indispensable for me to keep it up & never relax into laughing at myself or other people, I am sure I should be hung before I had finished the first Chapter.—No—I must keep on to my own style and go on in my own Way; And though I may never succeed again in that, I am convinced that I should totally fail in any other. (312)

Joanne Shattock says that nineteenth-century English women writers created the sense of literary community while reading one another's books: "They were astute critics of one another's work, and conveyed their views sometimes in personal correspondence and sometimes in published reviews. . . . It was an alternative of a female literary society" (Shattock 8).

In Austen's letters there are many references to books she or the members of the family were reading, among them many novels by the popular female writers of the age, though she seldom articulates her opinion about them, and if she does so, it is usually not favorable or avoiding comment through light and humorous characterizations.

She writes to her niece, Anna Austen:

Walter Scott has no business to write novels, especially good ones.—It is not fair.—He has Fame & Profit enough as a Poet, and should not be taking the bread out of other people's mouths.—I do not like him, & do not mean to like Waverley if I can help it—but fear I must.—I am quite determined however not to be pleased with Mrs West's Alicia de Lacy, should I ever meet with it, which I hope I may not.—I think I can be stout against any thing written by Mrs West.—I have made up my mind to like no Novels really, but Miss Edgeworth's *Your & my own*. (277-278)

In her famous comment Miss Hinton reported that Jane Austen "was no more regarded . . . than a poker" by her companies, adding that after the appearance of *Pride and Prejudice* she became regarded "a poker of whom every one is afraid. . . . a wit, a delineator of character, who does not talk, is terrific indeed" (Le Faye, *Jane Austen: A Family Record* 24).

The reader of Austen's Letters might agree with this last remark as the letters provide an excellent territory for Austen to record everything from household faults to personal conduct in minute and highly critical details. She is not forgiving a thing and is mocking at anything that may have captured the attention of the silent observer. In a letter to her sister Cassandra written in 1800 Jane Austen gives a witty yet almost cruel description about those being present at a ball she had attended.

There were very few Beauties, & such as were, were not very handsome. Mrs Blount . . . appeared exactly she did last September, with the same broad face, diamond bandeau, white shoes, pink husband, & fat neck. The two Miss Coxes were there, I traced in on the remains of the vulgar, broad featured girls who danced at Enham. . . . I looked at Sir Thomas Chamneys's daughter & thought her a queer animal with a white neck. . . . Mrs Warren has got rid of some part of her child, & danced away with great activity, looking by no

means very large.—Her husband is ugly enough, uglier even than his cousin John, but he does not look so very old. The Miss Maitlands are both prettish, with brown skin, large dark eyes, & a good deal of nose.—The General has got the Gout, & Mrs Maitland the Jaundice. Miss Debrary, Susan & Sally all in black, . . . I was as civil to them as their bad breath would allow me. . . . I had the comfort of finding out the other evening who all the fat girls with short noses were that disturbed me at the 1'st Ball. They all prove to be Miss Atkinsons of Enham. (60-3)

In her essay about Jane Austen's *Letters* Carol Houlihan Flynn notes that "the familiar letter allowed the powerless to criticize the powerful, but as an instrument serving two cultures, it also served to maintain powerful systems of social control" (Houlihan Flynn 112). While placing herself in the role of the observer, Austen manages to extract herself from a tradition inherited from her novelistic models and present in some of her own novels as well. In domestic novels (Richardson's *Pamela*, *Clarissa* or Austen's own favorite *Sir Charles Grandison*, in Fanny Burney's *Evelina* and *Camilla* and in Austen's own *Northanger Abbey*, *Emma* or *Mansfield Park*) the female protagonist is always placed to be the subject of the watchful eyes of the others. A female figure must always be ready for inspection, and open to the comments of others, especially men and older, more respectable women. Becoming the minutious describer of everything that captures her attention, and yet avoiding expressing her own feelings and thoughts can only be explained by the continuous want for new subjects to be put in letters and the enigmatic character of the authoress. When quietly and constantly rejecting the role of the observed, and taking up the role of the observer, Jane Austen is in fact expressing a Declaration of Independence of a highly self-conscious authoress.

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Ambiguity in Ballad Discourse. Coventry Patmore: “The Woodman’s Daughter”

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Abstract. Ambiguity as a literary term refers to the effect of uncertainty of choice between differing meanings which are equally tenable in a given linguistic context. Ambiguity is design in poetry; it appeals to the human capacity of enduring uncertainty, and as this paper argues, its function may be further specified by examining the non-linguistic contexts. The semantic ambiguities in Coventry Patmore’s ballad generate an air of mystery, which beyond being a genre characteristic, shapes the reader’s interpretation of the fallen woman theme. The paper compares the ballad with its textual antecedent as well as with contemporary treatments of its subject, and concludes by considering the reader’s responses to the polyvalent image of the central character that thus represents typical outcomes of the fallen woman conflict.

Keywords: semantic and pragmatic ambiguity, referential uncertainty, narration, reporting, context

1. Introduction

Ambiguity, the effect of uncertainty of choice between different meanings, engages the human capacity for accepting the lack of certainty. This is how this human capacity is described in Keats’ theory of “negative capability,” in a letter to his brother:

. . . at once it struck me what quality went to form a Man of Achievement, especially in Literature, and which Shakespeare possessed so enormously—I mean *Negative Capability*, that is, when a man is capable of being in uncertainties, mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason. (277)

What seem relevant for a study of ambiguity in Keats' definition are the elements of uncertainty, doubts and also the absence of irritable searching for definite knowledge. Ambiguity in poetry and art entices by offering a rare experience, as it couples surprise with a wish to know more, and thus draws together pleasure and thinking. Why is the human fascination with ambiguity?

The objective of this paper is to outline how ambiguity is generated, and to demonstrate, by examining a ballad by Coventry Patmore, how meaning related to ambiguity is refined by contexts.

2. Definition of ambiguity

The dictionary definitions of "ambiguity" in English come to something similar to 'uncertainty, multiple meaning'. However, ambiguity as a term used in linguistics, stylistics, literary and art criticism is more specific than its dictionary meaning. The concept of ambiguity as a valuable feature was introduced, and used in an extended sense, by William Empson, who provided the following definition: "any verbal nuance, however slight, which gives room for alternative reactions to the same piece of language" (3). His approach was response-based as it becomes clear from his classification of ambiguity into the decipherable and the non-decipherable types:

Ambiguities of this sort may be divided into those which, once understood, remain an intelligible unit in the mind; those in which the pleasure belongs to the act of working out and understanding, which must at each reading, though with less labour, be repeated; and those in which the ambiguity works best if it is never discovered. (57)

New Criticism considered ambiguity to be intrinsic to literary texts, and ambiguities were uncovered by the method of close textual analysis. René Wellek and Austin Warren regarded literary language as abounding in ambiguities, by which they meant "highly connotative" (23). Ambiguity has been viewed for a long time as a feature inherent in literary texts, especially in poetry. More recently Henry Widdowson said that poetic meanings are "of their very nature unspecific and ambiguous" and therefore "elusive of precise description" (116). However, he seemed to use the term ambiguity in a sense similar to Empson's, in relation to the

variety of meanings or rather, interpretations that a poem allows. Before the publication of Soon Peng Su: *Lexical Ambiguity in Poetry*, the term ambiguity was not used with consistency, but often as a synonym of such cognate phenomena as obscurity and vagueness, multiple meaning, and especially indeterminacy. Indeterminacy involves a kind of openness, inviting the reader who is faced with the question “What is the meaning?” to project an interpretation, because some aspects of the poetic significance are indefinite. In contrast, ambiguity has nothing to do with indistinctness, rather it involves a choice between definite and finite number of possibilities within a given context, so the reader’s question is which to choose (Su 113).

What exactly is ambiguity according to Su? Ambiguity is a form of multiple meaning, thus its potential is fundamentally a semantic issue, but “actual ambiguity results only when a certain relation is set up between the senses, when the word is placed in context, and interpreted as having disparate and alternative senses which are both tenable or relevant in the context” (43). Ambiguity is regarded as a primarily pragmatic phenomenon as it is realized in context, and through contextual interpretation. Whereas semantics studies meaning at an abstract level, pragmatics is interested in the concrete level of language use, and considers the speaker’s intention, context, and the hearer’s interpretation.

3. Interrelation between ambiguity, meaning and context

With ambiguity the central question is which meaning applies, and how do the different meanings apply at the same time? No language use can occur outside of a context; therefore meaning in pragmatics is contextually determined. Since meaning depends on context, a phrase can have more than one sense tenable in a text only if they suit the context. The concept of context includes: 1. the linguistic context, i.e. the most immediate context, which means the surrounding linguistic environment of phrase, sentence, and text level as well as the subject matter of the text; 2. the non-linguistic context, i.e. the cultural and cognitive dimensions of the context (the immediate context of the act of communication, which includes situational factors such as author-reader relationship, genre, and the least immediate context, which encompasses authorship, culture, tradition as well as historical facts) (Su 62). Examining a literary text, a ballad written in dialogue form by William Auden, Ronald Carter distinguishes three types of context: 1. the inner and outer context of the relation between speakers internal to the text, as well as between author and reader external to the text; 2. the intertextual context of literary tradition to which the poem alludes; 3. the historical context in which the work was written (69). It is generally recognized in discourse stylistics that literature is a discourse which exists in interaction with the larger cultural and discursive activity in which it is produced.

Not only the production but also the reception of literature can be affected by the discursive networks of genre, intertextuality, culture, and history. Meaning cannot be dissociated from the hearer/reader who is part of the social context, and be regarded as wholly intrinsic to the language of the text. Context involves a cognitive aspect as well, the shared knowledge of readers, necessary to the understanding of a poem, which Geoffrey Leech calls "background knowledge" (13).

The following parts of this essay will examine "The Woodman's Daughter," a poem by Coventry Patmore, with the aim to demonstrate how consideration of the different types of context refines and enriches meaning related to ambiguity.

4. Linguistic context

The starting point for the reader in the interpretation of a literary work has to be the language of the text. Detailed attention is given to the story, the speaker, his vocabulary, syntax, figurative language, meter, tone, etc. Linguistic context is important, because it functions as a means of deciphering ambiguity if it contains sufficient cues that guide the selection of one meaning over others. This is what usually happens to semantic ambiguity in actual language use, where the missing cues can be supplied. Insufficient contextual specification however, permits differing meaning to apply at the same time. Moreover, the immediate linguistic context may be designed so as to deliberately generate ambiguity (Su 72). This consideration provides a ground for investigating the immediate linguistic context first.

Patmore's poem,¹ as published since 1888, tells a narrative, the story of Maud, a woodcutter's daughter (Page 24-28). When she was a child, she lived happily at her father's cottage by the hill, spending her days working at her spinning wheel, or following her father, Gerald, where he worked. The rich squire's son, a young boy, would come and stand gazing at them, sometimes offering Maud some fruits which she accepted. As time went by, they spent more time together, and away from her father's presence. They enjoyed each other's talk innocently, and this continued spring after spring until one day Maud told her father that she was with child. In the present tense of the ballad situation however the father "is gone" and Maud steels out to the stream one evening where the concluding tragic event occurs. It is not clear, however, which of the following actions takes place: Maud is either still pregnant, and drowns herself, or she drowns her baby, and herself goes mad, or she drowns the baby and herself at the same time. What is the source of this ambiguity? It is obvious that the story is presented in a manner to deliberately avoid clarity. The linguistic means of creating ambiguity in the poem are referential uncertainty and figurative language.

¹ See the text of the ballad at

<http://www.archive.org/stream/poems00chamgoog#page/n182/mode/2up>

Referential uncertainty. In the description of the troubled situation of Maud, when she admits her pregnancy, there are two phrases of definite reference which turn out to be the sources of referential uncertainty, thus producing ambiguity. One is in stanza 11, where informed about Maud's pregnancy, Gerald says 'Poor Child!' and puts his hand on her head, a gesture indicating the referent of his phrase. In the last line of the stanza, however, the narrator says that Gerald would think of Maud "as if the child were dead". It is not clear whether "child" in the first line and "the child" in the last are co-references, and both refer to Maud, or have different referents. Capitalization in "Poor Child!" makes it clear that it is meant as a vocative phrase, but "the child" in the last line may just as well refer to Maud as to her child. As a kind of foreshadowing of some eventual tragedy, it remains unclear if it is Maud or her child that is doomed to die. It is very likely that this uncertainty is part of the poet's design, since the ambiguity of the phrase could easily have been avoided, and without impairing the rhythmic pattern of the line, by simply supplying "her" or "his" for the definite article.

Another case of referential uncertainty is a deictic phrase in stanza 17: "But Maud will never go/While those great bubbles struggle up/From the rotting weeds below." Whose bubbles? Maud's or the baby's? Did Maud drown the baby or herself? This ambiguity is especially confusing since definite reference normally implies, as Alan Cruse outlines, not only that the referential target is a particular entity that can be uniquely identified by the speaker, and that it is intended to be uniquely identified for the hearer, but it also implies the assurance that the hearer has enough information to uniquely identify the referent, taking into account the semantic content of the referring expression, and the information available from the context (situational, linguistic or mental) (307). Indefinite reference can also be the source of ambiguity, like in stanza 13, where the indefinite noun phrase "some thought" is ambiguous, and it is up to the reader to decide whether it refers to the idea of infanticide or suicide:

The shadow of her shame and her
 Deep in the stream, behold!
 Smiles quake over her parted lips;
 Some thought has made her bold;
 She stoops to dip her fingers in,
 To feel if it be cold.

Figurative language. Among the lexical sources of ambiguity not only polysemy, homonymy and referential uncertainty are to be considered but also tropes. What makes tropes potential sources of ambiguity is their very nature, i.e. they are implied statements, and are based on the play of distinct layers of meaning, the play between the literal and the figurative senses. Empson regarded

tropes ambiguous simply because they rely on the connotation of words and evoke multiple associations (2). In a narrower sense, as we have seen, a phrase is called ambiguous if it has at least two distinctly different cognitive senses, i.e. denotations, which are tenable in the given context. In figurative language, however, a trope generates ambiguity if both the denotative meaning and the figurative senses are tenable, or the phrase has two or more distinctly different figurative senses, and both are tenable in the context (Su 139-140).

In the figurative language of Patmore's ballad, ambiguity is generated by synecdoche, metonymy and metaphor. The meaning of the noun phrase "her shame" in stanza 13, although a definite referring expression, is ambiguous, as the context allows both the interpretation of 'pregnancy' and 'baby'. This synecdoche is based on substitution of opinion for fact, thus the ambiguity is between two figurative senses: Maud's out-of-marriage pregnancy, or her illegitimate child. However strange it is for a baby to be referred to as "shame," this possibility is supported by Maud's action of testing the temperature of the water ("she stoops to dip her fingers in to feel if it be cold"), and her recollecting in the next stanza that the stream "bears everything away".

The next ambiguous trope is a phrase with distinct literal and figurative senses which are yet tenable in the context. The narrator reports that standing over the stream Maud's "arms fall down". The literal interpretation is that she drops her baby into the stream, whereas the metonymical interpretation suggests that her arms fall down because she herself falls into the stream. This would establish the phrase in stanza 13 "The shadow of her shame and her/Deep in the stream" as prefiguring either or both infanticide and suicide.

After the tragic decision Maud remains in the same place, "at her post". "Post" is a place where a soldier is on watch, which suggests metaphorically that Maud is watching her drowned baby in the stream, or if we follow another association, i.e. a post as a place that soldiers are not to leave, Maud's post might as well indicate her death. The next metaphorical phrase "sunk in a dread unnatural sleep" seems to reinforce this double sense: "sunk" and "dread" suggest death, and death is often referred to as sleep; but the same phrase also allows the interpretation 'mad consciousness,' especially because the narrator reports earlier that Maud "sings wildly now". The ambiguity in the last stanza is generated by two distinct figurative senses of the metaphor "unnatural sleep".

It seems that ambiguities occur in the language of the ballad with a consistency that they make the action non-definable, and argue for a closer look at the non-linguistic context.

5. Genre as context

Genres are part of the literary tradition that the work of poetry relies on for communicating its meaning. The conventions of a particular genre act like a context in which meaning makes itself recognizable and more naturally accessible to the reader. Tzvetan Todorov suggests that genres are products of discourse, i.e. of the various discursive choices, and says that the literary genres are nothing but “choices among discursive possibilities, choices that a given society has made conventional” (10).

Meaning in a literary work is produced by the linguistic, literary and cultural systems, so what is said, and how it is said, are determined by the type of the discourse chosen. The reader, who has to interpret it, needs literary competence, i.e. implicit understanding of the operations of this literary discourse. Furniss and Bath point out that the codes and conventions of each genre are part of the reader’s literary competence, and as such they provide cues for the reader’s interpretation of meaning (346). How recognizing the genre characteristics contributes to interpreting meaning is demonstrated by examining “The Woodman’s Daughter” as a ballad.

Patmore’s 1888 poem is a literary ballad, i.e. a short narrative poem rooted in the tradition of orally transmitted folk ballads. Thus the typical structural and stylistic traits of the genre to be taken into account by the reader are as follows. Ballads focus on a single situation, a sensational event, which is also the conclusive episode of the story. Most of the action is presented in dialogue form, and in the presentation of the narrative there are abrupt transitions in time, unannounced by the impersonal narrator. The most specific characteristic trait of ballads is a particular kind of vagueness, an air of mystery generated by its dramatic form, and also by a conspicuous absence of circumstantial detail and psychological motivation. The language of the ballad is formulaic, stylized, employing repetition and parallelism, which are not merely ornamental but also emphatic. *The New Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics* underlines that in a ballad “every artistic resource is pointed toward giving an intensity and immediacy to the action and toward heightening the emotional impact of the climax” (Peminger, Brogan, and Warnke 116). It should also be noted that the English literary ballads of nineteenth century romanticism are not full imitations of the orally transmitted traditional ballad. They are primarily poems in their own right, although written in imitation of a few aspects of the traditional ballad. The most obvious difference is the narrator: whereas the fundamental characteristic of popular ballads is an absence of subjectivity and of self-consciousness, the narrator in a literary ballad betrays his presence in the narration through emotional intensity of expression, and may even play an important part in the development of the plot. It seems the major requirements of a literary ballad are structural rather than formal, i.e. it is enough

for a narrative with a tragic story to pass as a ballad if it has a climactic situation reported in present tense, with flashback by the speaker who recollects some antecedents of this present situation.

"The Woodman's Daughter" does not adopt the formal and stylistic characteristics of the traditional ballad. Its story is not told in a formulaic language, the poem dispenses with dialogue form, balancing stanzas, framing, repetition and also the typical ballad meter. Patmore's ballad does not follow the tradition of dramatic presentation of the story either. It is an utterance made by a single, implicit speaker; therefore in a stylistic examination of the poem the first question is "Whose voice do we hear?" All lyric poems allow the interpretation to postulate a speaker distinct from the author, and to regard the poem as an utterance by this speaker, who either identifies himself or is made to remain invisible. However impersonal his manner may be, it is possible to describe this speaker, at least in terms of his relationship with his addressee, by the mode of his speech and the functions he performs. Patmore's speaker remains impersonal, and never identifies himself, neither does he establish a relationship with his audience, apart from only two rather ambiguous phrases: in stanza 13 an imperative ("behold!"), either addressed to the listener or an expression of the character's surprise, and in stanza 18 "you" as a form of address or a word used in a generic sense.

What is more important about the speaker's characteristics in "The Woodman's Daughter" is that he is assigned a double role of relating past events and reporting present happenings. Anthony Easthope defines the ballad as a genre with rapid and unannounced transitions between "discours" and "histoire," i.e., between subjective and objective modes of speech. In the former, emphasis is on enunciation, i.e. on the speaker-listener relationship, on 'narration', which is the subjective aspect of the narrative. "Histoire," however, concentrates on the enounced, i.e., the story, the plot of the narrative (147). In Patmore's single-speaker ballad the narrator seems to be divided between these two functions, as out of the 19 stanzas 10 form a narrative preliminary dealing with the past events that led to the present situation. The speaker relates these past happenings keeping to their chronology, with the linear temporal structure of the poem broken only twice: embedded in past tense narration, the concluding phrase of the last line of stanza 1 ("In the garden now grown wild"), and the entire stanza 5, which refers to the present situation, in the narrative preliminary. The speaker's recollection of the past is carried out in a manner of clarity, as it is factual, objective, limited to the description of a sequence of situations and happenings told in a clear linear arrangement. Following stanza 11, however, there occurs a shift in the narrator's manner, similar to Easthope's distinction. The second major role of the speaker, i.e., reporting the present happenings of the climactic situation in stanzas 12-19 is performed very differently from his objective narrative. Although reporting sets the

expectation by the reader of clarity, the speaker's manner of reporting is dominated by ambiguity and intense sensuous imagery aiming at a specific aesthetic effect.

The story of the ballad is marked by certain vagueness from the start, which stems from gaps in the narrative line (the circumstances of what happened to Gerald, the father, and why Maud is not married are shrouded in mystery). Then this air of mystery is further reinforced by a lack of sufficient cues in the context of the speaker's present tense reporting. This happens first in stanza 5, where the preliminary hints at the present situation leave the exact cause of Maud's wild singing veiled, so it can be interpreted either as an act of extreme grief, or a sign of her madness or both. The temporal aspect is unclear as well: how much time has elapsed since the father's death is not to be known. Ambiguities, however, develop only in the main part of the ballad. It is in stanzas 11-19, which report the climactic situation in present tense, that the semantic ambiguities of the poem, discussed before, occur ("the shadow of her shame," "her arms fall down," "some thought has made her bold," "while those great bubbles struggle up," "Maud is constant at her post," "sunk in a dread, unnatural sleep"). Another source of ambiguity here is pragmatic, as at certain points it is impossible to decide whether the speaker reports from his own point of view and addresses the listener/reader, or projects himself into the central character Maud, and the happenings are filtered through her consciousness and reported from her point of view. This is the case in stanza 13, where there is uncertainty as to whose point of view is reflected in the phrase "behold," i.e., whether it is the speaker or Maud, or perhaps both, whose surprise is expressed at catching sight of the girl's shadow in the water:

The shadow of her shame and her
 Deep in the stream, behold!
 Smiles quake over her parted lip:
 Some thought has made her bold;
 She stoops to dip her fingers in,
 To feel if it be cold.

Shift in point of view. In the narrator's speech there is a sudden shift of focus from the character's consciousness to that of the narrator, which is marked by the second half of stanza 15. After the decisive act of Maud ("Her arms fall down") the speaker switches from the sequence of present happenings in his reporting to focus on details that are perceived as circumstances of the main acts, i.e. sensuous images not essential to the story: the sudden change of light to horrible, the contrasts formed to this by the merrily noisy chime from the church tower, the carolling larks soaring up to the sky, the reflection in the pool of the hot light of the setting sun ("scarlet West") and the East changing ashy pale. Instead of completing his task of reporting in a sequential line, the final section of the ballad is dedicated to

description, and out of its twenty-six lines only three and a half refer to the central character. Rather than provide a factual report of the actual happenings in this climactic situation, and make the ambiguous statements unequivocal, the closing section of the poem foregrounds the speaker, and allows him to convey his own sensual experiences, as a distraction from the main line of the action. The narrator plays the role of an observer, and dwells on the changes of the evening environment to create an eerily romantic mood:

Merrily now from the small church-tower
Clashes a noisy chime;
The larks climb up thro' the heavenly blue,
Carolling as they climb;
Is it the twisting water-eft
That dimples the green slime?

The pool reflects the scarlet West
With a hot and guilty glow;
The East is changing ashy pale;
But Maud will never go
While those great bubbles struggle up
From the rotting weeds below.

After this, the almost fearful and Gothic effect of the sensuous imagery as a lasting impression on the reader's mind in the coda (last two stanzas) draws entirely on the speaker's individual perceptions, his mental and emotional reaction, and thus the lyrical element becomes prevalent over the narrative.

6. Cultural and historical context

The context of a literary work can be defined as a broad term, including all those factors that determine meaning: relevant aspects of the authorship, the history of the subject matter, also the social and moral milieu of the culture surrounding it. With "The Woodman's Daughter," it is certain details of the author's biography, contemporary reception, moral conventions and the poem's textual history that seem to be relevant parts of its context.

Biographical facts and contemporary reception. Today Coventry Patmore (1823-1896) is chiefly remembered for his epic poem on domestic idyll, called "Angel in the House," a long verse sequence published in four parts between 1854 and 1862. The title of the sequence became a term used in reference to women

embodying the Victorian feminine ideal, in the wake of Virginia Woolf, who satirized this ideal in a speech of 1931.

“The Woodman’s Daughter” is an early poem of Patmore’s, published in his first poetic volume in 1844. The volume was met with unfavorable criticism by the contemporary reviewer of *Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine*, which disappointed and upset the poet. A few years later Patmore became closely associated with the members of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood (it was he who prompted Ruskin to write his famous letter to *The Times* in defence of the PRB against critical attacks in 1851). These young artists all knew and liked Patmore’s poems, and as Holman Hunt recalls in his *Pre-Raphaelitism and the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood*, Patmore’s “The Woodman’s Daughter” was a novel interest to all of them eager to find new poems, and it was one of the poems Dante Gabriel Rossetti liked to recite from memory (qtd. in Landow). In an oil painting, “The Woodman’s Daughter” (1851) Pre-Raphaelite artist John Everett Millais depicted the characters’ romance as children, and when the painting was first exhibited at the Royal Academy, it was accompanied by two stanzas from Patmore’s poem, pertaining to the represented scene. Millais’s painting is an indication of both the fact that the story of Maud was known to the public and that the painting must have contributed to its popularity. Patmore’s closeness to the Pre-Raphaelite artists suggests the likelihood that he might not have remained intact by the Pre-Raphaelite treatment of the fallen woman theme.

Contemporary moral conventions and textual history. The fallen woman was a dominant subject in Victorian art, poetry and narrative art. The great social novelists of the period, such as Elizabeth Gaskell and George Eliot considered the moral fall of women in the context of other effects of industrial society and treated these characters with sympathetic observation. The typical treatment of the theme, however, was in the spirit of the hypocritical double morality of the age: infidelity on the part of the husband was tacitly allowed, while the same act by a woman was condemned. Most Victorian works portrayed the woman alone, as if she had been the sole cause of her own bitter fate. The common view in the Puritanical attitude was that once a girl or a woman had sinned, she was beyond rescue, and deserved no indulgence or pity. She was a social outcast, left to bear the consequences of her immorality, and suicide was her only escape, as paintings like “The Outcast” (1851) by Richard Redgrave and “Found Drowned” by George Frederic Watts (1867) tell us. Leopold Egg’s tryptich “Past and Present” (1858) depicts the grim consequences of the wife’s infidelity on her, and her family. The conventional treatment of the subject was not without didacticism, the purpose to instruct the viewer to avoid similar temptation.

The Pre-Raphaelites were also haunted by the theme of the fallen woman, but their attitude was different. Many Pre-Raphaelite paintings include the male, either directly, like in “The Awakening Conscience” (1851-1853) by Holman Hunt,

"Retribution" (1854) by John Everett Millais and "Too Late" (1858) by William Lindsay Windus, or indirectly, like in "Take your son, Sir!" (1856) by Ford Madox Brown, which make it explicit that the sexual transgression of the woman is an act shared with a guilty man. The focus is not the woman's sin, rather her troubled situation, for which the blame is shifted on the man who wronged her. The woman is depicted with compassion as a victim, to raise the awareness of social injustice.

In his 1851 oil painting "The Woodman's Daughter" Millais depicted a scene from the story which allowed him to present the budding of the boy and the girl's romance. The two children occupy the central place in the composition, especially the squire's son. He is leaning with his back against a tree, as he is offering fruit to the girl, who is receiving it. The boy wears a striking red outfit, red being symbolic of passion, white stockings, and these colors make his entire figure stand out from his environment, suggesting the idea of incompatibility. The white color is repeated in the gathering clouds in the sky, which symbolically foreshadow disaster. The position of the boy's body leaning in the opposite direction, away from Maud, is also indicative of his future behavior. He keeps her at a distance, and although extends his arm towards her, there is certain rigidity in his pose. Instead of painting a portrait of the fallen woman in the spirit of contemporary moral conventions, the painter depicts her as an object of male desire, an innocent prey rather than a guilty woman. Millais establishes naivety and innocence as the girl's characteristic features, and places the blame on the boy. Ironically, as Jessica Webb remarks, the biblical image of temptation involving the female as tempter is reversed, and here the boy, the future seducer is the tempter offering the fruit. Millais's portrayal of Maud as an innocent girl erases "any hint of adult female lust," and "it is the girl's masculine counterpart that is labelled with the sin of excessive sexuality" (8).

In Patmore's verse narrative with the same title "The Woodman's Daughter,"² published in the poet's first volume in 1844, which Millais was acquainted with, the narrator relates the story of Maud, devoting more attention to the development of the love between the two young characters. Merton finally seduced her, but for some reason Maud does not disclose her situation to him, so he does not marry her. Maud's father, the girl's only support, died, probably heartbroken, and the grief felt over her abandonment drives Maud to drown her child; then realizing her crime, she is tortured into madness by remorse. The final version of the poem, which Patmore authorized for publication, and appeared in his *Collected Poems* (1888), shows significant differences, and the alterations concern primarily the character of Maud. It is obvious that the poet's intention was to render Maud innocent, guiltless of infanticide, which is evidenced by the first phrase (see the underlined phrases) he changed in the opening stanza:

² See the 1844 text at

<<http://ia360605.us.archive.org/2/items/poemspatmore00patmrich/poemspatmore00patmrich.pdf>>

(1844)
 In “Gerald’s Cottage,” on the hill,
 Old Gerald, and his child—
His daughter, Maud—dwelt happily;—

(1888)
 In Gerald’s Cottage by the hill,
 Old Gerald and his child
Innocent Maud dwelt happily;

The explicit description of Maud’s sinful act was later altered, and this ultimately makes her appear as a victim rather than a sinner. A major means to change the central character’s image as a sinner committing infanticide was ambiguities in the narrator’s reporting. In the ballad situation much of the explicitness in the speaker’s report of present happenings was replaced by ambiguous phrases, like in stanzas 12 and 13:

(1844)
 Poor Maud comes out to feel the air,
 This gentle day of June;
 And having sobbed her babe to sleep,
 [.....]

(1888)
 But he is gone: and Maud steals out,
 This gentle day of June;
 And having sobb’d her pain to sleep;
 [.....]

The shadow of her little babe,
 Deep in the stream, behold!

The shadow of her shame and her
 Deep in the stream, behold!

The 1844 text is a long narrative poem of 63 stanzas, called a “tale,” “a story of seduction, madness and child murder” by its contemporary reviewer and not a ballad (Blackwood’s 333). Maud feels miserable and regretful about her pregnancy, and soon her father dies at work unexpectedly. The cause of Maud’s abandonment is not explained; it is as though it is understood that illegitimate pregnancy alone is cause enough to end a relationship. In fact this is one of the targets of the reviewer’s criticism, who obviously finds it illogical that rather than causing inconvenience to her lover Maud ruins herself by killing the baby of their illicit love:

But Merton? He, if that were done,
 Could scarcely fail to know
 The ruin he had caused;—he might
 Be brought to share her woe,
 Making it doubly sharp.

When in the end Maud drowns her baby, she is struck by the realization of her crime, and her consequent madness is made explicit in the last stanza. The central character in the 1844 poem is a guilty woman, who accepts full responsibility for her situation. This treatment of the subject seems consistent with Victorian double

standards, as it is only the female who is to bear the burden of her fall, and the poet shows that the first fall is inevitably followed by further falls, i.e. the sinful act of infanticide, and its punishment, the descent into madness.

Later on Patmore turned his 1844 long narrative into a ballad, by building more tension in its structure. In order to make it more compact, he removed the speaker's meditations and several narrative stanzas. The most significant change is the removal of Maud's reaction to her fatal act, and its replacement by the speaker's observations of the surroundings:

(1844)

Merrily now from the small church-tower
Ringeth a noisy chime;
The larks climb up through the heavenly blue,
Carolling as they climb:
And lo! In her eyes stands the great surprise
That comes with the first crime!

(1888)

Merrily now from the small church-tower
Clashes a noisy chime;
The larks climb up thro' the heavenly blue,
Carolling as they climb;
Is it the twisting water-eft
That dimples the green slime?

A similar significant change concerns the imagery in the closing section of the poem: the 1844 text includes images reflecting the mad consciousness of the central character, the imagery merging subjective and objective reality, but two of these stanzas focusing on the character's consciousness are not included in the 1888 ballad, and thus the sensuous images in its concluding stanzas (16-19), starting with "The pool reflects the scarlet west" can be associated with the narrator's point of view alone:

(1844)

She throws a glance of terror round:
There's not a creature nigh.
But behold! The Sun, that looketh through
The frowning western sky,
Is lifting up one broad beam, like
A lash of God's own eye.

She sees it; and, with steady fear
 At what she dares not shun,
 Still gazes: her astonished heart
 Faints down, for she has done
 An act which to her soul has made
 A spy of the great Sun.

(1844 and 1888)

The pool reflects the scarlet west
 With a hot and guilty glow,
 The east is changing ashy pale,
 And yet she dares not go,
 For still those bubbles struggle up
 From the rotting weeds below.

As can be seen in these stanzas above, the sensuous images in the description of the evening environment, which follow Maud's realization of her crime, are perceived in the 1844 poem as reflecting symbolically her sinking into madness, whereas the focus is shifted on the speaker in the 1888 ballad, and the imagery in the next stanzas, which at the same time form the coda, reflects the mood evoked by the situation in the speaker:

The light has changed. A little since
 You scarcely might descry
 The moon, now gleaming sharp and bright,
 From the small cloud slumbering nigh;
 And, one by one, the timid stars
 Step out into the sky.
 The night blackens the pool; but Maud
 Is constant at her post,
 Sunk in a dread, unnatural sleep.
 Beneath the skiey host
 Of drifting mists, thro' which the moon
 Is riding like a ghost.

In conclusion, it can be stated that Patmore empathized with his character, and wanted to restore her, the woman originally tainted by infanticide, to innocence, by introducing ambiguity to erase explicitness in the description of her sinful act. The ambiguities in the narration of the action allow the formation of a polyvalent image of the central character, who in effect represents the most possible outcomes of the fallen woman conflict (infanticide, suicide and madness). Maud is made to appear

as a victim of her ill fate, and the focus of attention is shifted from what she actually did to the reactions that her fatal situation may evoke in a witness (the narrator).

7. The reader as context

Context is not only an external and objective framework in which a literary work exists, with its meaning encoded in the text, but also a psychological construct. Meaning is not entirely contained within language, as Su claims, but is also attributed by a human consciousness. It is "not a passive activity of choosing from a given, fixed set of meanings, but rather, it involves an active interaction between the human mind and the text" (63). Text, context (the objective factors) and reader (the subjective factor) are interdependent for a meaningful reading. Meaning is not selected but constructed out of various relevant factors which interact within a given context. David Birch regards the reader as part of a social and historical context (260). Leech's "background knowledge" contributes to the interpretation of a given utterance, and this shared knowledge is a key concept in reader-oriented criticism, which is interested in not only what but also how texts mean. Reader-oriented criticism is based on the idea that meaning is constructed in the reading process as an interaction between text, context and reader. The role of the reader is not passive reception; rather, it is conceptualizing the indeterminacies in the text to produce a determinate meaning.

What is the relevance of the reader in a study of ambiguity? Su points out that since the reader's contribution to meaning is to realize it, potential ambiguity is also actualized by the reader. It is the reader who searches for clues in the linguistic context, supplements from his experience and reflects in uncertainty on the possible choices (93). However, this is general to the conceptualization of all meaning. What particular effect does ambiguity make on the reading process? Through stylistic means poetic structures often violate and deform cognitive principles in order to achieve effects unique to poetic discourse. As such a stylistic means, ambiguity flouts the Gricean maxim of manner, which demands clarity. Its effect is to block the usual way of thinking and increase the difficulty and length of cognitive perception, since, according to formalist critic Shklovsky, "the process of perception is an aesthetic end in itself and must be prolonged" (12). By slowing down the process of interpretation, ambiguity induces an act of uniquely intense intellectual focusing on the part of the reader.

The effect of ambiguity is chiefly intellectual, and in this respect it is different from some other aesthetic values with a complex effect, such as sublime and grotesque. Besides surprise the sublime invokes the mixed effect of fear, adoration and power; the grotesque invokes comic, tragic and pathetic effects in combination. Ambiguity, however, is a device which makes the reader construct sense through

highly focused attention, where the effect derives from reflection, and step-by-step working out of meaning. When faced with ambiguity, the reader does not respond with mixed emotions towards the subject; rather they are led to contemplate on the alternative interpretations with the choice to remain ultimately divided.

Reader types and reader responses. In respect of the shared background knowledge there are two distinct types of readers in relation to Patmore's ballad. One type could be called the "informed reader," who is familiar with all the contexts including the 1844 poem, and regards the ballad as an adaptation of a known story established as a literary subject by the 1844 poem. Coventry Patmore's treatment of his own former subject is similar to the Pre-Raphaelite artists' relationship to literary subjects in their paintings, as they elaborated on, developed and interpreted those subjects for their own needs. Whatever their source the scenes represented were aimed to register moments of psychological intensity. In a similar vein, Patmore's ballad makes demand for the viewer by requiring him to engage with the psychology of Maud in the present situation, as out of the 19 stanzas of the ballad 9 are related to it. When faced with the 1888 ballad, this reader understands that the old story is now transformed into a more compact form, a ballad, regards its indeterminacies and ambiguities as ways of implicitness characteristic of the genre, and thus may follow the actual happenings of the storyline without experiencing uncertainty.

It is perhaps more interesting to examine what the effects of ambiguity are in the reading process of the 1888 text, since modern readers are only familiar with the ballad text, the single one authorized for publication. For this "intended reader," ambiguity acts as a means by which the ballad engages the reader's imagination, who is left to his own resources to oscillate between the alternative meanings, and to produce a possible conclusion. These are some of the possible contemplations.

The referential uncertainty in stanza 11 blocks interpretation by leading the reader to think, and try to decide whether the child is anaphoric (referring to Maud) or exophoric (referring to Maud's unborn child), and this reflection on the ambiguity of reference allows the association that in fact both referents are children. Maud, the child of her father, an innocent, unsuspecting young girl seduced and abandoned is thus put at the same level as her innocent baby. The referential uncertainty of "shame" works in a similar way. The reader is led to contemplate, and in effect to realize the inhumanity of the social moral principles that regard either an illegitimate child or illegitimate pregnancy as "shame." Rejection of this opinion undercuts judgement, and invites sympathy for the victim of such false social morals. The ambiguity makes the reader regard Maud and her baby, either unborn or newborn, together, in unity, rather than form a moral judgement. Suicide, infanticide and madness could all happen to women who "fell"

like Maud. Finally, as the technique of art's goal is to prolong the process of perception, the ambiguous phrase "her arms fall down" leads the reader to visualize the act in order to imagine how it might refer to infanticide. The phrase seems to suggest that Maud just releases the child in despair, as if yielding it to the stream, rather than throw it in the water in an act of violence. However, if the same phrase is meant to refer to suicide, the act of falling down allows the association of helplessness, which makes Maud appear a victim rather than a woman performing a determined and violent suicidal act.

The reader regards the ambiguous phrases or images as of key importance, responds to them with contemplation to face bravely the uncertainty regarding facts, and works out individual interpretations concerning the situations in the poem.

8. Conclusion

Keats regarded the capacity of enduring uncertainty as a sign of human greatness, and created his term "negative capability" with a philosophical sense. However, as design in poetry, ambiguity appeals to the same human capacity. Ambiguity generates a state of intentional open-mindedness, as it retains uncertainty by inviting a suspension of choice and decision. It is also a device that keeps the reader alert to complexity of meanings. Although rooted in the semantic level, it cannot be resolved by contexts. Contextual considerations can only further extend and refine the possible interpretations.

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Going Native – A Comparative Study Based on Joseph Conrad’s Heart of Darkness and Joseph Roth’s Das falsche Gewicht

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Abstract. As the title suggests, the study is aimed at comparing two literary texts—Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* and Joseph Roth’s *Das falsche Gewicht* with respect to the motif of *going native*. The term *going native* refers to the fears of European people living in colonies, such as being absorbed by the life and culture of the colonized country, which would result in their own degeneration and contamination. This process is therefore being seen as a sin against the law of delimiting the own civilized world from the foreign primitive culture. Both texts present all elements that are specific to the motif of *going native*, yet, whereas Conrad remains true to the tradition of colonial discourse, Roth will systematically deconstruct the topos.

Keywords: going native, colonial discourse, foreign, culture

The term *going native* refers to the colonizer’s fear of contamination by absorption into native life and customs (in the following Ashcroft et al. 115). The construction of native cultures as primitive, savage or degenerate in a binary discourse of colonizer vs. colonized led, especially around 1900, to a general fear of *going native* amongst colonizers in colonial societies. There are term variations such as *going Fantee*—meaning to adopt the ways of the native Fantee, a large tribe who lived south of Ashantee on the Gold Coast of West Africa—, or *going troppo*—meaning the adoption of a primitive lifestyle, this latter having its origins in Darwin, Australia where the humidity of the wet season leads to severe

discomfort with increased irritability and aggression, so that people can go ‘troppo’ or crazy. These variants suggest that associations with other races or just the mere climate of colonies in hotter areas can lead to moral and/or physical degeneration. The colonizers abroad were particularly terrified by the temptation of engaging in sexual relations with the natives; an act which they believed would invariably lead to the contamination of their own racial and ethical purity. Sexual intercourse with a native woman was considered a serious threat to the wholesomeness and purity of the white race. The notion of *going native* often also includes lapses from European behaviour, the partaking of native rituals and the practice of local customs such as food, dress and entertainment (Caslin 1).

Both literary texts to be discussed here—Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* and Roth’s *Das falsche Gewicht*—stage the crossing of the line between the civilized European world and foreign primitive cultures.

Conrad’s novella, written in 1899, is a foundational text on the subject of colonialism. The novella begins and ends in London; the most part, however, takes place in the Congo. A group of men are aboard an English ship, the *Nellie*, which is sitting on the Thames. The group includes a lawyer, an accountant, a captain, and a man without a specific profession who is named Marlow. The narrator appears to be another unnamed guest on the ship. While waiting for the wind to pick up the boat, Marlow begins to narrate his personal experience in Africa, which led him to become a freshwater sailor and gave him a terrible glimpse of colonization.

Roth’s novel, *Das falsche Gewicht*, published in 1937, relates the downfall of Anselm Eibenschütz, a calibrator who, pressured by his wife, leaves the military and moves to the small town of Zlotogrod situated in Galicia on the border with Russia. As a calibrator, Anselm Eibenschütz has to control the small handler’s gauges. It is difficult for him to fulfill his duty because in the border region of Zlotogrod people regard him as the enemy. Nevertheless, he succeeds in arresting Leibush Jadlowker, an outlaw. Eibenschütz falls in love with Euphemia, a gipsy woman, the former lover of the imprisoned Jadlowker. He is even going to abandon his family just to be with her. As a result, his wife and his stepson die of cholera later on. Eibenschütz himself begins to drink and fails to do his duty. He spends most of his time drinking in the border inn, which he gets to manage. Instead of watching out for criminals, he even protects them. Several smugglers and deserters pass through without being questioned or bothered by Eibenschütz. The last scene shows how the escaped Jadlowker kills Eibenschütz. The last thing the calibrator sees is he himself as a handler using wrong gauges and weights. He is being judged by the great calibrator and though they are wrong, his admeasurements are found good.

There are three parallels that can be drawn between the two texts. The first one is represented by the depiction of nature and landscape in Africa and Galicia. In both texts nature appears as a dangerous and overwhelming force. Marlow’s

journey leads into the African wilderness and can be regarded as a trip back into an archaic world which transposes the Europeans into a pre-civilized state (Hartmann 58). Africa becomes a “place of darkness” to Marlow (Conrad 71):

The vision seemed to enter the house with me—the stretcher, the phantom-bearers, the wild crowd of obedient worshippers, the gloom of the forests, the glitter of the reach between the murky bends, the beat of the drum, regular and muffled like the beating of a heart—the heart of a conquering darkness. It was a moment of triumph for the wilderness, an invading and vengeful rush . . . (Conrad 152)

Similarly, Eibenschütz's arrival in Galicia turns out to be a movement into a foreign geographical area with extreme climate that unleashes unknown urges and feelings. Therefore, it is luring and destroying at the same time (Hartmann 58). Whereas in winter the icy cold and the endless darkness are the factors that turn this region into an inaccessible fortress to a foreigner, in summer the warmth and the scent of chestnuts embrace the foreigner so that s/he is led to perform irrational and unintended actions. The literary description of nature in Africa and Galicia levels off the differentiation between a civilization built upon discipline and sublimation and a periphery that goes precisely against these civilizing fundamentals (Hartmann 58).

Secondly, in both texts these foreign regions—together with nature—are being feminized and sexualized. The dark continent of the colonized land is conflated with femininity.

The figure of Kurtz's African lover symbolizes the whole African wilderness:

She was savage and superb, wild-eyed and magnificent; there was something ominous and stately in her deliberate progress. And in the hush that had fallen suddenly upon the whole sorrowful land, the immense wilderness, the colossal body of the fecund and mysterious life seemed to look at her, pensive, as though it had been looking at the image of its own tenebrous and passionate soul. (Conrad 137)

Eibenschütz in his turn sees in Euphemia the embodiment of Galicia itself. She appears to him as a creature of the night and of sin, embodying thus the Galician darkness and lawlessness as well as the sensuality of this land: “Es roch betäubend süß nach Akazien, und es war Eibenschütz, als kämen alle Gerüche dieser Frühlingsnacht von der Frau allein, als hätte sie allein dieser ganzen Nacht Düfte und Glanz und Mond zu vergeben und alle Akazien der Welt” [“There was a sweet scent of acacia in the air and to Eibenschütz it felt as if all the odour came

from that one woman alone, as if she had lent the night its smell, glamour and the moon with all the acacia in the world”] (JRW 175).

Through combining femininity and a geographical region dominated by the Habsburgs, Roth reproduces central components of colonial literature (Hartmann 59). He even describes a rape-scene that could be understood as the Austrian claim to subjugate the Galician periphery.

Thirdly, Eibenschütz gets addicted to Euphemia as much as Kurtz becomes a slave of the African world: “When I had a chance I begged him to try and leave while there was time; I offered to go back with him. And he would say yes, and then he would remain; go off on another ivory hunt; disappear for weeks; forget himself amongst these people—forget himself—you know” (Conrad 131).

Besides nature and women, there is a third factor that contributes to the downfall of Eibenschütz, namely alcohol. His excessive drinking leads to his physical, mental and moral decline. The once so honest calibrator develops into a disoriented, malicious person. He is aware of the fact that he is a lost person.

Kurtz is also to be regarded as a lost individual: “You will be lost,” I said—“utterly lost” (Conrad 143). Whereas Eibenschütz’s disorientation is limited to his duty, the African wilderness awakes in Kurtz his deepest instincts and leads him towards cannibalistic practices (Hartmann 59).

Apart from the differences between the two texts, we can witness a degeneration process in both cases. The colonized land is identified as a world of urges and vices, amoral and in decline, where the civilized Europeans must protect themselves (Hartmann 59).

Yet, the reason Roth unfolds the motif of *going native* so thoroughly, is to deconstruct it (Hartmann 60). Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* can undoubtedly be regarded as a success story (Hartmann 60). The novella illustrates the way in which the white male individual overcomes his crisis of identity. This is particularly true for Marlow, who, despite of the fact that he experiences the degenerating power of the African wilderness, succeeds in preserving his self-control and his identity—he repairs the steamboat and navigates up the river. The fact that Marlow is able to talk about his journey shows us the victory of the civilized world over the dangerous Africa and, furthermore, it indicates that despite the ambiguity of the text and the inherent criticism of the eradication of the Congo, Conrad’s novella is ideologically part of the colonial discourse. The character of Kurtz also underlines the existence and functioning of a strong western subjectivity. Although he trespasses the line between civilization and barbarity, and thus loses his inhibitions, beliefs and fears, he succeeds, in Marlow’s opinion, through this trespassing to gain a dreadful but heroic greatness. He manages to take a glimpse into the real nature of himself, of all human beings and of the whole universe, concluding in his last words: “The horror! The horror!” (Conrad 157). Conrad’s novella presents the motif of *going native* as a journey that lets us recognize the terrifying nature of the

human being and of the world. Kurtz's nihilism makes him, in Marlow's eyes, an exceptional man (Hartmann 61).

Whereas in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* the western civilized subjects are strengthened, in spite of the parallels, Roth's text will deconstruct this imperial subject model (Hartmann 61).

Anselm Eibenschütz is not Marlow. The calibrator has no sense for self-preservation and does no systematic work to protect himself against moral and physical decline. He fulfills his duty but this does not function as sublimation nor does it consolidate his identity. It becomes a way of getting near Euphemia and gives him an opportunity to drink.

Secondly, Anselm Eibenschütz is not Kurtz. At first, it seems as if the calibrator would come to some sort of self-awareness:

Die meisten sterben dahin, ohne von sich auch nur ein Körnchen Wahrheit erfahren zu haben. . . . Manchen aber ist es vergönnt, noch in diesem Leben zu erkennen, was sie eigentlich sind. Sie erkennen es gewöhnlich sehr plötzlich, und sie erschrecken gewaltig. Zu dieser Art Menschen gehörte der Eichmeister Eibenschütz. [Most people die without having ever taken a glance of the truth. . . . Yet, some are given the chance to realize what they really are, while still alive. Usually, it is a sudden revelation and they get scared. The calibrator, Eibenschütz was such a man.] (JRW 187)

Yet, as a result of his excessive drinking, this attempt remains unfulfilled and loses its credibility. Contrary to Marlow and Kurtz, the calibrator will not win the battle against moral decline. He loses the battle and he loses himself. He dies as a victim of a horrible murder and does not leave a trace behind. He can neither relate his story nor is he going to be remembered by people the way Kurtz is.

In the end, Roth's text goes against a clear antithesis between the wilderness of the periphery and the civilized center that characterizes the colonial discourse. The eastern corner of the Habsburg Monarchy is a region of lawlessness, yet, it is not barbaric. Roth deconstructs the stereotype of civilization-border. He presents the calibrator as a cruel person who blindly follows the law, in contrast with the Galician people, who are outlaws from the point of view of the central power, yet, who are equal to each other through their joint lawlessness.

Therefore, one can conclude that Roth negates Conrad's thesis which says that identity constituted as a result of trespassing borders would be a strong one. *Das falsche Gewicht* quotes central themes and motifs of the colonial discourse in order to deconstruct them in the end.

Notes

1. Both authors come from a historic region called Volhynia, which today belongs in part to the Ukraine, in part to Poland. The difference is that Conrad (1857-1924)—by his real name in concordance with his Polish origin Józef Teodor Konrad Korzeniowski—was born in its Russian dominated part, whereas Roth (1894-1939)—Joseph Moses Roth of Jewish descentance—in the Austrian one. At some point in their lives both authors had to leave their native country and they both travelled a lot all over the world, gathering various experiences and precious material for their works. Joseph Roth seems to have been familiar with Conrad's life and work. In an article entitled *Geschenk an meinen Onkel* (1928) he reflects upon how they both come from the same region and the fact that they both had to leave (Hartmann 57).
2. In Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* one can clearly differentiate between the European colonizer and the African colonized world. This distinction, however, is not that obvious in Roth's novel. In this case there is a sharp contrast between center and periphery within the Habsburg Monarchy, and thus between Western and Eastern Europe, civilized and primitive cultures. Yet, the political, financial and moral relationships between these centers and peripheries resemble those of colonizer vs. colonized. Therefore, peripheral regions can be regarded as interior colonies of the Habsburg Monarchy, making up for the fact that they did not have any outer colonies as other great powers did (Ruthner et al. 10).

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Identity and Reminiscence in Works of Jurek Becker. Jurek Becker's Works from a Comparative Point of View

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Abstract. The presentation reports my recent inquiries on reminiscence, memory and narration in Jurek Becker's essays and fictions. The (East-)German author Jurek Becker of Polish-Jewish origin has repeatedly presented the experience of alienation that comes from the lack or strangeness of reminiscence in his works. On the one hand, I attempt to point at the way of self-representation as understanding the self in the other by exploring the problem of remembering, on the other hand, at its consequences for the way of narrating one's own stories and the stories of others. The presentation of the essays *The Invisible City* [*Die unsichtbare Stadt*] and *My Jewishness* [*Mein Judentum*] and that of the novel *Bronstein's Children* [*Bronsteins Kinder*] set different ways of searching for reflections to the following problems: (1) firstly, on the relation between survival and writing (a fiction). The reminiscence—because of the absence of certain experiences of the past from the reminiscence connected to the personal traumas during the Holocaust—is “other,” a story told by others. Can one's own story be constructed from the story of others? The problem awakes other questions: should or could others' (unfamiliarly familiar) story that we only have photos of be narrated at the same time? Is it an obligation or is it possible at all, to understand them by the self and the self by them—or by their photos? And, (2) secondly, the question is whether there is a narrative form that can point out the duality of the experienced and the written, the distance of reminiscence from the present of narration and the pre-absorption of reminiscences in the present of narration. Can the strata of massed and mixed reminiscences be divided, or it reveals a stratigraphic form of narration (*Bronstein's Children*) that shows the difficulty of this task?

The researches were published in several journeys and anthologies of the Department of Comparative Literature at the University of Szeged and discussed in chapters of my MA Thesis (2009).

Keywords: identity, reminiscence, Holocaust literature, GDR literature, Jewish literature, Jewish philosophy

1. Introduction

The (East-)German author Jurek Becker of Polish-Jewish origins¹ has repeatedly presented the experience of alienation that comes from the lack or strangeness of reminiscence. In the present study I will attempt to point, on the one hand, at the way of self-representation as understanding the self in the other by exploring the problem of remembering; and on the other hand, at its consequences regarding the way of narrating one's own stories and the stories of others. I analyzed the essay *The Invisible City* and the novel *Bronstein's Children* to explore the literary reflections upon these problems: (1) firstly, reflections on the relation between survival and writing (a fiction). The reminiscence—because of the absence of certain experiences of the past from the memories connected to personal traumata during the Holocaust—is “other,” a story told by others. The paradox way of remembering and the view of pictures from a ghetto in the present awake the complexity of understanding of the self and the other; (2) secondly, the question is whether there exists a narrative form that can point out the duality of the experienced and the written, the distance of reminiscence from the present of narration and the pre-absorption of reminiscences in the present of narration in *Bronstein's Children*.

2. Identity and reminiscence

The original meaning of the word “identity” coming from the Latin is ‘equality’, ‘sameness’. It established itself in the humanities as a very problematic notion and term, and there are several approaches to it. I have often used the discussions of the German author Jürgen Straub (2004); he considers identity as

¹ Jurek Becker was born in Lodz, Poland, 1937. After the Nazi invasion of Poland he and his family were isolated with the other Jews of Lodz (approx. 200,000 people) in one of the largest ghettos of Eastern Europe. After the final evacuation of the ghetto the Becker family was split: mother and son (Jurek) was forced to go to Ravensbrück and Sachsenhausen, the father was carried to other camps. After the liberation Jurek's mother died but his father survived and tried and managed to find his son. After the reunion the surviving family members moved to East Berlin. Jurek starts speaking German, going to school and being German. His first novel is *Jacob the Liar* (1969) published in the German Democratic Republic. Jacob's story recalls the times of the ghettos during World War II. His third novel *The Boxer* (1976) is the second part of his Holocaust-novels. The third part, *Bronstein's Children* (1982), was already published in West Germany, because he moved from East Berlin to West Berlin in 1977. In addition, he wrote several scripts, comedies and novels before his death in 1997.

‘aspiration’ of the self (Straub 279-80).² The identity of the self is not the sum of the reflections of the self on itself at fixed and intended moments from the past, but the experience of “what I want to be”. The self can never reach its identity with itself: its identity is always “other,” the “future” and exists in the future, but it can only be imagined for the self and the selfness that comes from the “re-presentation” of time and other. The modern feeling of consistence and inconsistency at the same time comes from this duality and forces the self to differ from itself. Identity is also “self-distinction” and its variations can be expressed through the ways of irony in the language (Straub 280).

I approach identity as “the relation of the self to the other and otherness”. Identity is *Verstehen des Anderen* (‘to understand the other’) and *Sich verstehen im Anderen* (‘to understand the self in the other’)³ and its problem is rooted in German phenomenology and its criticism. A constructive critical approach of the other that I often use comes from the French interpretation of phenomenology and is explained by Emmanuel Lévinas. He questions the “otherness of the other” that constructs the substance of the self in phenomenology. The self of phenomenology destructs the otherness of the other and makes it a “property”. But Lévinas says that the other can only be recognized for/in the self, and then the self gets out of itself. The self has to be ready for the other and the call of the other to recognize it completely “unreadiness” for the other; but after that the self can never completely return to itself (Lévinas 190). It is a philosophical task and an ethical responsibility for the other in Lévinas’ works.

I approach the *other* in Becker’s works through Lévinas because of the similarity of their thinking. The other is not only outside for him, but also in the self and raises several questions related to it in his essays and fictions: how can the other be understood? How can the understanding of the other and the otherness in the self relate? How can the language present this problem? How can it be said, how can it get a name, how can it be presented in one’s own language? Can or how can the otherness of the language of the other be preserved as “other language”?

A possible answer for Becker is that the language of the other can only be presented in the language of the self. However, it loses its otherness; its otherness can only be shown in the language of the self. He attempts to contemplate and write about it as a writer who reckons language and its essence as an existential question for himself in *My Jewishness*. Becker, the thinker and writer recalls an event from his childhood (Becker, “Mein Judentum” 20-21). A guest of his father coming from a foreign land (the “adult” thinker evokes—and (re)presents—him as Jewish-like, but the kid has never seen him before) introduces himself with a

² Here I discuss personal identity. The other concept of identity is that of collective identity, the identity of a group which is not the analogy of the former one.

³ I use German terms to point at the roots of these concepts. German philosophy—especially phenomenology—is the one that inspired the researches of “the self and the other”.

gesture: he embraces the kid and starts to sob. The kid does not understand him and his father cannot explain the situation.⁴ The narrator does not want to explain it with his knowledge which is not that of the kid, he tries to give the words to the kid, who did not and could not have the words in the past. The kid is an ‘other’ for the adult thinker, and the otherness cannot be bridged by a common language between them created by the adult. The strange way of narrating (the adult does not fill the gaps of the reminiscence and the adult’s interpretations on the ‘strange man’ seem to be strongly divided from the recollection of the past) results in the oscillation between two points of view, which confirms their difference and otherness, and refers to an uncertainty that can be associated with the hesitating kid; he does not know whether he may beg help from his father (to understand the gestures) or get the answer from the strange man directly or indirectly. Imre Kertész represents the same situation of kid, father and adult to utter the deepest problems of a person referring to his personal Jewishness and traumata linked to a community in *Kaddish for an Unborn Child*.

The other notion that has to be approached is “reminiscence”. I attempt to explain it in relation to ‘memory’ but I do not suppose a binary opposition.⁵ Memory is the ability of recalling past events, or the totality of past events existing for the self in the present. Reminiscence is “anamnesis,” the recollection of events from the past as well as the recalled events. It is the construction of these events and also the construction of the past for the self in the present, in the “Dasein,” that dissolves the otherness of the past. Reminiscence is furthermore narrated. In the next section there follows an analysis of the question “reminiscence and memory” in Jurek Becker’s essay *The Invisible City*.

3. Understanding the self and the other in *The Invisible City*

The essay *The Invisible City* by Becker analyzes the role of memory [*Gedächtnis*] and reminiscence [*Erinnerung*]⁶ in constructing the self and for constructing a story. The thinker draws a paradox situation:⁷ the ability of memory

⁴ We can imagine here a Jewish relative or the father’s friend from Poland, a man who had the same fate as the Beckers during the Holocaust. The man tries to express his sympathy in a seemly way, but the kid does not understand it, the father cannot interpret it, and the adult does not find the words for the kid who could not find the words that could not be found and their lack can only be expressed by the adult with other words.

⁵ It seems to be very difficult to translate the German words “Erinnerung” and “Gedächtnis” I used in my thesis. The English terminology is temporary, it can be undertaken as a starting point of the researches in the future.

⁶ The inquiries on the theme of “identity and reminiscence” are based on German-language researches, that is why I cite several German terms.

⁷ Its grounding is biographical: Jurek Becker spent his first eight years in the ghetto of Lodz (Poland) and in concentration camps for families and kids. Although there is biographical and historical

has—paradoxically—no access to memories. It can result from personal traumata during the holocaust. The memory of the thinker is *past, other, a story told by others* but narrated in one's own language. This is no real reminiscence. The essay tries to show that the relation of the written (the fictionally narrated) and the experienced is not clear.

Ein paarmal hat mein Vater mit mir darüber gesprochen, widerwillig und selten. Solange er lebte, war ich nicht neugierig genug, ihn mit geschickten Fragen zu überlisten, und dann war es zu spät. Dennoch habe ich Geschichten über Ghettos geschrieben, als wäre ich ein Fachmann. Vielleicht habe ich gedacht, wenn ich nur lange genug schreibe, werden die Erinnerungen schon kommen. Vielleicht habe ich irgendwann auch angefangen, manche meiner Erfindungen für Erinnerung zu halten. Ohne Erinnerungen an die Kindheit zu sein, das ist, als wärst du verurteilt, ständig eine Kiste mit dir herumzuschleppen, deren Inhalt du nicht kennst. Und je älter wirst du, um so schwerer kommt sie dir vor, und um so ungeduldiger wirst du, das Ding endlich zu öffnen. [My father talked about it [the ghetto], but rarely and not so cheerfully. While he was alive, I was not curious enough to interrogate him in a tricksome way, and after his death it was too late. Nevertheless, I wrote stories about ghettos, as if I had been a specialist. Maybe I thought, if I wrote stories long enough, the reminiscences [*Erinnerungen*] would come to me. It is possible that I started to reckon my own creations as reminiscence. Living without childhood memories is as if you were doomed to carry a chest and you do not know what is in it. And the older you become, the more you hope to open it.] (Becker, "The Invisible City" 185, trans. by me, N. B.)

I ask hereby the following questions: what kind of language does memory have? Can they be coded verbally or visually? What kind of role do the pictures, the images⁸ have in the act of recollecting? We assume that the question of the language of memory is also the question of its representation. Looking at the photos that refer to part of his imagined and possible memories, the thinker recognizes the lack of his memory. The recognition can be expressed verbally, and verbal language and its continuous existence are the only way of dealing with

evidence that can prove that the events of his childhood are real, Becker has no memories of them. He has no memories before his eighth year; however, he knows stories told by his father about these times. The reasons of the lack of memories are difficult: it can be explained by the "change of the language" (Becker moves to East-Berlin with his father after the Holocaust and speaks German forgetting Polish) or traumata caused by direct and indirect suffering (lethargy, apathy, starving). His essay *My Jewishness* tries to find and analyze the reasons for this problem.

⁸ I use the word "image" for pictures, photos to make its etymological relation with "imagination" visible.

memories: whether memories are constructed or fictionalized or based on real past events, they can and must only be written. This way of writing refers to the problems of recalling memories, of reminiscence and uses the same model as Imre Kertész in his *Kaddish for an Unborn Child*. Whether or not the awakened memories of a moment really refer to a past event, they seem to be created by the act of writing; remembering—and also the holocaust-remembering (of a person)—needs to present itself during writing and represented by writing.⁹

The thinker selects photos of an exhibition in his room and the activity evokes, activates thinking of experiences that could be narrated as fiction or as reminiscences.

Als ich sie bekam, als ich das Päckchen öffnete und sie auszubreiten anfang, hatte ich bald das Empfinden, sie in eine andere Reihenfolge bringen zu müssen. Doch in was für eine Reihenfolge? Was paßt wozu, und was sollte getrennt sein? Gehören Kinder zu Kindern und Bärtige zu Bärtigen und Händler zu Händlern? Und Polizisten zu Polizisten, und die Blonden zu den Blonden? Jedenfalls stimmt die Reihenfolge nicht, sie ist wie ein Sprung auf einer Platte, der die schönste Aufnahme verdirbt. Ich ordne die Bilder immer wieder neu, ich will unbedingt das Rätsel lösen. Ich lege den Bahnhof nach außen, den Friedhof nach außen, die Straßen in die Mitte, Holzhäuser zusammen, Steinhäuser zusammen, die Werkhallen dazwischen, die Grenze an die Grenze. Immer wieder ist alles falsch, das Lämpchen der Erinnerung leuchtet nicht auf. [As I got them, opened the box and unpacked them, I felt that I needed another order. But what kind of order? Which go well together and how, and which should be separated? Do children with children, bearded with bearded, merchants with merchants match well together? And policemen with policemen, blondes with blondes? This order is false; as if the record got scratched, spoiling the nicest recording. I'm continuously ordering the images, I want to match the fragments of the puzzle. I set the station outside, the cemetery outside, the streets in the middle, I set the wooden houses in one place, the brick houses to another place, the workhouses to another place and the wall next to the wall. The versions never fit, the lamps of reminiscence do not light up.] (Becker, "The Invisible City" 187-88, trans. by me, N. B.)

⁹ “. . . nem emlékezni akarok, . . . habár emlékezni akarok persze, akarok, nem akarok, nem tehetek mást, ha írok, emlékezem, emlékezni kell, bár nem tudom, miért kell emlékezni, nyilván a tudás miatt, az emlékezés tudás, azért élünk, hogy emlékezzünk a tudásunkra, mert nem feledhetjük, amit tudunk . . .” [I do not want to remember . . ., although I want to remember, of course, I want it, I do not want it, I cannot do any other thing, if I write, I remember, I must remember, however, I do not know, why I must remember, because of the knowledge, it is obvious, remembering is knowledge, because we do not forget what we know . . .] (46-47, trans. by me, N. B.) The knowledge refers to the ethical responsibility for the others or for ourselves (as victims), it opens up collective aspects and the question of the *shame* for the individual (see later in the analysis of the essay).

The act of selection is a very important motif and action in the essay: it is deliberate and it imagines and attempts at a possible order and ordering. This motif can be related to the writing of stories in Becker's works. Writing is an endless production of ambiguities for Becker. The role of the wall¹⁰ is also important: I am the one who sets the wall to the wall; this is my will, a result of my selection. This wall shows the borders of reminiscence but the light cannot filter through the wall. This light and its metaphors, the perception of and through the light also have a central role in the essay. What is more, the light is in a very close relation with photography. However, this relation is dual: the light is the condition for taking photos but it destructs photos as time goes by. Thirdly, the light is a symbol of understanding but not without problems. Lévinas sets this problem in his essay about phenomenological understanding of time and the other.

The light that permits encountering something other than the self, makes it encountered as if this thing came from the ego. The light, brightness is intelligibility itself; making everything come from me, it reduces every experience to an element of the reminiscence. Reason is alone. And in this sense knowledge never encounters anything truly other in the world. This is the profound truth of idealism. (Hand and Lévinas 39)

This criticism of understanding can be shown in Becker's language too. The light, the brightness makes Becker's thinker of the essay blind, as the light makes the photos blurry and the shapes invisible. This problem questions the understanding of the other and others and calls for understanding it/them. The vanishing shapes of the photos and the vanishing of lives of the others can express this problem.

Ich starre auf die Bilder und suche mir die Augen wund nach dem alles entscheidenden Stück meines Lebens. Aber nur die verlöschenden Leben der anderen sind zu erkennen . . . [I stare at the images, my eyes are looking for all decisively important pieces of my life. But I can only recognize how the others' lives vanish . . .] (Becker, "The Invisible City" 188, trans. by me, N. B.)

We can ask here the following questions: how can one's own life be understood in the others and the others' lives in the self? Is it possible? Do I have to understand them? Is it a moral question? Can one's own story be constructed from the stories of others and the others' from one's own?

¹⁰ The German word 'Grenze' (originally means 'border') has been translated with this word.

The ethical responsibility, whether it is possible or not, raises the idea of *shame*: trauma and survival, the death of others and the survival of one's own body and individual constitute a very difficult psycho-physical and mental complex. Writing is a kind of "testimony" or its replacement and the way of talking about events from the past for the traumatized person, as W. G. Sebald says in his essay *Jean Améry und Primo Lévi* (121-122). Imre Kertész talks about this shame: Kertész' narrator (see footnote 9) continues the contemplation of remembering with the necessity of remembering somebody: the recalled is 'us', 'them' and 'he', dead and alive, born and not-born, man and God, the subject and object of responsibility at the same time (Kertész 47): this kind of recalling raises the idea of a community of the subject with lots of spheres of beings, with alien-beings and the Other. Remembering is not only compulsion but also liberation (and later: liquidation) for the self. But Becker does not find the way of liberation, liquidation; writing is the only way not to lose but to represent his problems raised by traumata.

4. Time and narration in *Bronstein's Children*

I analyzed the question of time and narration and the problems of reminiscence and otherness in this novel. Its theme could be the self-seeking of a second-generation-Jew after World War II in East-Germany, as well as the personality and its relation to the personal view of past events and to the intersubjective relations of the person. They are understood as problems of the personality.

Let me summarize the story: Hans—a second-generation Jew, aged 18—catches his father and his father's friends (survivors of the Holocaust) kidnapping and torturing a KZ-Lager inspector in 1973. He tries to convince them to set him free, but he fails. He refuses the intervention of the police and tries to free the man. He finds his father dead of heart attack next to the prisoner. Hans starts to narrate this story at the first anniversary of the father's death and tries to reorganize and reassess his life. He tries to remember clearly, to explain the unexplainable, but it seems to be difficult to achieve.

I analyzed the narration to explain the problems above. Its central motif is the "coming and going" of memories.

I have only the vaguest idea of what happened to my father, and after his death, to me too. I suppose one must begin by creating the clearest possible picture of events that should be erased from one's memory; and this probably applies even more to the memories one wishes to preserve. But I simply let everything wash over me, the memories came and went randomly, while I just sat there. (Becker, *Bronstein's Children* 8, trans. by me, N. B.)

It reminds the reader of Marcel Proust's technique of narration and associates Bergson's philosophy of time.¹¹ But to create the "clearest possible picture" of the past events, the narrator has to understand this "coming and going" in the right way. The motif concerning Becker, also related to Marcel Proust, can be formulated in the following way: I have not done anything to understand the past, I have not considered it, I do not let the other be understood. That is why I want to understand by understanding of how I could not understand in the past that could not be the same as the present and I could not have the same intersubjective relations and the same language in the past as in the present.

The understanding of the "other past" and the "coming and going" of memories are represented in a special narrative form that has to be "other" than a "presence-dominating" narration. Reminiscence is "work" as "being-towards-the-other" for the narrator, like in Lévinas' philosophy. We can ask here the question: how can the narration reach the other, the past by work without destructing the otherness of the other at the same time. Becker considers the question more important than the answer and the narrative form represents the question in a "stratigraphic form". It is related to work as process and not to the product of this work. "Stratigraphic" might describe the undividable layers of time and reminiscence, their skidding into each other and their presentation of intersubjective relations and self-reflections. But this stratigraphic form seems to absorb in the act of interpretation (interpreting light) and to lose its "otherness," because the story wants its end to be a story, the narration wants to be "other" and the narrator wants both of them to make "the clearest possible picture of the events" and to "select" and "order" reminiscences but wants to find its form too. Here we can ask the final question: can the otherness be preserved or does this form point at the problem of the otherness and the "understanding of the other" and that of its linguistic and narrative form?

Yes, sure. If we want to recall events from the past we do not understand as past because we cannot and could not render them meaningful, we can choose a narrative form to express the dilemmas, hopes and expectations about this rendering. The way of narration is not only the reference to it, but also working out and *work* in this relation. The unexplainable traumata and the narration as an endeavor of understanding them reveal their essential relation in Holocaust literature and a very difficult and complex way of understanding memories, reminiscence, and the self by writing.

¹¹ The most important element of this philosophy for us is 'duration is creation', interpreted and mediated by Emmanuel Lévinas (Hand and Lévinas 46).

5. Conclusion

This paper raised a set of questions related to the theme “identity and reminiscence”—restricted to just the most important ones—to summarize my past inquiries on Jurek Becker. The researches are also contributions to the Holocaust literature not only in Germany, but also in Hungary. This literary tradition—whether it exists or how it exists—seems to be very important to us because of the Nobel Prize of Imre Kertész, and all related analysis can open up a new approach to it. Jurek Becker’s novels and essays are perhaps one of them.

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Narrative: Assimilation or Integration?

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Abstract. The works of minority authors are often referred to as “assimilation narrative,” although it is very often not assimilation that they seek. They strive to find a place in mainstream society, without giving up their ethnic-cultural-religious background—in other words, they wish to get *integrated*, rather than *assimilated*. They regret when *assimilation* takes place, when they finally have to leave their cultural roots behind, and they try to postpone it as much as they can. Ethnic authors, immigrant writers fully understand that the members of minorities, new immigrants wish to get integrated, as in this way they are able to enjoy the advantages a highly industrialized country with high living standards is able to offer. But most ethnic authors do not believe that for integration they always and inevitably need to abandon and give up their ethnic, cultural and religious roots. It is therefore justified to introduce the term “integration narrative” to denote writings the authors of which are against assimilation, while they look for a possibility of meaningful participation in mainstream society. For the essay, examples from Hispanic American literature will be used. Authors who reject and those who accept assimilation are discussed in the paper.

Keywords: assimilation/integration narrative, Hispanic literature in America

1. Introduction

In literary theory and literary history the works of (ethnic) minority authors—and similarly, the works of authors dealing with minorities—are often

referred to as “assimilation narrative.” This term tends to suggest that the works of minority authors produced in the language of the majority of the people living in the country concerned seek a place in society through assimilation. Assimilation, however, means melting up in the majority nation by adopting all the values, customs and way of life characteristic of the majority, and abandoning, leaving behind, giving up the original traditional values, ethics, lifestyle, religion etc. of the minority. Assimilation means disappearing without a trace, continuing life as a new person, with new values, language, a whole set of new cultural assets. In this paper an effort is made to show that this is in fact *not* what many of the ethnic minority writers look for, so the term *assimilation narrative* is in many, although certainly not all, the cases is erroneously applied.

What many minority authors—prose writers as well as playwrights and poets—seek and expect from the majority society is a chance for *integration*. From their point of view, integration is a lot more positive term, as it suggests the possibility for active participation in the life of society. It does not involve the abandonment of their original cultural heritage, but offers the advantages of participating in the life of the country.

Examples to illustrate the necessity of differentiating between *assimilation* and *integration* when labelling minority writings will be taken from the works of Chicano—Mexican American—authors. It is, naturally, possible to obtain similar instances from the literature of other minorities of the United States and/or other countries, but for constraints of space, the examples will be limited to the literature of Chicanos in this paper.

2. Politicians, assimilation, integration

For politicians, the situation is simple. Majority politicians often urge and encourage assimilation, as they tend to regard the demands, expectations and special needs of ethnic minorities as some sort of an extra political, cultural and economic burden. The number of majority politicians who look upon minorities as a cultural and economic resource for the entire country is usually smaller. Minority politicians are divided sharply according to whether they support or reject assimilation. Those who support it, usually argue that success in professions and business, as well as the chances of personal advancement are all subject to perfect linguistic and cultural adaptation, the unconditional acceptance of the entire value system of the majority. Linda Chávez, a prominent neo-conservative politician adds to these arguments the idea that emergence from poverty, the escape route from the slums—or the *barrios*, as the poverty-stricken areas populated by Hispanics are called—leads through assimilation. Chávez is an influential neo-conservative theoretician, who had been selected for the position of Secretary of Labor in George W. Bush’s government, but did not occupy the position because it

turned out that she employed an undocumented immigrant as a house servant. Chávez condemns that

The purpose [of American schools] is not to assimilate Hispanic children, . . . but to maintain and strengthen their ethnic identity by teaching them in their native language and by inculcating in them in their native culture. In the process, these children have become the most segregated students in American public schools, kept apart from their English-speaking peers even after they have acquired basic English skills . . . (9)

The quotation is from the chapter of the book, entitled “*The Bilingual Battleground*.” Expressions such as “battleground” indicate Chávez’s firm commitment to the issue of assimilation. For Chávez, education in their own culture impedes Mexicans in achieving full success in American civilization. Non-Hispanic politicians often use even more powerful expressions. Rosa Martha Villareal quotes the words of Tom Tancredo (representative for Colorado), who believes “that the culture of Latin American immigrants (especially Mexicans) threaten the very nature of American civilization” (Villareal, “Clashes of Civilization Stereotypes”). Tancredo’s words imply that Latin American culture in general, and Mexican in particular, is not American at all. The politician does not bother to explain what it is then; he continues the nineteenth-century tradition to suggest that Mexicans debase and defile the allegedly wholesome and sound Anglo-Saxon civilization of the United States.

Minority politicians who reject assimilation, usually refer to the traditional cultural heritage of their own people, and intend to reinforce the national identity of their people. They believe that political organization is a way of asserting their own interests in the country: “In 1966 Senator Joseph Montoya (D-NM) told a group of Mexican Americans that if they would organize, work together, and, above all, register and vote, they could become one of the most politically potent groups in the United States” (Gómez-Quiñones 102).

The 1960s also witnessed the emergence of the Chicano Movement, led by César Chávez. Although Chávez carefully planned his actions as an agricultural movement, the symbols they used and the sheer number of people who joined him made it clear right at the beginning that it was going to be a lot more than the expression of the dissatisfaction of a handful of California farmworkers. The movement did a lot for organizing Chicanos and to improve the ability of the Mexican minority to resist assimilation.

3. Narrative: assimilation or integration

In literature, the borderline between those who support assimilation and those who seek integration is not always so clearcut, and the proportion of the two parties are also different. Authors are usually intellectuals who are rooted deeply in their own culture and traditions, unwilling to give it all up, but are also able to see the chances offered by a wealthy, industrialized society will all the advantages it has to offer. They are therefore largely in favor of *integration*, and not of *assimilation*.

One of the first classic novels of Chicano literature is *Bless Me, Última* by Rudolfo Anaya. The novel is summed up briefly by Shirley and Shirley in the following way: “[it] is concerned with the maturation of a young boy . . . and his relationship with his spiritual guide, the Última of the title. She is a *curandera*, a wise woman, a dispenser of curing herbs and potions who also heals with spiritual advice and some ‘magic’” (105).

Anaya wanted to write a novel about his own people, about the traditional values of his own community. The world is the closed, relatively well-protected world of the family, where people know their place and the community takes care of them. Nobody is left alone when too old or ill to take care of himself or herself: “Gabriel, we cannot let her live her last days in loneliness . . .” ““No,”” my father agreed. ‘It is not the way of our people’” (3). The mother, whose ages-old task is keeping up the family and preserving its integrity at all times, initiates steps to receive somebody in need, and the father agrees. After all, that is “the way of our people.” The importance of family ties as a central point in the value system of the Chicanos is made clear in the very first pages of the book. It is in this environment that young Antonio grows up. In addition to family bonds, religion is also a central part in the life of the community. Antonio even finds it difficult to accept Christian faith and Última’s alleged powers as a witch at the same time. Finally he finds satisfaction in believing that both religion and Última’s witchcraft serve good purposes.

The question of assimilation does not arise here, as the outside world is a distant place, the characters of the novel are rarely exposed to it. Still, a distant menace of an alien, unknown world is there somewhere far outside, so many of the Chicanos decide not to live in the town, but to spend most of their time out the range, riding freely as long as they can continue this way of life. Attempts at finding a way to the new world are not very successful. Such an occasion is when the boys go to school. They expect a lot from it, but when they realize that not much attention is paid to the specific needs of Chicanos, and therefore education was not the same thing to them as to Anglos, they are no longer really interested. The circumstance that Antonio was not very deeply integrated in the school life of the Anglos—in fact, he was ejected by the system—made it easier for him to grow up to be a man within his own original world, in the traditions of his people. As he

grows older, he shoulders more and more responsibility, and he is accepted as a grown-up man, a reliable and respected man of his community. He is not integrated in the Anglo society, but nor is assimilated to any degree. The system allowed him to do neither. Anaya's novel was published in 1972 to become one of the most widely known and best-selling Chicano literary works. Another novel that rapidly received great acclaim is *Always Running—La Vida Loca: Gang Days in Los Angeles* by Luis Rodriguez. His work was published two decades after Anaya's work. This is also the story of a young boy's way to maturity, but the differences between the two novels are as great as the similarities. Rodriguez's novel is based upon his own life, and he received prizes for *non-fiction*. In his novel there is no wise magician to assist the hero on his way—he has to run his own race, and there are in fact very few who help him. There are many more of those who work against him directly or indirectly.

One of the characters who always support young Luis without reservations is his mother. The mother in Rodriguez's novel matches the traditional Chicana mother who, against all difficulties, financial and other, keeps the family together. She is, however, not the romantic beauty with the raven-black hair, often found in stereotypical images of Mexican women:

Mama always seemed to be sick. . . . she was overweight and suffered from . . . diabetes. She had thyroid problems, bad nerves and high blood pressure. She was still young then . . . in her thirties, but she had all the ailments. She didn't even have teeth; . . . Despite this she worked all the time, . . . and held up the family when almost everything else came apart. (23)

The last sentence is particularly important, as Mama, with her ability to keep the family together, will be one of the cyclically returning images throughout the whole novel, until Rodriguez will at the end be able to offer his own positive experience to his son.

Women described in novels and short stories often suffer under a double burden: one is the generally underprivileged situation of the Chicanos, and the other is the lack of a man—a husband, a father of their children, a permanent partner, a wage earner—in the family. In this situation the mother becomes what Charles Ramirez Berg describes as follows:

The naive, good-natured, long-suffering mother, . . . is the norm . . . and the typical way ethnic mothers are portrayed in Hollywood movies in general. In the assimilation narrative the mother figure serves as the font of genuine ethnic values and the protagonist's (and the narrative's) cultural conscience. When the hero listens to 'his people' he is listening to his mother. (38)

Berg is discussing traditional Mexican family values in connection with movies, but his observations are applicable to literature as well. These values are described by Harry H. L. Kitano as follows:

The women are expected to cook, raise the children, and serve the needs of the men. Male and female roles tend to be clearly proscribed; masculinity (*machismo*) is of great importance, even outside marriage. The family remains the most important unit; close relationships outside the family are mostly with age peers. (139)

The *barrio* was a place that distorted many of the basic values of the Chicanos. Such was *máchismo*. Originally, *máchismo* used to mean that men were allowed to have relationship with other women outside marriage, it was in fact a sign of their masculinity, but most of them did not desert their families, they supported and provided for wife and children. In the *barrio*, masculine pride for grown-up men often meant that they had many children from many different women, but they did not care much about the children or the women. But when the father is present, he has not deserted the family, the mother is usually described in the same way. Somehow, the role of the father is different, and from the aspect of the daily life and work of the family, the problems of the children, the father is an unimportant character, hovering somewhere in the background, on the peripheries of the story.

For a young man, identification with a gang began to replace identification with a family. A *barrio* is not rural or small-town America, where the betrayal of the family was the gravest crime, the punishment for which was contempt or even death. Here one could easily desert his family, and survive.

For young people the lack of any sexual education meant that introduction into sexual life was often a painful and frustrating experience. The naturalistic description of such scenes in the book indicate that this experience was very often not romantic, what is more, often disappointing for many young people—both girls and boys—who were frequently barely older than a young child.

The *barrio*, while distorts traditional values, also acts like a trap several times, whenever somebody appears to have a chance of breaking out, the *barrio* with its misery, deprivation, prejudice and petty crime prevents him or her from succeeding. But the first thing—and one of the most important—that we learn about the *barrio* is that it is not exclusively a Spanish-speaking community. There are other nationalities there as well, because poverty is just as important a fact in bringing people to the *barrio* as nationality:

. . . large numbers of Asians from Japan, Korea and Taiwan also moved into the area. Sections of Monterey Park and even San Gabriel became known as Little Japans or Chinatowns. . . . The barrios which were not incorporated . . . became self-contained and forbidden, incubators of rebellion. (Rodriguez 40-41)

“Incorporated” means that a town has its own public services and utilities and normal housing conditions—middle-class, as opposed to the slums of the immigrants.

Another recurrent image—or rather event—is the drop-out of school. The drop-out is usually the end of a hopeless, or sometimes not completely hopeless, effort to catch up with the mainstream society. The drop-out of school has more tragic consequences for Luis than it was for Antonio in Anaya’s novel. The *barrio* Luis lives in is deeply embedded in a big city, and any chance of finding a decent job and earning a middle-class salary is good education. Luis is not growing up in his own community, relatively isolated from an unfriendly and not receptive but remote mainstream America. A similarly hindering factor is police harassment—Chicanos are often subject to arbitrary and excessively rude police action. Police action is, however, a highly controversial issue in the novel. Young Luis’s life is spent in a way a natural part of which is petty crime—burglary, mugging, theft and street fighting. Still, police action is not regarded by the *pachucos* as an act of law enforcement and a retaliation for something that is not right—it always remains harassment, the sole reason for which is racial. This is the case on page 95, when they mug a group of youngsters, and the police appears on the scene:

They started to run, but we surrounded them and forced them to fork over some bills. As they ran off, Lencho kicked one of them in the ass. . . . We turned and walked down Hellman Avenue. Suddenly a Monterey Park police car drove by and stopped. Two uniformed officers rushed out. ‘Hold it right there,’ one of them ordered. This became routine with us. Whenever the people from the Hill made it down to Monterey . . ., the police departments . . . made a habit to roust us out. (Rodriguez 95)

Rodriguez does not explain what he thinks about interrelation between poverty and petty crime, but he described the risks of this way of life, as he tells several stories when, as a child, he was very close to committing a murder, thus becoming a serious offender. Explanation comes later in the novel:

‘You stole from me. You have to pay for it.’

‘I don’t mind that. The problem is we end up paying more for the same thing than other people do. On this side of town, the cops don’t beat up people. On this side of town, the cops don’t stop you for no reason. They don’t be hitting you in the head, trying to make you mad so you do something you regret later.’ (144)

At school most Chicano boys and girls do not have an adequate preliminary education, they very often struggle with the language, and even when they are juvenile criminals, they are offended that they are treated as juvenile criminals. At these passages Rodriguez does not make any comments and does not suggest any solution, apart from the fully justified complaint that the educational authorities did not provide for proper Spanish-language education. The fact that for decades nothing really happened in recognition of the educational needs of one of the largest ethnic groups in America, affords a rather sad image of the woeful shortcomings of the American educational system. In fact, providing for adequate Spanish education would have been just one possible solution. Paying more attention to teaching English with special and effective methodology to those whose mother tongue was different, could have been another way of addressing the problem, but this apparently did not happen either. It seems that for decades (Anglo-)American school boards and police departments behaved as if they had believed that the presence of “foreigners” in their country was a transitory phenomenon. They believed that all they had to do was wait, and these people would disappear, and all the social, educational and other problems with them, relieving the majority society of all obligation to do something for them. On top of page 120 of the novel Luis is glad that he is fired from school—at the bottom of the page he regrets that he has to do a dirty and humiliating job.

Those of us still in school were expelled. This was fine with me. I hated school. And I loved fighting.

I worked as a bus boy in a Mexican restaurant in San Gabriel when I was 15 years old. . . . It was kicking, hard work. . . . We carried thick plastic trays heaped with dirty dishes, cleaned up tables, poured water into glasses, provided extra coffee—and took abuse from the well-to-do people who came there.

‘Hey boy, clean up this mess.’

‘Hey boy, how about some more water.’

Hey Boy became my new name. (Rodriguez 120)

At similar scenes Rodriguez does not provide his own comments or explanations—when he was 15, it was “fine with him” to be expelled from school,

and did not understand that lack of education was equal to getting nothing but dirty jobs. What made it especially difficult for him to understand this was the generally hostile atmosphere, the prejudice that deprived them of equal opportunities at schools. There are two factors in the novel that finally pushed Rodriguez towards the first efforts at finding some sort of a solution to his apparently hopeless life. One is the absolutely senseless violence of the gang warfare. We find abundant descriptions of violence and destruction in the novel:

Things soon exploded. More cops came but they too were pelted. A major confrontation erupted . . . Soon the police pulled out. The ambulance took Carlitos and sped off, but not before receiving a barrage of rocks, bottles and debris. We assumed that more police and firepower were coming. (Rodriguez 96)

In order to become a member of a gang, one has to undergo a similarly cruel “inauguration” ritual. The ritual has its own choreography, the players know their parts, and the preparations have, in their own grotesque and bizarre way, some dignity. But the reader will soon forget that, when reads lines like these:

Topo swung a calloused fist at my face. I went down fast. Then an onslaught of steel-tipped shoes and heels rained on my body. I thought I would be able to swing and at least hit one or two—but no way! Then I . . . pulled my arms over my head, covered it the best I could while the kicks seemed to stuff me beneath a parked car.

Finally the barrage stopped. . . . Hands came at me to congratulate. There were pats on the back. (Rodriguez 110)

Violence, which occurred in the form of rare and tragic events in Anaya’s novel, is close to becoming a way of life in Rodriguez’s *barrio*.

In addition to being increasingly nauseated by the violence and destruction, Luis received another impetus that helped him continue his own personal *Bildungsroman*. As a result of the gang wars and the increasing crime rate, the authorities finally realized that there was something wrong, and paid more attention to the problems of the Chicanos. The process was hampered by several setbacks, but community and educational programmes were launched and those who were ready and willing to accept it, help was offered. It happened at the time when the Chicano Movement first appeared. America began to learn new abbreviations: UMAS for United Mexican American Students, MEChA for Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlán and many more. Several of these organizations exist today.

Luis discovers for himself that art and literature may be a point of breakout of his miserable situation. First he paints murals, a common activity among *barrio* boys. It was recognized by social organizations, and they soon made efforts to organize the painters by selecting walls, agreeing with the owners of the property, and providing paint and brushes to the participants in the programme.

A real revelation for Luis was literature. He went to the library, and under the suspicious and contemptuous eyes of the librarian he selected books for himself:

And then there was Piri Thomas, a Puerto Rican brother, *un camarada de aquellas*: his book *Down These Mean Streets* became a living Bible for me. I dog-eared it, wrote in it, copied whole passages so I wouldn't forget their texture, the passion, this searing work of a street dude and hype in Spanish Harlem—a barrio boy like me, on the other side of America. (Rodriguez 138)

Here, and at other parts of the novel, we also find code-switching that is used here to create an atmosphere. At the end of the book the Spanish terms are explained in alphabetical order. Code-switching is also characteristic in Anaya's novel.

Luis Rodriguez was lucky as he came of age together, in fact hand in hand, with the Chicano Movement. Still, the Movement in itself was not sufficient. He needed his own will, his own determination to change things for the better. This is what makes Luis's story a real *Bildungsroman*. His efforts to catch up with the mainstream of American society seem to refute what Nobel Prize-winning Mexican author Octavio Paz says about the *pachuco* not wanting to become a part of American life. Rodriguez makes it clear when he says, "It's about time we become part of America" (212). Integration does not necessarily mean assimilation. It does mean involvement, participation, but to that end enforced all-English education as Linda Chávez and other advocates of making English the exclusive official language of the U. S. believe, is probably not the right way of achieving the involvement of crowds of the population that are at present excluded because of social prejudices and education entirely inadequate for their needs. In this way, they are not allowed to *join* in a "nation of joiners":

'What would you want me to tell my students about how they can fulfill their responsibilities as citizens?' one of us used to ask at the conclusion of his interview with community leaders. Almost always the characteristically American answer was 'Tell them to get involved!' The United States is a nation of joiners. (Bellah 167)

The Chicanos do long for America and all the positive things American way of life has to offer—and it does not mean that they want to give up their identity.

On the contrary—finding their own identity, creating literature and arts based on their own traditions help them in fighting for their rights and due place in American society more effectively. Chicano poetry, Campesino Theatre and Chicano prose all call for action—and as Leal and Barrón put it, “Action is much more effective, when backed by knowledge of one’s roots” (Leal 13).

The book that became “a living Bible” for Luis Rodriguez is, similarly to Rodriguez’s work, autobiographical. The story takes place a generation earlier than Rodriguez’s, but the situations of the two authors are very similar. Thomas’s situation is complicated by his skin being darker than that of the average Latino. His quest for indentity is therefore even harder and more complicated than Rodriguez’s, and more severe are the trials and tribulations he is going through. Rodriguez did not serve a long prison sentence before his final decision to radically change his life. The similarities between the two novels—and the two lives—are, however, greater than the differences. In fact, it often appears that certain elements of Rodriguez’s novel are based or modelled upon Thomas’s. On page X of his Prologue to the novel, Thomas writes: “I am . . . Unsatisfied, hoping, and always reaching” (Thomas X). This clause, “always reaching,” may have inspired Rodriguez’s selection of a title for his novel. Similarly to *Always Running*, Thomas’s story is that of a Hispanic boy growing up in an American city in the twentieth century. Similarly to *Always Running*, at the beginning of *Down These Mean Streets* the family is together, father, mother and children in the same household. The role of the mother is uncomparably more important than that of the father, another similarity between the two novels, between the two lives. Thomas sr. makes efforts to be a good father, his son looked up to him, but after a while he somehow vanishes from the life of his son, reappears sometimes, but he just floats somewhere in the background, unable to offer a model to his son, an example to follow.

Thomas’s mother is not an enchanting beauty either: “I looked at fat little Moms standing there with a very serious look on her face” (Thomas 18). The “fat little Moms” will be the focus of the family, and it is not her fault that at the end her son strayed away from the family and ended up on the wrong side of the law.

Rodriguez describes the *barrio* as a place where misery was just as important a factor in bringing people together as nationality. Still, misery was selective in terms of nationality: Hispanic people lived together with various Asian immigrants in the *barrio* on the West Coast. Young Piri Thomas soon learns that misery may have a nationality: “[In the Home Relief Office] Most of the people were Puerto Ricans and Negroes; a few were Italians. It seemed that every mother had brought a kid to interpret for her” (Thomas 41-42). The children, a step ahead of their first-generation immigrant parents in integration into their new homeland, picked up more English at school and in the streets than their mothers did. Piri translates for her mother, and the relief officer answers in Spanish—he may have picked up a

few words and uses them out of courtesy, and it is likely that he meets Hispanics so often that it was not difficult to learn the basics of the language.

Code switching is frequent all through the novel, similarly to Anaya's and Rodriguez's works. Thomas also often uses rude language, although at the beginning of the novel his parents make efforts to dissuade him from that, keeping the boy within the framework of decent Catholic upbringing. As Piri reaches his adolescent age, and spends more time with other kids from the neighborhood, these efforts are hopeless. By the time he has a job as a shoeshine boy, he is a shrewd street kid, with tricks of extracting big tips from customers. Here, class has nationality again, as "Sir" is more often used than "Señor," indicating that middle-class customers, having their shoes cleaned in the streets, tended to be Anglos. Petty crime for young Piri is just as natural as it is for young Rodriguez. He describes a case when he stole \$10 from a girl as poor as he, and explained it as "it was her or me, and as always, it had to be me" (Thomas 98).

It appears to be a desperate fight for survival, but it was not. Poverty was not the first and foremost problem for these young men. We learn from the novel that although they were not at all very wealthy and they turned up at the Home Relief Office every now and then, they had a bathroom, regularly had decent food, and enjoyed amenities that were unavailable for most boys of the the same age in wartime Europe, let alone other continents. Piri's family even moved out of Spanish Harlem to a detached house, which was the first sign of starting a lower middle-class life. Stealing \$10 from a poor girl who badly needed the money was an act definitely not dictated by desperate starvation. It was a means of demonstrating superiority, showing an ability of being able to survive under all circumstances. For most of the boys spending their time in the streets the real problem was the lack of a real community to belong to—lack of a sense of belonging. They tried and regularly failed:

The next day I was back on the stoop, slinging sound with my boys, yakking about everything we knew about and also what we didn't, placing ideas on the common altar, splitting the successes and failures of all. That was the part of belonging, the good and bad; it was for all of you. (Thomas 54)

"My boy(s)" is a recurrent term all through the novel, to the very last pages. "His boys" were the real community for Piri Thomas, the community to which he believed he belonged. It was a false belief, but young Piri failed to recognize that. During his search for a community to belong to, he faces racial prejudice as well. It is a slow and painful recognition for him to understand that it does not matter for people that he is not an African-American; his dark skin makes him Black, and that is it. A particularly humiliating experience for him is when he tries to date a "*muchacha blanca*," a white girl. Piri Thomas learns through a painful and bitter

experience what Glazer and Moynihan describes as follows: “Even in these early days a characteristic pattern of response to the American Negro could be seen in the Puerto Rican community. For the Puerto Ricans are a mixed people. And while in their own minds a man’s color meant something very different from what it meant to white Americans, they knew very well its meaning for Americans” (Glazer and Moynihan 92).

Through the story Piri undertakes various jobs, starting with shining shoes, but the jobs are all low-paid positions for unskilled laborers and Piri is dissatisfied with the situation, just as Rodriguez will be a few decades later. He also fails to recognize the interrelation between low-paid and humiliating jobs and the lack of education and trade. In the hope of finding a community to integrate into, he takes a trip to the South, where African-Americans live in higher numbers. When working for his voyage aboard a ship, young Piri refers to it as “coolie” work; he does not recognize that he has no qualification whatsoever that would entitle/enable him to do any other kind of work. Naturally, the inadequate educational system that did not take into account the needs of ethnic minorities—or, perhaps more precisely, erroneously identified the needs of the ethnic minorities with an inflexible and standardized English-only instruction—did not help Piri to recognize the importance of good education for social progress.

As low-paid jobs did not yield the amount of money Piri and “his boys” needed, they took to petty crime. Drug trafficking, shoplifting, becoming a drug addict and finally armed robbery signify the stations in the personal education of Piri Thomas. But even when he is sentenced for the armed robbery, he does not recognize that the punishment for his crime was just and fair, or at least that a crime is to be followed by some kind of a punishment: “The reasoning that my punishment was deserved was absent” (Thomas 255-256). This was the same in Rodriguez’s work, who at the beginning believed that punishment for various crimes was an unfair retaliation from the majority society: “The problem is we end up paying more for the same thing than other people do” (Rodriguez 144).

The recognition that learning a trade or learning for a high school diploma might be a good breakout comes slowly. First learning is nothing more than a way of spending the long years in prison. The first signs that learning is a good way of understanding oneself, a way of finding our place in the world, come late in the novel: “Learning made me painfully aware of life and me. What had I been? How had I become that way? What could I be? How could I make it?” (Thomas 298).

This recognition came together with Piri’s return to his Catholicism. The Catholic faith of the Puerto Ricans is described as not particularly strong and influential: “Roman Catholicism is not a national church, as it is in Ireland and Poland. It sets the general frame of life by baptizing (most), marrying (less), and burying, and its calendar sets the holidays and festivals, but its impact on the

people, in guiding their lives and molding their ideas, and in serving as a vessel for their social life, is relatively small” (Glazer and Moynihan 103).

Still, for somebody as deep in the hardships of life as Piri Thomas, Catholicism was a considerable help in finding the way out. In prison he learns about the role of religion in life in general, he learns from the Muslims that a man needs to have human dignity, regardless of race and color. This is an important factor in making Thomas able to accept himself. When he is out of prison, he perhaps for the first time in his life, recognizes simple, basic facts of life. Now it seems that being normal was cheap and easy, and being a drug addict was hell on Earth: “I made mental figures and my junkie *panín* needed seventy-two dollars a day to keep from coming apart—to stay normal. Something I was doing for nothing” (Thomas 328). Thomas, however, paid a high price for “staying normal,” to avoid the danger of falling apart. He was ready to turn his back on his old self, and start a new life of his own, accepting some of the facts of life and the laws of society. The author allows the *panín* to make the final dramatic plea to God and the Virgin, to talk about dignity, but there is no doubt that these are in fact Thomas’s words, his own determination and conviction about his own future.

For Anaya, Rodriguez and Piri Thomas the traditional values of their ethnic community—their roots—are important, but there are also those who are willing to leave their own roots behind, who have different ideas about “joining” the mainstream society. Sandra Cisneros’s *The House on Mango Street* aims at less than Rodriguez’s novel. Cisneros’ ambitions are primarily personal—she longs for a personal American dream: a decent middle-class lifestyle. The story, similarly to Rodriguez’s and Thomas’s works, is highly autobiographical. Esperanza has positive memories of her mother only. Her memories about her father are either neutral—he used to shave in front of the mirror while listening to music—or explicitly negative, when his snoring at night disturbed the others. The reason why fathers are relatively unimportant characters in both Rodriguez’ and Cisneros’ works is perhaps that they fail as providers. They are supposed to provide their families with American living standards, financial stability, good education for the children, but in the *barrio* they are unable to do so. Many Mexican-American families live in the *barrio*, that is, the district populated primarily by Hispanic people, but we learn from Rodriguez that many other nationalities living in poverty and deprivation share the *barrio* with Hispanics. Rodriguez and Thomas often refer to the place they used live in as *barrio*, whereas Cisneros does not. In her novel not even the word *barrio* is used, perhaps because

Cisneros is, typically, more interested in detailing the dynamics of her own community rather than representing conflicts between Anglo-Americans and Mexican-Americans. Conflicts between Anglo and Latino cultures are, of course, present in Cisneros’s writing, but they often take the form of

encounters between relatively assimilated Latinos and relatively unassimilated ones. (Romero, “Sandra Cisneros”)

The avoidance of the word *barrio* may come from the fact that Cisneros grew up in Chicago, a northern city, where the Hispanic community was smaller than in the cities of the Southwest. What we find in the novel is, however, not any different from any *barrio*: a rundown neighborhood with small and crowded houses with many people with Hispanic names in it. At one point in the novel, Cisneros even draws up the geographical boundaries of the *barrio*, when they try a new car and make a round trip in it, but the author does not use the word.

What Romero claims about the description of the conflicts between Anglo and Latino cultures is clear in “Never Marry a Mexican,” the heroine of which, Clemencia leaves their middle-class home to go to the *barrio* when her mother marries a “white” man, that is, a non-Mexican person. “Never Marry a Mexican” for Cisneros is perhaps never marry at all—she is single, does not have a husband and children—“nobody’s mother and nobody’s wife,” as described in the “Notes about the author” at the end of the novel. As Romero points out, when discussing her experience about teaching Cisneros to international students is that “[o]ne potential source of discomfort for students is Cisneros’s manifestly feminist sensibility. Some students may accuse her (as they would accuse virtually any other feminist writer) of ‘man-bashing’” (Romero, “Sandra Cisneros”). It is difficult to escape that conclusion when we read descriptions which suggest that men are the reason for somebody’s being bad and miserable: “They are bad those Vargases, and how can they help it with only one mother who is tired all the time from buttoning and bottling and babying, and who cries every day for the man who left without even leaving a dollar for bologna or a note explaining how come” (Cisneros 29).

The suffering mother appears together with the image of the man who fails as a provider for the family. Where there is no reason for blaming a man for ignoring his family, the man is simply ugly and repulsive, whereas the woman is kind and attractive:

The grandpa slept on the living room couch and snored through his teeth. His feet fat and doughy like tamales, and he powdered and stuffed into white socks and brown leather shoes.

The grandma’s feet were lovely as pink pearls and dressed in velvety high heels that made her walk with a wobble, but she wore them anyway because they were pretty. (Cisneros 39)

It does not occur to the author that a man may also suffer, if from nothing else, then from some disease. Cisneros, unlike Anzaldúa, has not become lesbian,

but her rejection of the male sex makes her live alone. At the end of the novel Cisneros longs for a house of her own, and makes it clear what kind of a house it is going to be: “Not a man’s house. Not a daddy’s. A house all my own. With a porch and my pillow, my pretty purple petunias. My books and my stories. My two shoes waiting beside the bed. . . . Nobody’s garbage to pick up after” (Cisneros 108).

In the case of Cisneros, the melting pot does not fail to melt; it functions well. Her desires are strictly personal, she does not mind melting up in American society, leaving behind her cultural and ethnic heritage. This is pure assimilation: personal goals, personal desires to be satisfied. Luis wanted to leave poverty and deprivation, Esperanza wanted to leave behind her entire former life, including her heritage, with all the negative and positive features and examples.

When the individual is unable to find a point where he can join the mainstream society, and he is unable either to be assimilated or integrated, the result is tragedy. Such a story is written by Richard Dokey, whose short story entitled *Sánchez* was written in 1967. All the characters in it embody basically positive attributes. Juan Sánchez is a hard-working migrant, who makes a home in the United States. He marries the girl he loves, and who “accepted his philosophy completely, understood his needs, made it her own” (Dokey 262). The loss of this beloved wife is the only tragedy in the story. Jesús, Sánchez’s son, also works hard, finds a job among the Gringos, and is proud to show his place of work to his father. Jesús also shows his father the entertainment facilities near the place he works. This is the moment when Sánchez sadly realizes that he has lost his son. Jesús loves and respects his father with a true filial love, but he is absorbed by the world of the *norteamericanos*. So much so, that he does not even understand why his father is not equally enthusiastic about the wonderful things he shows him. After the loss of his wife, Sánchez has to release his son. The end of this short story is suicide—Sánchez sets all his belongings and finally his house on fire. The reason for his suicide is his sense of unbearable loss. The values of the *norteamericanos*—a (relatively) well-paid job, entertainment, a new place in a competitive society—absorb a second-generation Chicano who is ready to adapt to this world. Sánchez went to the United States to find a better living. He worked hard, but he never really assimilated—he either did not want to, or was not able to, and remained a *paisano*, a man of simple needs, living close to the land he cultivated. Working hard is a value Sánchez shares with the *norteamericanos*—the only value, in fact. Technical and social progress, entertainment, the company of people of the same age are not things he is looking for, and when he realizes that he has missed something, it is too late. He could have chosen either of two alternatives: showing more flexibility in connection with mainstream America, in other words, showing more inclination to assimilate, at least to some extent. The other is taking more care in bringing up his son in the traditions of his own nation, to keep him closer to his own *raza*, thus slowing him down on his way towards

assimilation. But his son starts to assimilate at a pace that makes it hopeless for Sánchez to catch up with. Sánchez did not simply perish in the fire, as the people in town believed: “But of course, on that score they were mistaken. Juan Sánchez had simply gone home” (Dokey 267). Sánchez chose the way of his departure, having completed his mission on Earth.

It is likely that we find fewer and fewer mothers suffering and serving the way described by Berg and Kitano. As an increasing number of Chicanos elevate themselves to middle class status, and more and more of them adopt values of the Anglo middle class, Chicanas become more “emancipated” as it is regarded by the mainstream society. During the demonstrations against the new immigration laws in the streets of the cities of California a few years ago, many women wearing the T-shirts of the *Latinos Unidos* fought for their rights side by side with men. But these were ethnic-conscious demonstrations—as turning away from old family values, and entirely giving up the role of the mother as the person keeping the family together would probably be the same as giving up one of the most important core elements of Hispanic cultural heritage. Although the selection of these particular works might appear to be arbitrary, and a great number of any other works can be selected and arranged into various combinations for the purposes of an analysis, there is little doubt that another set of works would show a similarly great variety of themes and approaches, defying any simplifying categorization.

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The Death of an Ethos . . .

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Abstract. The article analyzes the experience under the communist regime as it is depicted in Herta Müller's novel *The Land of the Green Plums*. It is more like a metaphysical experience rather than a political one—the novel is a metaphor not only for the abjection and the degradation of the human beings trapped in the totalitarian world, but also for the destruction of an old type of attitude towards life, an attitude which is defined by Virgil Nemoianu in some of his studies as the *ethos of learning*.

Herta Müller's characters seem to carry within themselves certain features of this ethos, but in a world which has no logic or causality, they become victims of their own attempts to evade the terrible reality. Nevertheless, in spite of the lack of substance of the characters and the apparently incidental ending of the novel, *The Land of the Green Plums* manages to describe what many other Central and Eastern European authors have ignored or have tried to forget—the fear, the ugliness and the absurdity of life in communism.

Keywords: Herta Müller, communism, ethos of learning, absurdity

In a series of studies explaining the manifestations of *Romanticism* in Europe, Virgil Nemoianu asserts that the main difference between the Western European and the Central European culture relies in the *work ethic* of the first (as Max Weber once defined it) and what he calls the "*learning ethos*" of the latter. In his opinion, social advancement before the First World War "over a large area of Central Europe—roughly covering what is now Austria, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, the former Yugoslavia, Romania" was a result not of "gainful

labor and individual achievement” but rather of the “acquisition of information and the communitarian recognition of learning and as a standard of merit” (Nemoianu *Imperfection* 91).¹ In other words, while the most important features of the capitalist Western European attitude towards life and God were related more to material matters—work, temperance, industry, resolution, acquisition of wealth, etc.²—in Central Europe the focus shifts towards the acquisition of knowledge and information, meaning it “postulated the world as a vast arena in which affirmation and promotion were possible through orderly and fair tests, struggles, and strategies. . . . Learning could justify wealth and high position and it was an avenue open to all classes” (Nemoianu *Imperfection* 96).

As Nemoianu argues later on, this *learning ethos* explains the blossom of many cultural organizations promoting knowledge, information and the protection of the arts around 1840 in Hungary, Bohemia, Romania, Serbia, etc., organizations in which “social interaction would transcend class interests by establishing common standards of learning and of striving for intellectual and spiritual betterment” (Nemoianu *Imperfection* 98). Moreover, the members of these societies had a great influence on the political and social life of their countries, they made learning become an aspiration and even a tradition among different social classes, and a way to establish and keep a status among the governing elite.

However, this type of ethos had its downfalls as well; it generated “slothful modernization, excessive nostalgia, deficiencies in the relationship to reality, and the chronic addiction to all kinds of retrograde populism” (Nemoianu *Imperfection* 119). I would add that all these deficiencies are depicted particularly clear in a large part of the Romanian literature—from Eminescu’s intellectuals (both in his poetry and in his prose) who spend their entire life among books seeking knowledge in spite of their extreme poverty only to realize in the end how disconnected they are from the rest of the world, through the more realistic characters depicted in Ioan Slavici’s short stories or the feeble thinkers such as Titu Herdelea or Apostol Bologa in Rebreanu’s novels, continuing with Camil Petrescu’s intellectuals who, in spite of their sincerity and refinement, are subjects of the most ardent internal dramas and ending with Marin Preda’s Victor Petrini,

¹ Chapter 4, “East / Central Europe as a Confirmatory Case Study,” also published, with a few annotations in Virgil Nemoianu, *The Triumph of Imperfection. The Silver Age of Sociocultural Moderation in Europe, 1815-1848*, Chapter 8, “Learning Over Class. The Case of Central-European Ethos”.

² As Nemoianu asserts: “A certain congeniality of elective affinity” between capitalism and Calvinism made the two to reinforce each other; the Puritan-Calvinist-capitalist nexus blossomed into a fully-fledged system of moral-religious virtues. Individualism was bolstered through the doctrine of personal saint-likeness and a private direct relationship with God. Justification takes place through work, success, human self-discipline, and perfectibility, both moral and material. Acquisition is sacramentalized. Temperance, resolution, industry, frugality, cleanliness, and chastity are among the foremost virtues” (Nemoianu *Imperfection* 95).

crushed under the absurd veil of history. However, in spite of their inner conflicts and the impact history has on their existence, all these characters are part of a well-defined plot, their personality and thoughts are part of a course of events that can be easily inferred and explained by the reader. But what happens with the ethos of learning in the later years, before and after the falling of the communism in Romania and in the rest of Central Europe?

Herta Müller's novel *The Land of Green Plums* is unmistakably autobiographical, deriving from the terrible experience the author had under the communist regime and how she was forced to leave her native country, Romania. But at the beginning of the text, the first person narrative voice hides behind a number of other voices—Edgar's voice, uttering the same words which will actually end the novel as well: "when we don't speak, said Edgar, we become unbearable, and when we do, we make fools of ourselves" (Müller 1), or Lola's thoughts which she writes in her notebook.

The movements of the story are so vague, so slow and the language so highly metaphorical that they make any description, in the traditional sense of the term, very obscure. Lola does not have a certain age; we do not know almost anything about her past or her family. All we are allowed to know is that she's a young student from a poor province in South Romania. Her only possession, in the "little cube of a room" in the campus which she shares with five other girls, is a suitcase with stockings and a few dresses (yet she has "fewer than anyone else") and her only dream is "to spend four years studying Russian," "to become somebody in the city" and then, "four years later, to go back to the village" but not "on the dusty path down below, but higher up, through the branches of mulberry trees" (3-5). She does not care what she studies as long as education can help her marry a respectable man and escape poverty. As she writes in her notebook, she wants her kids to have a "big childhood" and she knows in her village the only children who were allowed to have such a childhood were the ones who had "a father and a mother who have been to school".

In spite of the vagueness and mere allusiveness surrounding the details about her life, Lola's dream seems so far legitimate, achievable; she carries the potential of a perfect picaresque character built on the pattern of the learning ethos. Yet in the world of communism, a world of shadowy workers roaming aimlessly around the city in the night tram with "a greedy desire of a starved dog" (13), Lola's writing speaks for her guilt, her notebook is a proof both for her profoundness and of her duplicity. When a few pages later she becomes a prostitute, a member of the communist party and begins a relationship with an official, the entire edifice of the potentiality is reversed. And by the time the first narrative voice finally steps in, she can only witness Lola's death.

The posthumous exclusion from the party and from the university is one of the most intense scenes of the entire novel, making the experience of dread the

characters have to face almost unbearable. The world of communism is so absurd and so dramatic that not even the ones involved can understand it and so they constantly suppress their feelings, suspect each other and spy on each other's gestures:

At four o'clock in the afternoon, in the great hall, two days after she'd hanged herself, Lola was expelled from the Party and exmatriculated from the university. Hundreds of people were there.

Someone stood at the lectern and said: She deceived us all, she doesn't deserve to be a student in our country or a member of our Party. Everybody applauded.

In the cube that evening someone said: Everyone felt like crying, but couldn't so they applauded too long instead. No one dared to be the first to stop. Everybody looked at each other's hands while they were clapping. A few people stopped for a moment, then were so frightened they started clapping all over again. By that time most of the people wanted to stop, you could hear the clapping in the room lose its rhythm, but because those few had started again, everyone else had to keep going. At last, when one beat bounced against the walls like a giant hoe, the speaker raised his hand for silence. (25)

However, in spite of such scenes and many other references to the communist regime, the dictator and the secret police, the novel is not necessarily a political one. At least not in its most important parts. It does not carry any type of political message, it does not aspire to openly oppose a certain truth against the gloomy ideology of the regime. The narrator and her three friends, Edgar, Georg and Kurt, do not exactly tell the story of rebelling against the order of things; none of them, taken separately, has the force of a tragic character, giving "a voice to whatever is without a voice," as Italo Calvino used to say about political literature, "especially to what the language of politics excludes or attempts to exclude" (98). In fact, there is so little known in the novel about the inner life, the biography or their past that they could be very easily mistaken for one another. Their voices and their actions are so similar that in the absence of a name is hard to establish who is who. Even when they start being watched by the other students in their dormitory or when their parents' houses are searched, their reaction has nothing to do with fury; they seem completely paralyzed with fear. Romanian communism is no longer about politics; it has become what Matei Călinescu once defined as a "*thanatocracy*" (175), a world which censors the very essence of the living. Life is thus forced to hide itself, to become corrupted. Fear and lie are the very essence of this corruption:

The bodega, too, was a lie, with its tablecloths and plants, its bottles and wine-red uniforms of its waiters. Here no one was a guest, they were all just refugees of a meaningless afternoon. The men staggered and yelled at one another before smashing each other over the head with empty bottles. They bled. . . . Peasants, I thought—only peasants jump from laughing to crying, from shouting to silence. So great was their desire for life that each passing moment was capable of extinguishing life in one blow. Every one of them would have followed Lola into the bushes in the dark, with the same doggish eyes.

If they stayed sober the following day, they would go into the park alone to get a grip on themselves. Their lips would be parched and white from booze, the corners of their mouths cracked. They would step cautiously into the grass, chewing over every word they had shouted while drunk. They would crawl into the lost memories of the previous day and sit there like children.

They were scared they might have shouted something political in the bodega. They knew the waiters knew everything.

But booze protects the skull from the forbidden and fodder protects the mouth. Even when the tongue can only babble, the habit of fear does not desert the voice.

They were at home in their fear. The factory and the bodega, the shops and the apartment blocks, the railway station and the train rides through fields of wheat, corn, and sunflowers all were listening. The streetcars, the hospitals, the graveyards. The walls and the ceiling and the open sky. And if it happened, as it often did, that drunkenness grew careless in places which were lies, it was more like a mistake of the part of the walls or the ceilings or the open sky, than any intention of the human brain. (31-2)

These images in which people are reduced to stupefied beings, with no control whatsoever over their lives and no mind of their own have nothing to do with the learning ethos, on the contrary. Herta Müller's cynicism brings the novel, in this point, far closer to the absurd universe of Kafka, Orwell, or Eugène Ionesco than to the literature of dissidence and revolt against a totalitarian system of Soljenitsin or Mandelstam.

The only type of survival in this dehumanized world is, however, precisely the attempt of evading it sometimes through subtle intellectual strategies. We would never know exactly why Lola left her notebook in the narrator's suitcase, we can only infer that her German ethnicity, her immersions in the memories of her childhood when she learned that she "had to grow against death" (34) and the fact that she comes from a village as well (so do Georg, Edgar and Kurt) creates some sort of connection between the two of them. But it is none of the less true that once

she discovers the object, which she manages to read before the secret police lays its hand on it, she fully understands its significance. Moreover, when she meets Georg, Edgar and Kurt, the notebook becomes a link between them and a pretense for their friendship:

I wanted to keep Lola's notebook in my head. Edgar, Kurt and Georg were looking for someone who shared Lola's room. After they approached me in the cafeteria, I met with them every day: I couldn't keep Lola's notebook in my head on my own When I thought of Lola on my own, there were many things I could no longer remember. When they were listening, everything came back to me. I learned from their staring eyes how to read what was in my head. (35)

Lola's notebook and her death are proofs the evasion from the terrible communist reality is possible. Insanity is another, but it is a tragic one, as the stories of the singing grandmother, the deaf dwarf lady on Trajan Square or the philosopher who mistook telephone poles and tree trunks for people show. The fourth one is friendship, but even friendship is tainted by fear and the four companions end up hurting each other on purpose in their conversations. Love itself is not possible in the rarefied atmosphere of the regime in which intimacy has disappeared. Duplicity and shallowness have become so common that people simply do not realize they betray their friends or even their families . . . Tereza, the trusted friend from the factory is also an informant for the secret police, the seamstress will flee the country unexpectedly although her children stay behind, the unnamed lover will leave no trace in the narrator's thoughts and feelings after he dies trying to cross the border with his wife. *The Land of Green Plums* speaks of such an absurd world that it cannot be rendered through a story, the evil has transgressed the regular order of things and it has become not only ubiquitous, but extremely ordinary. The victims are no longer strong characters, but feeble sketches of people carrying an unexplainable guilt of their own, the acts of malfeasance have no logic, no causality can explain the events. The time of the novel in itself has lost its power to organize the action and carry any type narrative meaning, it is continuously fractured through a simultaneous accumulation of different voices, perspectives, locations and moments, all of which give the impression of a constant stagnation—in the land where everyone expects the dictator to die or run away from the country temporality is also suspended. Herta Müller attempts to write a novel about something that cannot be described, about a universe, as Milan Kundera noticed in one of his essays, which is incompatible with the very idea of the novel, an incompatibility

. . . deeper than the one that separates a dissident from an apparatchik, or a human-rights campaigner from a torturer, because it is not only political or moral, but **ontological**. . . . The world of one single Truth and the relative, ambiguous world of the novel are molded of entirely different substances. Totalitarian Truth excludes relativity, doubt, questioning; it can never accommodate what I would call the spirit of the novel. (14)

But in Herta Müller's writing, the Totalitarian Truth as Kundera defines it has dissolved in an infinity of lies and the relativity, the doubt has acquired an **ontological** dimension of its own—all human relationships and feelings lost their genuineness while people's lives have no meaning.

This is particularly obvious after the fifth type of evasion, and probably the most important one when it comes to the further development of the characters and from the point of view of the ethos of learning, the evasion in art and literature. At first it gives the characters the illusion of freedom—Gellu Naum's poem they constantly recite, the German books smuggled into the country which they read in the summerhouse, Edgar's and Georg's poetry and Kurt's photos make them believe they found ways to keep their humanity. Yet just like everything else, this illusion is a lie as well:

We were no different from those who brought mulberry trees with them, but we only half-admitted it in our conversations. We looked for things that would set us apart because we read books. While we drew tiny distinctions, we stored all the sacks we had behind our doors, just like everyone else.

But in our books we learned that those doors were no shelter. All we could open or slam or leave ajar were our own foreheads. And behind those were ourselves, with our mothers who sent us their illnesses in letters and our fathers who stashed their guilty conscience inside the damn stupid plants. . . . We imagined the land where the books came from as a land of thinkers. We sniffed at the pages and caught ourselves sniffing our own hands out of habit. We were surprised our hands didn't blacken as we read, the way they did from the ink in the newspapers and books printed in our country.

All the people who went around the city carrying their provinces with them sniffed at their hands. They didn't know the books from the summerhouse. But they wanted to go there. In the land those books came from, there were bluejeans and oranges, soft toys for children and portable TVs for fathers and whisper-thin nylons and real mascara for mothers. (46-7)

Moreover, their intellectual and artistic preoccupations seem to be the ultimate sin against the order of things under the regime. It is as if the victims

themselves invent their guilt and search for a punishment, aware that this punishment would come no matter what other path they would have chosen. Not only doesn't it save them from being sent after college in sordid little towns or villages where they witness the most terrible images of destruction and ugliness, but it condemns them to being constantly watched and interrogated by the secret police. Every time the narrator and her friends have to confront Captain Pjele, the conversations revolve not around political ideas, but around their guilt of being different, of being intellectuals. His main purpose seems to be precisely the annihilation of this difference:

Captain Pjele, who had the same name as his dog, first interrogated Edgar, Kurt and Georg about this poem.

Captain Pjele had the text of the poem on a piece of paper. He crumpled it up, Pjele dog barked. Kurt was made to open his mouth, and the captain stuffed the piece of the paper into it. Kurt had to eat the poem. It made him gag. Pjele the dog jumped at him twice, tore his trousers and scratched his legs. . . . Captain Pjele said to Edgar, Kurt and Georg that the poem was an incitement to flee the country. They said: It's an old folk song. Captain Pjele said: It would be better for your sake if one of you had written it. That would be bad enough, but not as bad as this. Maybe it was a folk song once, but those were different times. The rule of the bourgeoisie and the landowning class is long gone. Today our people sing different songs. (79-80)

In other words, just as Captain Pjele says, the times have changed and so has what once used to define the *ethos* of this part of Europe. Books, learning in general cannot change people's lives in a country where nobody is allowed to live outside the limits of what they are officially allowed to think and where censorship and reclusiveness complete the fears and the lies which have replaced free thinking. At the end of the novel, Georg's and Kurt's sudden and uncalled for death comes to emphasize this truth . . . no one can escape the randomness of the fate in a communist regime, no one is truly capable of evasion, except when they are, in Edgar's words "the lucky ones". The final triumph of the two characters is simply accidental.

Herta Müller's novel is a metaphor not only for the abjection and the degradation of the communist world, but also for the corrosion of an old type of attitude towards life. The lack of intimacy, the fear, the violence and the constant terror which characterize life in communism have managed to defeat not only people's aspirations and humanity, but also life in itself. Thus the author manages to describe the indescribable, to convey a world almost impossible to speak of.

Communism is certainly a crime just as big as the Holocaust. But one which is more difficult to rationalize, due to its absurdity and randomness . . . its victims

were not chosen for a specific reason, its survivors were just “the lucky ones”. In other words, as long as it is so hard to find an explanation, to understand it and to find the ones responsible for it—it makes the line between the victims and the executioners very hard to define. Herta Müller’s novel has precisely this great merit . . . it reminds us of the line and of the risks of a totalitarian system.

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The Sublime in Contemporary Arts

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Abstract. *The sublime* (elevated, lofty, supreme), a concept introduced to the philosophy of arts by Burke, today appears to be realized in *the technologically sublime*.

For our post *Star wars* generations the metaphysical has become more and more physical. We find the highest expressions of the sublime in movies (Stanley Kubrick, Ridley Scott), science fiction (Arthur C. Clarke, Ian M. Banks) and techno/ambient music (Brian Eno).

Music, though, is special among arts as it has always been the expression of *harmonia mundi* (best seen in the works of Steve Reich).

In visual art, Burke's theory of the sublime had a crucial influence on the work of Barnett Newman, who, based on a peculiarly American tradition, chose as his theme the inexpressible.

In our age of living "utterly distanced from God" the *Skyscape* series of James Turrel (*Space that Sees* in Jerusalem, *Roden-crater* in New-Mexico) focuses our attention on the remarkable qualities of space and light—light that is scientifically inscrutable and irreducible.

Keywords: technologically sublime (vs. Burke); except music (*harmonia mundi*) and the *Skyscapes* of James Turrel

Today the sublime is the technologically sublime, at least according to the book entitled *The Beauty and the Contemporary Sublime* by Jeremy Gilbert-Rolfe (20). The concept of the sublime derives from Burke, and the meaning of the Latin

original *sublimis* ‘high, lofty, supreme, ascending-floating’, and that of *Sub limen* ‘reaching to the (upper) threshold’.

The “upper threshold” to which the phenomena (objects, works of art, things) regarded today as sublime are raised, is a cosmic threshold. “Beyond the threshold” there extend the borders of the realms of the infinite, of the realms of spatio-temporality, unattainable for humans, reached and mediated by current technology. This is reflected not only by the techniques of astronautics and cosmology, but it is also present in architecture; in the ever larger airports, in the ever higher “skyscrapers,” which, as their name shows, strive for a dimension reaching the clouds, competing with the order of magnitude of the mountains. “Is it not stunning—Paul Virilio remarked a few years ago—, how physical the metaphysical has become?” (Ujica and Virilio 56)

While for Burke the most sublime (and at the same time the most fearful) spectacle, captivating the mind, is the ocean,¹ the mind of the post *Star Wars* generations is fascinated by the concept of galactic oceans. In this way the sublime, just like the beautiful, can be found outside the contemporary (high) arts; in movies, in science-fiction, in techno/ambient music. The films by Stanley Kubrick and Ridley Scott or the novels by Arthur C. Clarke and Ian M. Banks support Jeremy Gilbert-Rolfe’s thesis, based on Burke and Heidegger, according to which “today the sublime is the technologically sublime”. This is valid also in such cases when nature of a cosmic scale and extension appears in the mentioned works (the last monolith in *Spatial Odyssey 2001*, or the artificial celestial body called Rama in the novel *Rendez-vous with the Rama* by Clarke). The cosmic natural background is present only as a framework, in order to highlight and to make perceptible a particular technological construction in its enormous proportions, the sublime character of which is also increased by the desired and at the same time feared exoticism of extraterrestrial intelligence.

Although in the case of these representational arts cosmic nature constitutes the framework of the sublime, today the relationship between technology and nature is actually the opposite of this: we perceive nature in a universal dimension, through the framework system of technology. Heidegger does not really exaggerate when he writes in his travel journal entitled *Aufenthalte*: “what the world means for us today is the puzzling confusion of technological information, which has taken precedence over the intact physis and has taken its place . . .” (62)

Of course, there are exceptions, and these are more interesting for us. With respect to the sublime, music—one can say—is exceptional from the first, on the

¹ “A plain of vast extension can offer such a huge spectacle as the ocean; but can it ever captivate our minds with things of such proportions as the ocean is itself?” (Burke 68)

one hand, because it uses devices, instruments and technology, on the other hand, because it “has preserved its metaphysical dignity” (Böhringer, *Experiments* 61). Although Hannes Böhringer literally means that the exceptional character of the temporality of music is also valid to the spaciality, the spatio-temporality of music:

. . . the time of music is the time that traditionally, since Plato, has been regarded as the likeness of eternity. Music is the expression of *harmonia mundi*, or the preliminary experience of the song of heavenly choirs. This philosophical-theological understanding of time and music could not be wiped out in spite of all kinds of enlightenment and criticism of metaphysics . . . (*Experiments* 81)

In the musical art of the past decades this is best represented, in my opinion, by two epoch-making works by Steve Reich, the *Music for Eighteen Musicians* and the *Violin Phase*. While in the previous piece the wave streams of cosmic vibration coherence resound, devoid of any kind of individuality, in the work composed for violin all this becomes audible by containing also the individual references.

Besides the contemporary technological concept of the sublime, Reich’s music deserves special attention also because of the fact that he reflects, within music, on technologization, on the predominance of the electronically formed sound. The sound image of his music is close to the realm of the artificial sound, though it exclusively consists of acoustic instruments and voice.

In contrast to him, the sound landscapes of Brian Eno pursuing *ambient* music would not exist without electrical engineering. His musical pieces consist of hazy, blurred sound clusters and spheric sounds. In his life-work the cosmic references, just as the larger scale time dimensions, appear also directly sometimes, for example in his piece entitled *Apollo*, composed in the memory of the landing on the Moon, or in the case of his *Long Now* planned for ten thousand years.²

In connection with Burke and in general, with the appearance of the sublime today, it is inevitable to take into consideration the peculiarly American tradition of the sublime. For instance, Jeremy Gilbert-Rolfe remarks that Barnett Newman’s “pictures had to be large, so that they could be connected to the specifically American sublime, which Harold Bloom speculated on” (27). However, this is not a question occurring in the case of particular authors and artists, it is originally linked to the American spatial experience and to American mythology. “The Americans considered the surrounding world as boundless, and it followed from

² Eno is one of the founders of the *Long Now Foundation*, which aims to create a clockwork capable of functioning for 10,000 years, and an afferent library; 12 Nov. 2008 <<http://www.longnow.org/>>

this that they did not see the bounds of their capacity of conquering and expansion either”—Richard Sennett sociologist writes (24). This world experience appears most illustratively in the western, which determines the American mythology: “The main character of the western is the great, lofty landscape”; there are no boundaries, only vast unpopulated territories (Böhringer, *The Western* 41). However, the specific geographical conditions proved to be determining also in the forming of the American self-esteem, of the individuality in the new world.

In modern arts the issue of the sublime gets directly into the foreground in Barnett Newman’s life-work. “Newman’s work belongs to the aesthetic of the sublime”—Jean-Francois Lyotard states—“Newman read Burke. He found him too ‘surrealist’ (in his monologue entitled *The Sublime is Now*). In spite of this, Burke, in his own way, was determining with respect to Newman’s project” (15). He found him too surrealist because he regarded Burke’s despising judgement on painting as being valid only to such an art which wishes to depict, to represent and to make recognition possible. But in Newman’s life-work “the thematization of the inexpressible takes place,” as Christian Pöpperl rightfully states (171).

But is it possible to represent the inexpressible? Newman’s life work can be interpreted as an experiment aimed at solving this problem. According to his writings, Newman was strongly preoccupied with this problem also theoretically. Besides Burke’s influence, he was also influenced by Jewish religious thinking, the specialist literature pointed out the influence on him of a cabbalistic concept of creation.³ We have every reason to think that he was also touched by the question of the prohibition of representation. However, for him, as a practicing painter, this question occurred in relation to painting—and remained within the frames of this medium. In this way his solutions, for example his painting entitled *vir heroicus sublimis* (approximately 2,5 x 5,5 m) provides grand surfaces, measured in meters, covered with paint, which are not too convincing in this respect.

Is it possible at all to represent the sublime, the *unmeasurably great* (Kant), proportionally and in a worthy way, when it is beyond the thresholds, beyond the perceivable and the comprehensible? Doesn’t it in fact have to do with the unrepresentable, which is incomprehensible, just as the world, the universe is not “conceivable,” either conceptually, or for the media of fine arts?

In spite of this, however, it is not impossible. At least this is what James Turrell’s works exemplify.⁴ Especially his *Skyscape* series, which stands in several versions in several spots of the Earth. The building provides a shelter, forms protected, closed spaces in order to defend its dwellers from the vicissitudes of

³ See Thomas B. Hess’s writings.

⁴ James Turrell link-collection <http://www.lasersol.com/art/turrell/rc_links.html>

weather, from the intrusion of the outside world. In contrary to this, Turrell's constructions have been built around openness: their top is not closed, instead, it opens towards the sky. This gap, placed within frameworks of various forms, the framed openness itself constitutes the center of the construction.

From an architectural point of view, a *skyscape* is the turning upside down of the constructing activity, the reverse of everything that architecture has always aimed at. At the same time, in this respect it is not unique: in contemporary art Rachel Whiteread proceeds in a similar way when she casts the inner spaces of houses, sometimes whole houses in concrete, then she demolishes the original building from them—in this way she literally represents the “pure,” materialized inner spaces. However, the subject of Turrell's works is not representation, but rather light and space. His works only create frameworks and conditions—architectural and artistic framework conditions—for the contemplation and experience of light and space. Of course, these frames exceed the traditional and contemporary art theoretical concept of the framework (Cf. Simmel 91, Marin 201).

In the case of the *skyscape* entitled *Space That Sees*, which can be found in Jerusalem—from which I have had the opportunity to gain direct experience—the “frame” consists of a square, 7-meter tall building, with a 10x10 meters basic area and of the passage leading to it. His frame opens “within” such architectural frames—opening a square of 8x8 m to the sky. Standing, walking under it or sitting—on the flooring jutting from the walls—the endless blue of the almost always clear sky, or sometimes the moving of the clouds, the change of the parts of the day and the lighting conditions can be contemplated.

Within these frames, the nuances of the blue, the references of light and shadow, up and down, celestial and earthly can be viewed. The place—in both the current and original sense—is the space of contemplation: it also refers to the *templum*, the square plane of reference, open to the sky, of the Augurs (more in details see Tillmann 171). However, contrary to the Etruscan-Roman *auspicium*, it is not aimed at the line of flight of the birds, but at the sky, the space, the light, and through them, to the position of their contemplator. In fact, all this is reached with the use of a minimal technology, as these constructions could already have been accomplished in the Neolithic Age (and he does not even need, as Yves Klein, to patent the sky-blue, the ultramarine⁵). Turrell's works are not regarded as a part of architecture, still, the outstanding examples of contemporary church architecture are closest to his works, just like Peter Zumthor's *Bruder Klaus chapel* from Wachendorf.

⁵ *International Klein Blue* (IKB, =PB29, =CI 77007), 12 Nov. 2008.

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/International_Klein_Blue>

In the case of the *skyscape* which can be found in the Israel Museum, just as in his works created within other artistic media, besides the built, technological framework, his works are also framed by the art as institution, as a conventionally distinguished medium. In the case of his work on the largest scale, the Roden-crater in New-Mexico, which has been created over the last thirty years, there are no such frames. The places and gaps hollowed in the crater mountain in the desert are surrounded by the former petrified material of the volcano; the crater is not an exhibition space, and it is not public. Around the spaces serving for the contemplation of the spatial and lighting conditions of cosmic constellations, of celestial bodies, it is nature that forms the framework. In this way any kind of scientific and technological mediation comes to the forefront and proportion distortion can be avoided.

I read—Turrell says in an interview—an article in the European journal *Parkett* by Hartmut Bohme. One of the phrases he used was ‘we live in an age of consummate remoteness from God’. And although, in our age of scientific rationalism, we wouldn’t want to say about light, ‘It’s God’, still, at the same time, the experience of light is a phenomenon that somehow tends to nudge us past that. There’s something about light which science can’t quite fully encompass, or reduce. (Whittaker “Greeting the Light”)

(Trans. Judit Pieldner)

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Organizational Discourses as Status Symbols

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Abstract. Organizational culture represented as an iceberg (Schein 25) conveys a strong visual message on the visible and invisible layers of organizational values, interactions and rituals.

On-stage and off-stage aspects of organizational life are intertwining and developing gradually both for the insider and for the outsider of a given social system. Organizational socialization is, in fact, the process of individual and group learning aimed at aligning to the values and practices of a given institutional setting (Van Maanen and Schein 3).

The main vehicle of this learning process is language: acquiring key organizational discourses is a tool of socialization, of integration into the new social space. Once acquired, these language practices turn into routines and effective tools of status building (Cunliffe and Shotter 121).

Discourses serve both as tools of integrating newcomers and as cultural markers of status. In order to explore the deep-seated levels of organizational culture, a wide range of convergent approaches is necessary: observation, interviews, questionnaires, and content analysis of organizational documents (Hofstede 5). We propose a framework of understanding an organization's culture and socialization practices through exploring and analyzing leadership discourses.

Keywords: organizational discourses, socialization, status symbols, leadership

1. Introduction: the context of viewing organizations as cultures

Looking at organizations from a cultural perspective has become a widely accepted approach in the twenty-first century. Globalization, networked society and the dynamic of social change have created a multicultural work environment across the world. Since the last two decades of the twentieth century, scholars and practitioners have approached organizations from the softer perspective of people and their values, as compared to the cybernetic approach of the fifties and the sixties (Scott 409).

Gareth Morgan (119) defined the cultural perspective as one of the many possible metaphors aimed at understanding organizations. The way people think, feel and act can be conceptualized through a set of deep-seated values encompassed by the broader notion of culture. This approach has both strengths and limitations (145). One of the main virtues of the cultural metaphor is that it directs attention to the symbolic significance of organizational life. The second strength of the metaphor is that it shows how organizations are rooted in shared systems of meaning. “The culture metaphor points toward another means of creating and shaping organized activity: by influencing the ideologies, values, beliefs, language, norms, ceremonies and other social practices that ultimately guide social action”(147). There are also dangers and limitations related to viewing and managing organizations as cultures. Managers and organizational development consultants are tempted to perform “values engineering” (150), in order to make employees adhere to a seemingly success oriented ideology. By attempting to manipulate peoples’ values and beliefs, managers might create an Orwellian “corporate newspeak” (Morgan 151), and thus endanger individual freedom of organizational actors.

Culture as an organizational phenomenon is, in fact, a process of sense-making, closely related to the socialization of newcomers (Weick 4). However, Weick emphasizes that sensemaking is not a metaphor, as Morgan has put it: instead, it should be understood literally. “Sensemaking is what it says it is, namely, making something sensible” (16). Apart from other explanatory processes such as understanding, interpretation and attribution, sensemaking is grounded in identity construction, has a retrospective orientation, is enactive of sensible environments, and has a strong social, ongoing character. Making sense of the organizational life is “driven by plausibility rather than accuracy” (17). We shall highlight two key characteristics of sensemaking: identity construction and retrospective orientation. In terms of identity construction, an individual wears at least two hats within the organization: the personal one, which represents his or her individual values, beliefs and drives, and the organizational one. An individual “not only acts on behalf of the organization in the usually agency sense, but he also acts, more subtly, ‘as the organization’ when he embodies the values of the collectivity”

(23). By retrospective sensemaking Weick means the post factum character of understanding organizational acts and processes: “we are conscious always of what we have done, never of doing it” (26). It is what Weick calls “future perfect thinking”: present decisions can be made meaningful only in a larger context (29).

Understanding organizations through their values, rituals, norms and actions is strongly related to understanding leadership issues (Hofstede 5). Leaders have a key role in shaping an organization’s mainstream culture, whether accepted or not by its members. Charles Handy (1995) developed an integrated theory of organizational cultures and leadership styles, based on power and influence, motivation, learning styles and the way change is engineered (5). A misfit between the organization and its leadership style will end up in cultural confusion and it shows up in extra resources and inefficiency, longer delivery times and an overstaffed head office. There are four types of organizational cultures and each one has a leadership style symbolized by an ancient Greek god.

Club culture, graphically represented as a spider net, is best run by a “Zeus” type of leader. “The relationship with the spider matters more in this culture than does any formal title or position description” (14). Zeus is impulsive, charismatic and concerned with his power. Historically, the club culture is rooted in the small entrepreneurial organization.

The second type of organizational culture is the “role culture,” represented as a Greek temple, led by “Apollo”: order, rules, and predictability are keywords of such organizations. Apollonian organization and leadership is highly bureaucratic and prescriptive. “In a role culture, you do your job. Neither more nor less” (18).

The third type of organizational culture as described by Handy (21) is the task culture, led by “Athena”: it is a problem solving culture, represented as a net, because “it draws resources from various parts of the organizational system in order to focus them on a particular knot or problem” (21). This culture recognizes only expertise as the base of power. Task culture is about teams, whereas role culture is about committees (22). Performance oriented individuals feel at ease in this work environment.

Existential culture led by “Dionysus” is strongly personality oriented, based on the individuals’ needs and values, as opposed to the other three cultures, where the individual is subordinated to the organization. Expert partnerships, artists’ associations are good examples to illustrate existential culture (Handy 26). An overview of cultures and leadership styles is shown in table 1 (Bakó 93).

Table 1. Handy's typology of organizational cultures and leadership

| | Club culture | Role culture | Task culture | Existential culture |
|-------------------|----------------------|---------------------|--------------------|-------------------------|
| Metaphor | <i>spider net</i> | <i>Greek temple</i> | <i>net</i> | <i>cluster of stars</i> |
| Principle | <i>will</i> | <i>rules</i> | <i>tasks</i> | <i>trust</i> |
| Structure | <i>hierarchical</i> | <i>hierarchical</i> | <i>networked</i> | <i>flat</i> |
| Leadership | “Zeus“ | “Apollo“ | “Athena“ | “Dionysus“ |
| Advantage | <i>reactivity</i> | <i>stability</i> | <i>performance</i> | <i>expertise</i> |
| Disadvantage | <i>authoritarian</i> | <i>rigid</i> | <i>exigent</i> | <i>vulnerable</i> |

There is no receipt in shaping organizational culture and leadership. However, “the choice of gods” (Handy 6) is shaped both by the organization's environment, the national culture and the occupational setting of the organization.

2. Three levels of organizational culture

Edgar Schein (25) has developed an intuitive model of viewing organizations on a three-layer-basis, by picturing them as icebergs. This visual metaphor conveys a strong message on the visible and invisible levels of organizational values, interactions and rituals. It also shows the ways of access to different organizational phenomena:

I. Artifacts. These elements are at the surface: dress, furniture, technology displayed within the organization can be easily perceived, but are quite hard to understand.

II. Espoused values. Beneath artifacts there are “espoused values” which are conscious strategies, goals and philosophies, not so hard to unveil by content analysis of organizational documents, or observing verbal interactions.

III. Basic assumptions and values. The essence of organizational culture is represented by the basic underlying assumptions and values, which are difficult to unveil, because they exist at an implicit level. In order to gain access to these hidden organizational phenomena, triangulation is necessary: a balanced use of different methods, and a carefully considered level of researcher's involvement in deciphering organizational culture, as shown in table 2.

Assessing the three levels of organizational culture provides the key to understanding relationships, decision-making processes, attitudes and behaviors of organizational stakeholders. “The most important lesson for me is that culture is deep, pervasive, complex, patterned, and morally neutral” (Schein 60).

Table 2. Schein's typology of organizational culture research methods (205):

| Level of "Subject" Involvement | <i>Level of Researcher Involvement</i> | |
|--------------------------------|--|--|
| | <i>Low to Medium Quantitative</i> | <i>High Qualitative</i> |
| Minimal | Demographics; measurement of "distal" variables | Ethnography: participant observation, content analysis |
| Partial | Experimentation: tests, questionnaires, ratings | Projective tests, assessments, interviews |
| Maximal | Total quality tools: statistical analysis, action research | Clinical research, organization development |

3. Organizational artifacts as status symbols

Symbols are the building blocks of identity construction in organizations. They are "visible, physical manifestations of organizations and indicators of organizational life" (Rafaeli and Worline 2). Organizational symbols are not easy to decode: due to their polisemic nature, the meaning attributed by researchers often differ from the set of meanings attributed by key organizational stakeholders. Symbols play four main functions in organizations: they act as reflections of organizational culture; they trigger internalized values and norms; they frame conversations about organizational experience, and, last but not least, they are integrators of organizational systems of meaning (2-3). When talking about organizational symbolism, it is important to distinguish symbolic representations from symbolic actions. While symbolic representations are related to the sensorial set of symbols, symbolic actions comprise the organizational actors' dynamic of activity and their hidden, decodable meanings (4). However, Rafaeli and Worline do not explain how symbolic representations and symbolic actions are related to each other.

Elsbach remarked that physical markers might be perceived as symbols of social and personal identities of corporate employees: environmental psychology, organizational identity inquiry and impression management were equally interested in decoding the message conveyed by offices' objectual world. Environmental psychology has examined symbolic effects of office design and furnishings. "A review of this research suggests that physical markers in corporate settings may signal and affirm an employee's identity by defining his or her status and distinctiveness categorization" (63). An office's size and location, the number of windows and the quality of furnishings indicate the organizational actor's rank, prestige, and status. Research suggests that status markers have little impact on performance, and yet "perceived inequalities in status markers evoke both strong emotional reactions from employees and calls for changes in markers for more appropriate levels" (64). Moreover, attempts to remove status markers and to level

the playfield in organizations resulted in improvised means to show one's organizational rank, by negotiating the number of personal items to be displayed, according to status (65).

However, we should not overstate our ability to decode messages conveyed by physical artifacts. The process of symbolic mediation is complex and often misleading: in a conservative environment, one is tempted to hide elements that seem inappropriate, such as a hidden tattoo. By the same token, using inadequate and conspicuous status symbols, an organizational actor might create the impression of a higher status. People use symbols to reveal both how they are different from and how they are similar to others (Pratt and Rafaeli 10). Physical symbols enact relationships and convey messages on organizational identity and status (12). "Thus, a CEO who uses an expensive car or wears an expensive suit is claimed to *be powerful*. Yet, the use of a symbol is meaningless if there is no audience to the initiating move" (12). Language is a socially constructed system of complex, intertwined meanings. Pulling out a singular symbol and analyzing it out of its context would distort the whole picture of identity construction in organizations: "the study of symbols needs to go beyond discrete treatment of the meaning of *individual* symbols to looking at *patterns* of symbols" (Pratt and Rafaeli 13). Objects do not only mediate identity construction process in organizations, they not only function as extensions of self and raw materials of self-construction processes, but they equally convey messages on actor's status, rank, formal and informal position within given institutional settings. While individuals use symbols in order to *identify* themselves with a given organization's set of values, organizations put forward their set of identifiers in order to *assimilate* the individual as much as possible (15). There are four types of organizational status symbols, according to the Pratt and Rafaeli interpretation scheme (3):

- (a) dress and personal adornment;
- (b) physical landscape and office design;
- (c) technology (computers, phones, cars) and
- (d) dramaturgical props (letterhead, diplomas, awards).

When analyzing these types of symbols, two main dimensions should be taken into consideration: *instrumentality* and *portability* (4). Instrumentality refers to the usefulness of a given object (chair versus diploma), whereas portability refers to the ease with which a given status symbol can be transported (laptop versus chair). Physical symbols enact organizational relationships in a complex manner, which might give "translation problems," according to Pratt and Rafaeli (24): today's organizations use more and more instrumental and portable status symbols, and they attempt to blur status differences in order to empower organizational actors.

At the same time, accidental signaling, strategically ambiguous signaling, complex relationship signaling are elements which make it hard to decode the web of meanings conveyed by organizational artifacts. Even an insider might be lost in

this labyrinth. However, individual actors can take action in order to overcome status symbol translation problems, by symbol *intensification*, symbol *redundancy*, symbol *reduction* and symbol *transformation* (31). Symbol intensification refers to a more conspicuous use of artifacts, whereas symbol redundancy is meant to reiterate the use of artifacts, by buying more cell phones for instance. Symbol reduction means eliminating those artifacts which blur the status message one plans to convey (e.g., avoiding to wear a T-shirt that everyone wears at the company). Symbol transformation refers to the process of reshaping the message conveyed by a given organizational artifact, for instance, by reinterpreting keywords used in the organization, in a way that makes it more straightforward to stakeholders. Pratt and Rafaeli conclude:

With regard to identity issues, physical symbols suggest that individuals are distancing themselves from their organizations either completely (e.g., disidentifying) or partially (e.g., identifying with multiple identities). Organizations, in turn, legitimate some of this distancing by using physical symbols to preach identity plurality. With regard to status issues, organizations either completely or partially (leveling or ambivalently maintaining) remove messages about status hierarchy as empowerment enters their symbolic rhetoric. (33)

Organizational artifacts play an important role both in shaping identity and revealing status, rank and hierarchy of an individual in a given social setting.

4. Discourse and socialization

On-stage and off-stage aspects of organizational life are intertwining and developing gradually both for the insider and for the outsider of a given social system. Organizational socialization is, in fact, the process of individual and group learning aimed at aligning to the values and practices of a given institutional setting (Van Maanen and Schein 2-3): this does not mean “that the transfer of a particular work culture from generation to generation of organizational participants occurs smoothly, quickly, and without evolutionary difficulty”. Such apprenticeship can be considered a lifelong experience, and, at best, a process of acquiring rules of proper organizational behavior. In order to do this, newcomers have to learn the functional and social requirements of their newly assumed roles (Van Maanen and Schein 8). Organizational learning does not occur in a social vacuum: colleagues, superiors, subordinates, clients and other key stakeholders guide newcomers within the labyrinth of rules, rituals, hidden assumptions and accepted practices of an institution.

The more integrated one is, the closer he or she is to the center of the organization. In the case of highly informal organizations, such as “club culture” and “existential culture” (Handy 14-26), the more socialized an individual is, the closer s/he is to the leader. Van Maanen and Schein (20) defined several levels of organizational socialization, from the less integrated outsider to the most integrated central positioned figure, as shown in table 3.

Table 3. Van Maanen and Schein’s inclusionary domains of organizations (20):

| <i>Levels of Organizational Actors’ Inclusion</i> | |
|---|----------------------------|
| <i>Role</i> | <i>Position</i> |
| Central figure | Leader |
| Confidant | Tenure granted |
| Confederate | Permanent membership |
| Proviso member | Accepted but not permanent |
| Newcomer | |
| Outsider | No position yet |

Before a newcomer becomes integrated in a given organization, s/he has to be tested in terms of abilities, motives and values. If acceptable by others and by the rules of the game, an individual may pass from the outsider’s, then the newcomer’s position to the more inclusionary status of a proviso member. This status gives him or her access to organizational secrets, hidden assumptions and expectations, and to the difference between “presentational rhetoric used on outsiders to speak of what goes on in the setting from the operational rhetoric used by insiders to communicate with one another as to the matters-at-hand” (Van Maanen and Schein 21). Thus, the language use of an organizational member functions as a marker of his or her level of socialization, his or her centrality.

By analyzing leaders’ discourses, we can assess the way they conceptualize cultural norms, expectations, assumptions, and detect topic areas of presentational rhetoric. By analyzing members’ discourses and comparing them with the leader’s discursive practices, we can assess the areas of overlapping and the levels of congruence in terms of presentational rhetoric. In order to assess operational rhetoric, observation and internal document analysis is necessary, since we are in the position of outsiders of the organization. The more “insider talk” we find, the higher organizational status we may hypothesize. Language is, thus, both a tool of socialization and a marker of status and identity. Once acquired, these language practices turn into routines and effective tools of status building (Cunliffe and Shotter 121). Discursive practices function therefore as status symbols.

5. Conclusion: organizational discourses as status symbols

Research on organizational culture is informative because we are flooded by status symbols (Bakó 2). Organizational discourse analysis gives us clues to identity building processes and key actors' status. By using observation, leadership style survey, content analysis of leaders' versus members' interviews, complemented with organizational document analysis, we gain access to the difference between presentational rhetoric and operational rhetoric of an organization. Applying Schaffers' methodology on "ordinary language interviews" (150) we can map and explore the way organizational members relate to the three levels of organizational culture, and get closer to an interpretive approach on the way they conceptualize status and identity (Yanow 41).

The keywords interviewees should explore have to relate to the focus of our analysis and to the conceptual framework we use. In our case, if we conceptualize leadership through the lenses of Handy's theory ("Zeus," "Apollo," "Athena," "Dionysus"), we might choose keywords like "power," "status," "success," "task" and "excellence". We should then confront leadership and membership responses on the chosen keywords, and all this presentational rhetoric with the daily discursive practices. The wider the gap, the weaker the organizational culture is.

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The Virtual Me. A New Way and Practice of Identity Construction and Language Use

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Abstract. The paper is based on a sociological research (2009) focused on the population of a social networking site in a smaller East European town (Miercurea Ciuc, Romania). 1327 iWiW accounts were chosen by sampling and a database was created based on the visible data from each account. Using this database, we can draw a picture about this town's iWiW users: along what kind of socio-demographic parameters we can describe its population, what they present about themselves, how many connections they have, how much information they share, what they say about themselves and in what way. Besides the database, content analysis was used as well. This was applied in two main categories: (1.) *about myself*: given answers to the open questions of the profile page: *length* (whether there are short or long phrases), *language* (Hungarian or other), *spelling* (correct, incorrect, use of emoticons), *originality* (own words or quotations), *style* (sober or funny, likely or unlikely valid), and (2.) the *photographs* they share, along five aspects: *character(s)* (presented on the picture), *theme* (of the profile picture), *place*, *subtitle* (whether there are any or none, metaphoric or simple ones, in which language, whether there are any emoticons used) and *design* (whether they are "original" or "edited"). A comparison was also made between younger and older users (under the age of 20 and older than 20), with regard to the major differences between different age-groups: the younger users' "behavior" was very dissimilar to that of all the other users.

Keywords: social networking site, content analysis, virtual identity, profile analysis, cyborg-behavior

1. Introduction

The online world creates an opportunity for connection through a new kind of behavior, labeled as “cyborg”. By even ensuring the anonymity, the cyborg-behavior appears as an opportunity of liberation in common social knowledge, and in the virtual sphere the simulation of life situations is possible (which may not be in the non-virtual environment) (Papacharissi, “The Virtual Geographies” 200). The first such discussions about virtual behavior were focusing on the structural characteristics of the effects of online space on self-representation and self-expression—since the self-presentation is not the same in virtual world as in face-to-face interactions (Papacharissi, “The Presentation of Self” 645-46). Recently, accent has been transposed on the structural and design elements of online social network sites, on the social capital production of the virtual connections as well as on the effective communication (Papacharissi, “The Virtual Geographies” 200). However, there are studies that analyze one or more community sites, or how these sites (such as the Facebook, the AsmallWorld etc.) influence the definition of patterns of community and individual identity (see Papacharissi, “The Virtual Geographies” 201).

The concepts of identity and community have been in the focus of the new media research for a long time. According to the specialist literature, first of all the social networking sites are built on a niche of audience, although the attractiveness of these sites reaches a lot wider target group (Papacharissi, “The Virtual Geographies” 200). The literature defines the social networking site as a service that allows individuals (1) to build a public or a semi-public profile page within a given system, (2) to see other users’ profiles with whom they are connected, and (3) to see and review their network or the network of any person belonging to the “system” (Boyd-Ellison 212). The regulations of these sites depend on the features of the community site. Such social network sites have appeared by the dozen during the past decade and the phenomenon continues. The first sites appeared in the second half of the 1990s, and the real dumping was sometime between 2003-2006.

In Romania the most popular ones are the hi5 and recently the Facebook. For the Hungarian community in Romania the most important social network site is the iWiW (International Who is Who). We could ask whether the scientific interest is justified. And the answer is yes, because it is a current social phenomenon, broad masses of people are involved; it raises the question whether a whole new, previously unknown communication platform affects the identity and personal image construction; it presents the changed markings in the community patterns of a rapidly and continuously changing world; it is a challenge to draw a picture about the people who use this kind of social network sites, how and what they tell about themselves, with how many people they are in “virtual” connection, what they

show and what they would like to show with the pictures they present about themselves.

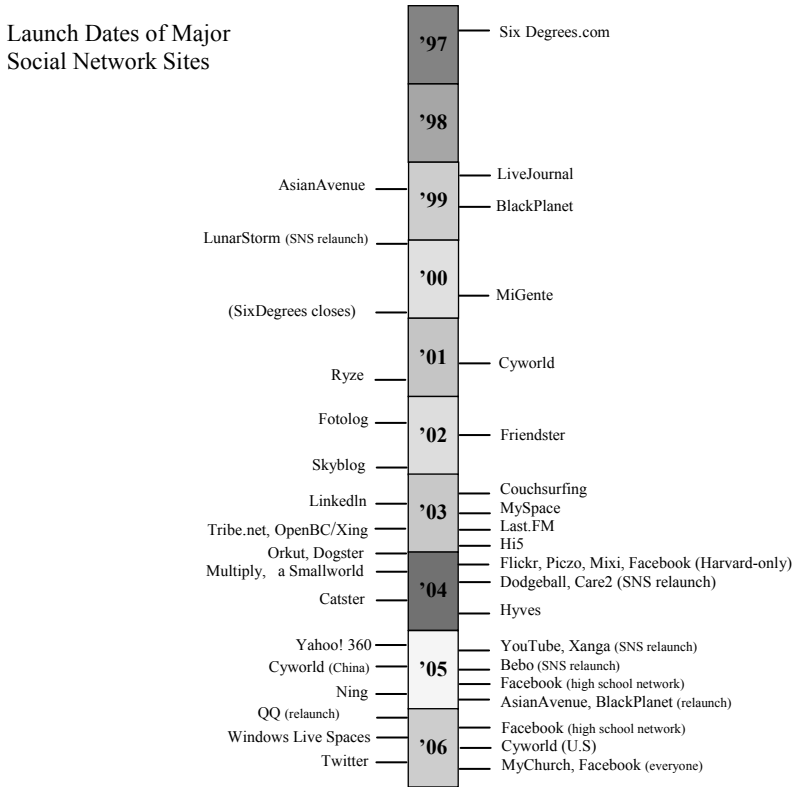


Figure 1. The appearance of Major Social Network Sites. (Boyd-Ellison 215)

1.1. Contextualizing the topic

Our world is enmeshed by the Internet and the social sites. If you are not in, you do not exist, so you had better register—this is one of the main everyday theories. Similarly to the physical spaces, the virtual spaces also have their architecture. Particular forms of interaction are suggested and enabled at the same time by the architecture of virtual spaces. This new kind of “architecture” has been connected to a new kind of behavior too, named “cyborg”. This cyborg-behavior has two main very positive and brand new peculiarities: (1) it can be related to anonymity, which can have a liberating impression; (2) it can have a strong “real life” character, even if everything happens in a virtual world (Papacharissi, “The Virtual Geographies” 200). The earlier works in this topic were adapted to the

question if the self-presentation and expression are influenced by the structural features of online spaces; recently the structural and design elements of online social networks are in the limelight.

The virtual has no boundaries, even in an Eastern European small semi-rural town the presence in one or more social networking sites on the Internet is very important. And, of course, the young people are the most interested and the most concerned about this presence (Livingstone 396). For the Hungarian community in Romania the most important social networking site is the iWiW. The hi5 and the Facebook enjoy huge popularity and this has been growing very quickly in the past few years among the population of Romania. But for the Hungarian minority, the iWiW was the very first and the most important: first of all, because it is in Hungarian, and secondly, there are a lot of possibilities to find common faces: renewal of acquaintance, finding old friends, families who have emigrated and so on. Of course, during the past years even this has changed, but for the Hungarian population the iWiW is still very important. Miercurea Ciuc is a small town (around 45,000 inhabitants, 85% Hungarian people) and in January 2009 there were about 11,000 iWiW-users from this town. In this paper I will examine one social network and I will present how the “cyborg-behavior” of youngsters is different even from the little bit older people, what the main characteristics of identity construction are, and in what way it differs from the other—older—users.

2. Methodology

The sociological research took place in January and February 2009. 1327 iWiW-accounts were chosen by *sampling*, and in this way a database was created with all the visible data from each account. Then, by using this database, we can draw a picture about this town’s iWiW-users: along what kind of socio/demographic parameters this town’s iWiW-population can be described, who these people are, what they present about themselves, how many connections they have, how much information they share, what they say about themselves and in what way. Besides the database, *content analysis* was also applied. There are two main categories: (1) the photographs they share and (2) the given answers to open questions of the profile page. All the profile pictures were analyzed along four aspects: character or characters (who or what is/are presented on the picture), place, subtitle (whether there are any or none, metaphoric or simple ones, in what language, whether any emoticons are used) and design (whether the pictures are “original” or “edited”). The iWiW account contains several places where every user can write whatever s/he wants. There are such categories: “About myself,” “When I work, I do this,” “When I don’t work, I do this”. These phrases are analyzed as well: (a) length (whether there are short—one or a few words—or long phrases), (b) language (Hungarian or other), (c) spelling (correct, incorrect, the use

of emoticons), (d) originality (own words or quotations), (e) style (sober or funny, likely or unlikely valid).

3. Major findings

The profile page contains a data sheet, on which there are—commonly—available (I.) personal data, (II.) contact information, (III.) club-information and (IV) information regarding school and/or work. Besides these, there are two other categories of data, I would call them closed questions and open questions: there is a category of data, where the person does not have to write anything, only to choose the answer which applies to him/her and there is another category of questions, where they have to write something about themselves. The data analysis is based on these pieces of information, collected from the 1347 users' profile pages. In the major part of the paper the common iWiW users' profiles will be presented—in three main chapters—and the results of the content analysis will be presented as well.

3.1. Users' profile

Based on the data introduced in the database, we can draw a picture about the iWiW users of this town. A selection was carried out; only the most important and more relevant observations are presented. The results show that every second present user entered the iWiW in 2008 (51.8%), and only 9.1% of the users registered before 2007. Two-thirds of the users are female, and most of them (71.3%) were invited to the iWiW by another female user. As concerns the male users, most of them (60.6%) received an invitation from a female person, who was already an iWiW user. Regarding the marital status of the users, surprisingly the majority of the users is married (33.0%) or is in a relationship (16.5%) and only one person out of ten is single. There is a very small group that makes this information available only for his/her contacts, but—as we can see—this is not typical at all. But—at the same time—there is an important number of people (35.4%), who do not write anything in this line.

Regarding the age of users, we can conclude that this social network site “is conquered” by young adults: more than a half of the users is older than 18 and younger than 34 and the “most popular” age category is the 19–24: more than 20% of the town's users belongs to this age category. In this category there is also a large number of users who do not reveal their age on their profile page (24.5%).

Almost everyone (83.4%) has at least one picture attached to his/her profile page, in average the common users uploaded around 5 photos to their profile pages (which means 5,392), but there are users who show a lot more (the maximum value is 80). Regarding the number of contacts: common users have around two hundred

contacts (which means 222,56), but there are people who have much more: here the highest number was 1953.

Based on the data available on the profile page of the users, we can draw up the profile of the “typical” iWiW user. The typical iWiW user from Miercurea Ciuc is female, in her early 30’s, she is married, has about 5 photos uploaded, joined the iWiW in 2008, the invitation was sent by another woman and has connections with approx. 220 other iWiW users. She is Hungarian, but she speaks Romanian and often English as well, has secondary education and her photos present her family and children.

3.2. Personal data

As we have mentioned above, the data sheet contains some open questions, where everyone can write whatever s/he wants. There are three categories and we can find sentences like: 1. “About myself” [in Hungarian: “Magamról”]—only 24% of the users completed this line. 2. “This is what I do when I work”—49% completed this one. 3. “This is what I do when I don’t work”—46% wrote something here. Since this is only a subtopic of this analysis, we will discuss only the major issues.

The given answers or written answers were analyzed according to *length* (whether there are short—one or a few words—or long phrases), *language* (Hungarian or other), *spelling* (correct, incorrect, use of emotions), *originality* (own words or quotations) and *style* (sober or funny, likely or unlikely valid).

3.2.1. About myself

We can usually find very short phrases (fewer than 5 words), but the opposite extreme as well: with one person nothing, with the other one a long text or several texts. In the majority of the cases the words and sentences are written in Hungarian and only in a very few cases in English (2%, e.g., *Holiday*, *Sunrise*, *New look*, *Train*, *Nice*). In the “about myself” head we can meet the English language use as well, but only in a very few cases (2% in the case of the “*About myself*” and 3% in the case of “*I do this when I work*”). We can also observe a very interesting phenomenon, namely words taken from English and “adapted” to Hungarian, which means that they are written with Hungarian spelling, but English words are used: e.g., “*Nájsz*” [=nice], “*Jessz of kórsz*” [Yes of course], “*mejd báj me*” [made by me]. This is a peculiarity which can be observed in all the cases of content analysis of a written text, so in the case of the photo subtitle as well. Another trait of the language is the use of the “Szekler” language that has recently become popular. We could name some regionalisms, characteristic of the rural oral

language, which have become very popular and are used among young people who live in urban areas.¹

These few words or phrases are usually grammatically correct, or more or less correct, but they are incorrect regarding the use of Hungarian accents: only 1 out of 7 of users uses the Hungarian accents (instead of á, é, í, ó, ö, ő, ú, ü, ű only a, e, i, o and u). Here the fact has to be mentioned that there is a statistical correlation between the age and the correct spelling: the very young population cares less about this: they use a *cyborg language*, with no accents and a lot of abbreviations,² they use only the first letter of very frequently used words (e.g., only *h* instead of *hogy*), using “conventional” words (e.g., *vok* instead of *vagyok*). One explanation can be that this generation has written a lot of text messages on their telephones where the number of characters is limited and they are the first chat-generation, they have already spent a lot of time on the messenger, so they are more familiar with this language than with the literary accepted one. They do not pay attention to the accent, to switching the keyboard to Hungarian keys.

Regarding originality, it can be stated that the majority writes something short and formulated by himself/herself. But at the same time a lot of people use quotations by Hungarian and non-Hungarian writers, popular people, most often by Coelho, Márai, Esterházy, Kennedy and Márquez. And usually even clichés: e.g., “*Time goes by*”. Most of the teenager users put a link here. And this link very often transfers one to another social network site, mainly to hi5 and by clicking here the person’s profile pictures from that site will be visible.

As for the style, in many cases the sentences about themselves are very funny or would like to sound like that, they play upon words for the sake of making fun. The sober style can be found as well, but more often it is neither sober nor funny, just a common style. Only in a very few cases these lines have a double meaning and use both meanings or use a metaphor. “*Jó munkásember*” [good hard worker: a quite normal person, but at the same time we know that the person says that s/he works a lot]. Another thing regarding the style: there are users, usually older people, who write in a very formal way, presenting often a quasi curriculum vitae: *I was born in, I finished school at, I have been working since....* and so on. The majority of the users, usually the youngsters, are very informal; sometimes even rude (e.g., “*It’s not your business*”).

3.2.2. I do this

This subchapter presents some results of the content analysis, that is, some interesting things which were not mentioned in the previous subchapter. The open

¹ A few examples: “*esment*”—literary: *ismét*, “*ejsze mi van?*”—literary: *mi a helyzet?*

² This is also valid in the case of photo subtitles and other open questions.

question is: *I do this when I work* and *I do this when I do not work*. First of all I would like to present the reason or hypothetic explanation for the question why people answer these two questions of the data sheet and say nothing about themselves. One of the reasons could be the easier expressiveness: they can express themselves more objectively, because it is something about an activity, so half of the users have written a few words here. Another reason might be the mechanical registration. The Web forces us to become practical and quick. The people have to log in on so many web pages and very often it is specified which data are required and which are optional. So even among the iWiW users there are people who want to finish quickly, filling in only the “required” information. From their point of view, providing information about themselves, finding the right words to express themselves could be optional.

We comment these two questions together, because the majority of the users proceed in the same way: they make a connection between the two answers. For example: a.) *I make people drink coffee* b) *I drink coffee*. [in original: “*kávéztatok, kávézom*”—A coffee sales manager, who sells coffee.] Here we can find humor more often (“*I count money*”—we guess, maybe s/he works in a bank) and metaphoric language use: even in the above mentioned example: “*kávézom*” — which means ‘I drink coffee’, but also ‘I am involved with something connected to the coffee’. Another example: “*Tamagocsizok*” ‘playing with tamagotchi’ and playing with her own daughter, whose name is Tamara, and using this nickname.

3.3. Profile pictures

Eight people out of ten have a picture uploaded on their iWiW profile. Since more than one picture can be uploaded, during the research the decision was that in the content analysis only the profile picture will be included: we could say that it is the most important picture, because this is the “logo” of the person, this appears every time when one looks at the profile page. So only one photo is analyzed, and this analysis is made along five aspects: *character(s)* (presented on the picture), *place* (the ambience, the milieu of the photo), *theme* (the main topics represented by the pictures), *subtitle* (whether there are any or none, metaphoric or simple ones, language, the use of emoticons) and *design* (whether the pictures are “original” or “edited”).

3.3.1. Character

We can conclude: the main character of the profile picture is the person himself—only one person out of thirty does not appear on his/her profile picture, and in the majority of cases (68.1%) the page owner appears alone.

Table 1: The character of the profile picture

| | Percentage |
|---|----------------|
| The person alone | 68.1 |
| The person with his/her child, children | 8 |
| The person with his/her partner/husband-wife | 7.6 |
| The person with his/her family | 5.5 |
| The person with a family member | 1.2 |
| The person with a very important person, friend | 1.8 |
| The person with an animal (dog) | 0.9 |
| The person with friends | 2.1 |
| The person in crowd | 0.6 |
| The person with an object (car, house, mouse, PC) | 0.9 |
| The person does not appear on the picture | 3.3 |
| Total | 100.00% |

Very often the other character(s) on the picture are the child or the children of the profile owner (8.0%), the second most popular character in a secondary role is the partner (7.6%). Every 21st user shows a classical family picture: there appears the whole family and usually on an important occasion (e.g., graduation, wedding, religious ceremony etc.).

A few common symbols can be identified, which appear on the picture: traditional costumes (family and/or religious ceremonial), gown (graduation) and elegant costumes (festivities).

The plot of the pictures is usually a very simple one or it can be figured out easily. Very often it is obvious that the character is posing and in many other cases there are no identifiable actions: the character is doing nothing. But the symbols of “being all right” are visible in most of the cases: the people are smiling, having fun, being happy.

3.3.2. Place

Mostly, the environment of the picture is provided by the atmosphere of the home: the character(s) appear(s) in a room (33%), very often on a sofa, in the living room. The family around a Christmas tree (7%). Another group’s profile picture shows an exotic place, exotic for the region of Miercurea Ciuc (seaside, very hot summer etc.). The nature appears in the third group, too: but most of the time the nature appears in spring or summer, only in a very few cases in winter. This is paradoxical, as weather in Miercurea Ciuc is very cold from September until April, with fog and only for a very few weeks it is warm and sunny. But this third category of places is very “home-type,” it presents very beautiful, shiny places of this region.

3.3.3. Themes

The main themes of the photos can be grouped into three categories: 1. the message of the photo deals with the question of the family, which I labeled: “Family comes first”; 2. another group, significant in number has chosen a photo as profile picture on which the person appears next to his/her partner, so it can be labeled: “You’re my mate” and 3. this category clusters the photos where everything is about and only about the person, labeled: “I, me, myself”. To have an idea what these themes and pictures are about, let us see some models from each category and these pictures will also demonstrate some earlier observations.

Subtitle: “*With my husband and with my grandchild: Tamara*”

[User’s data: female, No. of photo: 1; no. of contacts: 68.]



Picture 1: Profile picture / Themes / Family comes first

Subtitle: “*Tunisia 627*”

Male, married, age: 31, 1 photo, no. of contacts: 365



Picture 2: Profile picture / Themes / You're my mate 2.

Subtitle: “*Playing music*”

Male, divorced, 4 photos, no. of contacts: 229



Picture 3: Profile picture / Themes / I, me, myself

3.3.4. Subtitle

As we can see, in many cases there are no subtitles (38%). When there are subtitles, usually they are simple ones. Only in very few cases (4%) they are metaphoric or suggest a secondary meaning. They are written mainly in Hungarian, similar to open questions and also without using the Hungarian accents. Mostly they do not contain emoticons, smiles (only in 8% of the cases). The most frequently used emoticon is, of course, the smile (in 60%, and the :P, :D, ;)). In the majority of the cases (65%) the subtitle refers to the character: *Me with...*, *When I am happy*, *Me in the mountains*, *This is me*, *Me*. In the case of every fifth person's (20%) profile, in the subtitle of pictures there appears the word "I" ("me") ("*én*," "*én és . . .*," "*én lennék*," "*ez is én volnék*"), other 10% writes the first name—usually the person's name ("*Andrea*," "*andika*," "*Zsu*," "*Boldizsár*," "*I am Jocó*"), or another very close, very important person's name ("*Me and my daughter*," *Emo*," "*Me and Réka* [friend], "*Gizikém*"). Only 1% of the subtitles contain something in plural ("*We*," "*The two of us*").

Every second person mentions his/her *child*, *children* ("*My son*," "*With my daughter*," "*Our children*"), or the word *family* ("*My family*," "*The family*," "*With my family*," "*Among family*") on their profile picture subtitles. 10% refers to a place (a town, a city, a geographic place): almost half refers to exotic, popular tourist places (e.g., Paris, Pisa, Egypt, Tunisia, Croatia, Venice), the other half refers to a place in Hungary or to a Romanian tourist resort (e.g., Sovata, Tusnad, Sighisoara, Delta). 20% refers to an action or an event (e.g., job or free time, festivities).

3.3.5. Design

In a professional sense, most of the photos are not very well designed: they are often taken by the person him/herself, so we could not say that there is a very deliberate picture editing. But most pictures are not edited technically (using photoshop is not typical at all). We could say that only every tenth photo is "edited". In the majority of the cases the uploaded photos are not very good (the other, not profile pictures are often much better).

4. Conclusions

Analyzing the profile pages of these 1347 users, which is a representative sample, we can draw conclusions by making some statements regarding the typical iWiW user and by drawing a typology. The analysis was carried out according to two variables: the scale of information sharing (how much information they share, write about themselves) and the consciousness of the profile management (the awareness of what and how they communicate about themselves, the rate of filling

in the data sheet, how they upload the pictures, whether there are subtitles below the pictures, whether the subtitles have a metaphoric meaning etc.). Considering all these, 4 types of users can be identified, which are of course ideal types: the *hard core* user, the *cautious* user, the *good soldier* and the *lunk*.

| | | CONSCIOUS PROFILE-MANAGEMENT | |
|---------------------------|------------------|------------------------------|--------------------|
| | | Characteristic | Uncharacteristic |
| THE SCALE OF INFO-SHARING | Characteristic | “ Hard-core ” | “ Lunk ” |
| | Uncharacteristic | “ Cautious ” | “ Soldier ” |

The conclusion can be that the “awareness” of profile-building is much lower than it was assumed at the beginning of the research: 25% of the users do not pay attention at all to their profile page; usually they have not made any changes to their user profile since they entered the iWiW. Usually they have no photos or only one or two photos. They have not completed the data sheet in more than 50%. The one who signed up to the iWiW because everybody else did can be labeled as the *good soldier*; s/he did not want to miss a thing, but s/he was not willing to waste too much energy and time. This can be found with all age groups. There is the *lunk*, who shares more information about himself/herself, but s/he is not too familiar with the IT world or does not consider it very important. S/he is older than 35, his/her photos are often not turned in the right position; they do not have a subtitle. S/he completes the data sheet, but only the closed questions. The third category is the *cautious* user, who is not old, but not too young either. This person provides a relatively large amount of information about him/her, but these data can be mainly seen by friends, his/her contacts. His/her photos are subtitled. The last group contains the *hard-core* iWiW-user. S/he has very many photos which are definitely subtitled. These titles have a secondary meaning, so s/he uses metaphors and labels. This person does not write anything randomly about himself/herself and often shares personal information with anyone. Members of this group visit their iWiW profile on a daily basis and make changes on their profile page very often. Actually, the latent hypothesis can be fully confirmed only for this group and less in the case of the cautious user.

Nevertheless, we can conclude that writing without Hungarian accent is completely taken for granted for the iWiW-users. The grammatically incorrect writing is not a deviant thing at all. By analyzing iWiW-users we can affirm that users—and not only the users of this social network site—can be labeled as the citizens of a “*click-society*”: the majority of people avoid text-writing, they rather complete parts where only a click is needed, but leave the places blank where something “written,” formulated is needed (*about myself, when I do this ... is to supply pictures* etc.—the majority of the users do not complete these lines, do not make any supplementary effort). At the same time, the use of clichés is very

frequent: “*When I work: I work,*” “*I would prefer you to ask others,*” “*I have no time for this, maybe another time*” etc.

The findings also reveal the fact that there are huge differences between different age groups and mainly the young users (under 20) are more concerned with their accounts: they have much more photos, their photos are well-edited and they pay attention to what they show about themselves. We can realize what is important for them, and what is not: for instance, correct spelling is not an issue for the young people: they do not use the Hungarian accentuated letters, they use shortened words and a lot of common acronyms and emoticons. They write only a few words, but show much more by pictures, so we can say that they are more visual than the older users. For the young people the iWiW is not the most important online social network, the hi5 is much more important, and there they could be more active (e.g., they can write comments to each other, they can monitor who has taken a look at their accounts etc.).

We can conclude that iWiW is a façade—in the positive sense of the word. The person presented is an image, which varies from person to person, regarding the construction of consciousness. There are a lot of users who care more, who are “working on it,” but even more who do not care about their iWiW profile managing. We could say that the image presented about the person itself is idealistic: smile, happiness, summer, children, best time, best friends, best look, best party and best memories. Is there a virtual identity? Yes, we could state that there is a virtual identity that can be grabbed behind the user habit. A virtual behavior, which also has an everyday character: real people, real happenings and real photos. It contains “imported” components from his/her non-virtual identity: the virtual behavior presents—whether consciously or not—his/her most important things and values. Such values are family, traditional values, religious festivities and friends. At the same time, it presents a desired character: the aspired image of life—shine, sunny photos in a very cold, half-year-winter town. Yes, we can say that a new kind of identity can be observed: a new practice of self-presentation by using IT, *sending* a complex message about myself for others, friends or strangers. This message can be “created,” “recreated” or “changed,” “modulated”. It is in a very strong correlation with *real* identity, it is not something totally different, but it has a strong “cyborg” character: almost everything is possible. We can say that it is more optimistic and more adaptable: it can present even the identity which we would really like to acquire.

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**“Signs of Times”
– A Semiotic Content-Analysis of ‘Apocalypticizing’
Rhetoric on Hungarian Conspiracist Websites –**

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Abstract. There is an ever stronger interconnection between various forms of social anxieties, be they religious, political, national or even environmental and online forms of expression. People’s fears and resentments (along with hope) precipitate in mythical narratives structured on the ancient oppositions of Good and Evil. Apocalyptic rhetoric represents the most crystallized form of verbal warfare against the evil forces (mundane or supernatural). In the processes of secularization and globalization these narratives have somewhat lost their religious character, but at the same time penetrated new reaches of the Irrational, and impregnated many beliefs and ideologies, from academic and philosophic heights down to popular mythology and urban legends. The easiest way for ancient sacral stories of antagonisms to get into the modern narratives was through symbols, mainly purported by visual signs. Although anxieties have always been present, showing certain patterns of rise and decrease, the electronic media of the past century have definitely contributed both to the perpetuation of a higher tension and to the wide spreading of such story-bearing visual symbols. Today, the Internet offers an excellent hotbed for both processes mentioned above: not only through unidirectional web pages but also, or even better, through the self-organizing virtual net-communities. There are countless such groups, religious or ethno-political, each with its own symbolic iconography, but most of these signs are quasi universal, same as the stories they bear. I have chosen some Hungarian websites through which I wish to present these symbols and narratives at work, with a hint to their universal character.

Keywords: apocalypticizing rhetoric & iconography, conspiracy theory, alternative historicism, xenophobia, topical Internet communities

Before reading a word, the reader may ask: why does the title appear in quotation marks? Those marks indicate a double meaning, the expression is intended to bear the original apocalyptic connotation of the term (the events and miracles that precede the End Times) but at the same time the words ironically refer to their primary, denotative sense (semiotic signs used in our times). This title is meant to express exactly what the paper will investigate, namely *Signs of Times* perceived and communicated by various online communities through the *signs of* (our) *times*: textual and visual emblems on the Internet.

The paper performs a semiotic content-interpretation of visual and textual elements and the apocalypticist rhetoric on some Hungarian conspiracist or radical right-wing websites—as part of my preparatory investigations for a longer research into the study of ideological web-semiotics and -rhetoric. The idea was born from a fortunate coincidence, where my main personal research interest in the field of apocalyptic studies has met my present work in the domain of contemporary communication studies. For the present investigation I have chosen some Hungarian web-sites and online communities formed around them (www.kuruc.info, www.bar!kad.hu, www.hunhir.hu, www.maghar.gportal.hu . . .) through which I wish to present the mentioned symbols and narratives at work, with a hint to their universal character.

In our everyday life we tend to think that apocalypticism is a long-extinct extreme religious mentality centered on some catastrophic end-of-the-world scenario. We usually suppose that people thought this way only very long ago, or even if some still do today, they are very few, or very far away, maybe somewhere in America, or in underdeveloped Muslim fundamentalist countries, even farther away . . . In any case: not now, not here—not among us.

In this paper however, I would like to show that neither is there any need to think of apocalypticism and apocalypticists in such extreme terms, nor should we place away such phenomena in the distant past or the indefinite elsewhere. As we will see, the core narrative of apocalyptic discourse survives in many variations and similarly does its symbolism, with its visual or textual elements adapting to the ever newer contexts and to the necessities of their users. In our specific case I investigate how such stories and images of apocalyptic origin are imported and converted in some radical Hungarian online communities.

My paper consists of two larger sections: a theoretical part and one of applied research, where the summoned theories are tested on empirical data through content analysis. Thus, the first chapter is dedicated to the definition of the necessary key-terms, crucial to the understanding of this phenomenon. After having discussed theoretical issues as social anxieties, mythical narratives, apocalyptic and “apocalypticizing” rhetoric, ethnic eschatology, conspiracy beliefs and cultural mistrust, I will turn to the presentation and analysis of the narratives and images of this Virtual Imperium. I will call the attention upon the visual

transfer of ancient emblems through electronic media, as well as the topical online community formation and ritual deliberation of net-communities, and then a short conclusion will be drawn, with a proposal for further investigations.

There is an ever stronger interconnection between various forms of personal or social anxieties, be they religious, political, national or even environmental. Such anxieties have never been absent in history, but in certain periods they get amplified and tend to impregnate the whole society. Calendar turning points, periods of cultural changes, traumatic events, but above all times of perceived moral, religious, political, or economic crisis offer as many opportunities to worry. These crises, whether real or imagined, are accompanied—if not quite caused—by the fading or loss of fundamental values governing community life. If such critical periods get prolonged or acute, individual unrests may conglomerate into social turmoil, or possibly even war. However, not always does anxiety overwhelm the entire society: it often remains restricted to only a part of the given community. Vulnerable social layers, age groups, subcultures, various minorities, defeated, oppressed people usually feel more exposed and more threatened by either the existential circumstances or by the ruling/surrounding culture—that is, by the(ir) whole World itself.

Anxious individuals or communities may perceive any ill circumstances, events as concerted actions deliberately directed against them by overtly malevolent or occult forces. The case is somewhat similar to that of really threatened communities living under the pressure of fear caused by genuine persecution. There is no clear boundary however between the consecutive degrees of threatenedness and, within exposed communities, subjective perception of threat counts heavier than the objective presence or gravity of the threat itself. In most cases they are or feel powerless and defenceless in the face of the threatening forces. As Alan Hunt (1999) puts it, many interpretive traditions “identify anxieties that reveal the experience of powerlessness, helplessness and social disintegration as manifesting apprehension in the face of social change and a generalized fear of modernity” (2).

I wish to emphasize that for this study a clear difference is made between anxiety in general and social anxiety, with a stress on the latter. Social anxiety will be interpreted here primarily not as a psychological term, referring to a feeling surfacing in individuals or—on a larger scale—in communities, but as a term of social psychology, in the sense Hunt uses it in his essay *Anxiety and social explanation*: “Anxiety is a psychic condition of heightened sensitivity to some perceived threat, risk, peril or danger” with a distinction made “between individual anxiety and social anxiety. An individual anxiety has no social significance unless it is a shared or social anxiety and, additionally, it results in some discernible action by significant numbers” (1-2).

Anxiety as social behavior normally shows up not through physical action but through verbal expression. It is this aspect our study will investigate, since this analysis does not seek the origins or causes of such anxieties, it just looks at the narratives produced and used by the concerned communities. In Hunt’s terms, it focuses on what he might call “symbolic interpretive strategy,” namely when a certain anxiety is analyzed as a symbolic expression of more pervasive social processes (8-9)—with an important difference however: this study does not investigate nor doubt the actual social roots or reasons for the anxieties, limiting the search rather to the typology of the symbolic language elements themselves.

Anxiety should not necessarily be considered as a setback, on the contrary: it is one of the fundamental drives governing human culture, and it is a highly creative force that plays a fundamental role in producing myths. People’s fears and resentments contributing to the anxiety complex conglomerate (along with desire and hope) in cognitive constructions through symbolic rationalization of mythical narratives structured on the ancient oppositions of Good and Evil. These stressing sentiments along with a sense of helplessness project the solution of the perceived crisis into the spiritual realm, where myths of some idealized place or time, offer a virtual salvation backed by the satisfaction of vengeful fantasies targeting the enemy—without leading to physical outbursts of aggression (see Strozier and Boyd 5). Although far from being the (only) scope of their cultural function, such mythical narratives may provide paradigms for social actions, but more often they serve to channel uncontrollable emotions, by solving immanent human problems in the transcendence of the imaginary.

The archetypal good-bad opposition is a very productive mythologem—in that it can be found in actually all types of myths from cosmogonic and anthropogonic creation myths to eschatologic and apocalyptic visions. Antagonistic values are usually organized into dualistic structures that unfold in tales of conflict. Whether origin-narratives, or stories of heroic quest, or fantasies of some final battle, combat myths seem to present the patterns that sooth human concerns regarding the presence of evil in our world. In fact, as Edith Humphrey (1996) explains, these universally present Chaos-Order narratives are powerful tools to keep the surrounding world under control, rationalizing, on the one hand, the incomprehensible by grasping the evil through personalization; on the other hand, overcoming evil by annihilating it virtually through the works of symbolic imagination (5-6). Illness, misery, death, suffering, plague, misfortune, war and all other fearful phenomena are personified into monsters, demonic beings only to be defeated by always superior positive personifications of the life-supporting principles or forces (see Ricoeur 175-260, also Hankiss 204).

Combat myths are universal and somewhat natural atavistic expressions of human thinking working on binary categorizations. There is however a later

development in this paradigm, generally referred to as Manichaeistic dualism,¹ which is a radicalization of the binary symbolic structures. While the combat myth remains central to such narrative, evil and good is no more restricted to certain personages but projected to the whole world that is seen in sheer black & white, everything being either good or bad—there is no middle way. The conflict seen in such terms—as Michael Barkun argues (133)—bears a tendency to view the world as a battleground between pure good and pure evil; and this absolutistic mentality is transposed into apocalypticism.

Apocalyptic is an answer of religious crisis communities typical for monotheism, where theoretically evil should not be a match for the One God. According to Stephen O’Leary (34), it has necessarily sprung out of the theodicy paradox uncomfortable in monotheistic traditions: if God is both willing and able to prevent evil, whence then is evil? In apocalyptic mentality the final resolution to the perceived tribulations or critical situation is postponed into the future, when all evil shall be wiped out and the perseverance of the few faithful will be rewarded by the Almighty.

Apocalyptic rhetoric represents the most crystallized form of verbal warfare against the evil forces. In apocalyptic narratives, since alienation results in the generalization of animosity towards the entire world, evil is no more restricted to the personifications of supernatural demonic powers, but surrounding mundane entities such as neighboring people, foreign nations, state authorities, ruling powers, or simply: the others are perceived as agents of Satan, consequently, as enemies. The rhetoric of apocalypses is thus often characterized by an undifferentiating animosity directed towards the others, and generally against the world, with an emphasis on self-victimization counterbalanced by a triumphalist discourse that reassures the faithful sufferers of God’s (their) final victory over all enemies. There are several variations of apocalyptic discourse however, but interesting for us is that type which some authors describe with attributes as “paranoid style” (Werly 40) “tragic frame” (O’Leary 47) “pessimistic” (Brummett 59)—because this kind of approach was inherited by the modern conspiracism.

In the processes of secularization and globalization the apocalyptic narratives have lost something of their religious character, but at the same time penetrated new reaches of the Irrational, and impregnated many beliefs and ideologies, from academic and philosophic heights down to popular mythology and urban legends. The original salvage-message got transferred into the realm of ethnicity and politics, where—in lack of theology—it adopted peculiar nationalistic, social or economic teleology. Evil and enemy lost their transcendence, retreated in the here

¹ This kind of dualism is actually older than Manichaeism itself, originating from Zoroastrianism, but due to the fact that it has survived within Christianity through its ideas purported by similar Gnostic movements its name designates the characteristic type of antagonistic structure (see Culianu 170-176).

and now. In case of major banes, such as social disorders, armed conflicts, or political repressions, the enemy is clearly visible, identifiable—thus it may be dealt with. In contrast, not so sharp historic moments or processes, economic breakdowns or social changes may lead to crises, where the cause or the foe is not so obviously recognizable. A state of social anxiety is thus generated, a sense of insecurity and unrest infecting certain, more vulnerable segments of society. In some cases, such anxieties may penetrate entire nations, countries or even whole cultures.

In disadvantaged or vulnerable groups’ crisis-awareness backed by uncertainty there is a particular version of apocalyptic narratives circulating: conspiracy theory. In László Lakatos’s brief formulation, the questions to be answered by it are the same as ever: “Why is there evil on Earth? The question is always the same—Why do bad things happen to us? And the answer is always the same—Because there are evil people who benefit from them” (1). But since these evil people are invisible, or better said unrecognizable, they constitute a very slippery enemy. As a consequence, people concerned about these issues are (see themselves as) virtually powerless victims, conscious of their continual threatenedness. American analyst Chip Berlet (2005) stresses the relation between the apocalyptic and conspiracism by pointing out the paranoid nature of the apocalyptic, which he believes underlies many conspiracy theories. He suggests that the paranoid style that describes conspiracism which distinctly identifies a scapegoat is related to the dualistic thinking promoted in the apocalyptic narrative. Dualistic thinking that is associated with an apocalyptic narrative “creates a dynamic that encourages the construction of conspiracy theories that blame a demonized and scapegoated ‘other’” (21).

Still, conspiracist discourse is not to be identified with apocalyptic rhetoric (although they may often interfere). Not only because the first one lacks the transcendent dimension but also because it has no dénouement—it contains no consolatory message promising a solution to the present hardships. There is though an important similarity between the two modes: their revelatory nature—by being in the possession of ultimate truth both aim to unveil reality; but while the latter one offers a godly perspective, conspiracy theory only “unmasks” occult (but very worldly) machinations that secretly govern our life. Considering the basic differences and correspondences, I propose “*apocalypticizing rhetoric*” as a differentiating term for the language of conspiracism.

This apocalypticizing style may be characteristic of conspiracism and also of various radical nationalistic, political or ideological discourses related to that. Fundamentalist religious conservatives, radical right-wing leaders or ultraliberal activists alike may make use of it, each adapting it to its own messages and purposes. The most prolific hotbed for conspiracist discourse however is provided by nationalism. Radical and xenophobic forms of nationalism abound in conflict-narratives (usually pointed against the evil neighboring nations, immigrants, or

alien enclaves, minorities within the body of nation) even without conspiracy theories. But completed with the all-suspecting rhetoric of conspiracism the extreme nationalism can have an even greater lure to frustrated individuals.

Concluding the theoretical premises we can see that social anxieties as well as individual frustrations in crisis circumstances create and circulate various chaos-order narratives explaining the origin, sense and termination of evil. Special among these narratives are (Jewish, Christian, Muslim) apocalyptic myths radicalizing the antagonism to the extremes, with a promise of total eradication of evil by godly intervention in a close but indefinite future. Finally, theories of conspiracy as products of modernity inherit the radical patterns of apocalypticism emptied of all transcendence, and adapt them through an “apocalypticizing rhetoric” to explain national, or political, or economic failures by suspecting an occult evil global conspiracy and scapegoating given groups (see Barkun 16).

Since both apocalypticism and conspiracism are studied primarily in Anglophone countries (and the majority of theoretical works cited comes from there) it seems challenging to test the theory on home-ground, checking the theses in local connotations. In the case of nationalist variations of conspiracy-discourse a peculiar development occurs: transcendence is regained in an occult and contorted way. There is no need to detail how the idea of nation (as a supra-communal entity) has gradually gained a mystic connotation throughout the past centuries. As in the West, so in the Eastern part of Europe—though with certain delay—the national idea was unfolding, building up its own discourse from historical, mythical and—not last—religious narratives. A whole range of competing mundane ethnic eschatologies have formed especially in the multiethnic Central and Eastern Europe, and within it, the Hungarian narratives hold a distinct position.

Modern history has decisively shaped the self-image and neighbor-visions of the nations inhabiting the Eastern part of Europe. Every nation had or has traumatic periods of tribulation, defeats, losses, oppressions by the hands of the neighboring nations, or by Western/Eastern powers—and all that contributed to the formation of resentful and vindicative narratives to the detriment of the others. Hungarians are no exception in this respect, and the main lines of the narrative are comparable to those of the surrounding nations. Common elements of these narratives are historic mission-consciousness, chosen-messianism, origin-discourses, fate-discourses, and in the more extreme variations, a kind of paranoid mysticism evolved.

Thanks to its peculiar situation in Europe as a singular non-Indo-European ethnic group among the surrounding Germanic, Slavic, Romanic nations, and given its ruptured status due to twentieth century history, Hungarian discourse is even

stranger among the other ultra-nationalist discourses. Emphasis must be laid upon the fact that radical Hungarian nationalist narrative-variations radically differ indeed from the mainline Hungarian national discourse, not only in their rhetorical style but first of all in their content, their message. In contrast to the official national discourse, radical variations show quite divert, even opposite standpoints regarding mainly (but not exclusively) history, linguistics and anthropology. Main issues of dissent are the origins and anthropological affiliations of Hungarians, the geographic significance of the Carpathian-basin, linguistic issues including writing, and of course, history—both early and modern. In radical narratives mythology and religion acquire a crucial importance (naturally at odds with mainline theses), since these provide the necessary mystical background of certain radical nationalist narratives. Parallel variations of historic, social, scientific theories are natural, but in the case of the referred radical quasi-religious narrative variants there are strong links to conspiracy theory and apocalypticism.

First, radical narratives seem to be both originated in and at the same time causing conspiracist discourse. This is most visible in the phenomenon of *cultural mistrust*—a deep-rooted suspicion against elites and written culture. According to some unrecognized historians, linguists and anthropologists, their alternative theories (competing with the official Finno-Ugric and the AD 896 settling theories) have always been neglected not because of academic consideration but because of political pressure (see the self-evaluation of Badiny Jós, Ipolyi, Kiss, Kiszely, Marácz, Padányi, Pap, Vámos-Tóth, Varga, Végvári et alia).² This view then is distorted and magnified in popular interpretation to a very complex conspiracy theory.

Cultural mistrust sees that during modern history the Habsburg governance, later a German influence, then Soviet and now EU interests have been covering actually some occult malevolent interference into history research, trying to break down, neutralize and distort Hungarian historic consciousness and self-knowledge. Ruling and intellectual elite has always been subservient to and manipulated by foreign powers—so it cannot be trusted, nor is it legitimate! Academic history and linguistics is at least suspect if not utterly false, only to blind and fool and humiliate and enslave the Hungarian people! This is the general suspicion, or better said conviction of many semi-cultured radical nationalists. It is important to highlight the semi-cultured nature (see Adorno) of the adepts of the conspiracy theories. They are neither illiterate, nor undereducated people. Usually they come from middle class, with a high-school or even college education background—and most of them are young.

² I do not refer explicitly to each of the mentioned authors’ works. Their more significant ideas mentioned here and further on are contained in their representative works listed in bibliography.

Beyond youth's already regular animosity towards the older generation, and the grounded accusation of ideological brainwashing of the past decades (for which the latter is held responsible), there is another source of suspicion and alienation among the younger generation: information technology development. Used to the Internet, digital natives—as Prensky (2001) calls this generation—do not lean any more on printed culture, which they perceive as monotonous and slow. They acquire information fast online, from a multitude of sources but at the same time very superficially and randomly, both from authentic and unreliable sources, the latter being the more frequent. In relation to our issue this phenomenon implies that radical nationalist discourse, being seductive mainly among younger people, goes hand in hand with a superficial knowledge being ever more characteristic to online communities. Thus, although not overtly expressed, there is a trend of suspicion against book-culture, seen as representing the official academic (that is: manipulated and manipulating) discourse on Hungarian history, language, geopolitics, as opposed to the alternative, underground (that is: trustworthy) hypotheses presenting the real story of Hungarians, hidden from us by conspirating malevolent forces, but revealed by the uncensorable independent radical nationalist websites. At the same time, it is not an irrelevant aspect that alternative histories appear much more interesting and more majestic than the one known from school-books.

On the other hand, regardless of the actual religiousness or atheism of radical nationalist narratives, a certain quasi-religious discourse is often characteristic of their rhetoric. Generally, mainline nationalist discourses ascribe an (over)emphasized historical and geopolitical importance to the Nation (whichever it may be). In radical narratives, this natural highlighted importance is often turned into a magnified mission-awareness: the particular nation or group has not only a central historical-geopolitical role, but it bears a sacred mission to save the world from some perceived evil—with or without the prospect of leading it gloriously ever after. We could see the most extreme cases of this paradigm in both extreme rightist and leftist ideologies of the last century leading to the Second World War and later to Cold War. This mindset, though modern in its appearance, has ancient and deeply religious provenance: the ideas of messianism and chosenness of Judaism and Christianity. Mystical trends of radical discourse often build their narratives on a transcendent conception according to which the ethnos bears a sacral mission throughout history—from its mysterious origins to some utopian future. It is a common development in modernity, especially within the frame of New Age occultism and Neo-Paganism (see Aryans, Druids, Zalmoxians, Rodnovery movements etc.), even under the wings of Christianity (often linked with a dispensationalist fundamentalism—see Barkun, *A Culture* 4-6). As such, it forms an organic unity with conspiracy theory, which assures the image of the enemy to overcome: found in a xenophobic view of other nations or a paranoid vision of secret societies. This rather loose conglomerate of ideas still forms

together a very coherent narrative of ethnic eschatology, in which the Nation will finally prevail over the evil and inferior Others.

This is the set in which Hungarian radical nationalist narratives are to be read. In the following lines I resume in brief the variations³ that converge into a backbone of the plot constituting the ethnic eschatology. In regard to origins, as opposed to the official Uralic, Finno-Ugric version, Hungarians descend either from Proto-Asian people(s) and/or Sumerians, Huns, Scythians, Parthians, Sabirs (see Badiny Jós, Bobula, Kiszely, Pap) or—according to some newer theories—from primaeval Proto-European (Carpathian-Danubian) populations (Cser and Darai). Further on, the Hungarian language preserves the most ancient form of the original protolanguage in its perfection (see Kiss, Varga), and based upon the clear logical peculiarities of this language the Hungarian runic *rovás* was the first form of writing ever, from which all other alphabets later evolved (see Varga)—consequently this nation is the direct descendant of the prehistoric proto-culture, while other nations diverged and degenerated from it (see the Tamana-theory of Vámos-Tóth). Following this logic it should be no surprise that also the Hungarians were the originators and only perpetuators of the real (Parthian) “Pre-Christian Christianity”. Jesus himself would have been a Parthian prince bringing the message of Light into the world, which was then spoiled by the “Jewish Bible” (see Badiny Jós). Against all odds, and being “Christianized” by force, Hungarians still have succeeded to save their creed by the mystical program of the Holy Crown and keep a sacral order in the Carpathian-basin through the past millennium (Pap). The sacral mission of Hungary—dedicated by its first king Saint Stephen to Mary the Virgin—has always been to serve as guardian of Light and Truth and to assure the spiritual bridge between East and West, at the same time warding off from the crucially central Carpathian area both the eastern intruding people and the western aggressive imperialist powers (see Balogh).

However firmly had it held its stance though, it could not resist to the plague from within: the infiltrated *foreign-hearted* people, Germans, Slavs, Walachians, Jews, Gypsies and other newcomers have spoiled the Hungarian nation. Inner subversion, outer invasions and imposed foreign domination finally has brought the nation to its humiliating Doom. After two lost world wars enforced by alien powers, the Regnum has been broken, torn away to pieces by the surrounding countries. And now the remaining last hold has ever since been under continuous threat as all the Western Powers, Soviets, Communists, Liberals, Jews, Free-Masons, Gypsies, Feminists and Homosexuals try to break down the last nation keeping the sacral order on earth. Lastly the occult masters of globalization have

³ The mentioned variations do not cover the whole range, are not universally accepted by all alternative groups, and in certain cases even are at odds with each other (e.g., Central-Asian and Old-European origins). Paradoxically however, one can observe that on numerous alternative websites such variations are gathered, presented or linked in even if contradictory.

lured and forced Hungary into the hurdle of the EU only to crumble and annihilate what is still left from the Nation.⁴ Therefore Hungarians must awake, get to know their real history, and build up resistance against all the overwhelming occult forces, inner parasites and hostile nations. In the end—overtly or latently—the ultimate goal would be no less than liberating and purifying the Nation, and reuniting the old Regnum under the Holy Crown.

Still there is no clear ending, except that Sacral Order of the world must be restored finally. The discourse is centered simply on resentment and different levels of struggle. Although these latter elements—in proper adapted variations—are common to practically all (Central and Eastern) European nations, Hungarian radical discourse of ethnic eschatology is somewhat distinct and unique amidst the others. Its narratives are directed rather to the past and the present than to future—and in that respect differ from genuine apocalypticism. There is no catastrophic *the-End-of-the-World-as-we-know-it* resolution involved, not even politically, and eventual glimpses of the utopian future are very misty. Eventually Hungary may resurrect as a spiritual Nation, a *Homeland in the High* with the help of the Holy Crown and Virgin Mary. All that is clear and unequivocal in these narratives is that due to their provenance Hungarians have a mystic messianic mission, while there is an evil worldwide hidden conspiracy and an overt hostility to thwart it, against which the truehearted must fight. And the key element (if not weapon) in this battle is language.

Given the Hungarians' linguistically insular character in the region, particular stress is laid upon language itself. Hungarian language plays a central role in the ethnic eschatology, since it bears a sacral charge both as an issue of origin (and in this respect, a clear sign of separateness as non-Aryan and non-Semitic affiliation) and as a resort of final salvation. Ultimate spiritual triumph is achieved only by discovering the real roots of Hungarian language—it is almost an inverted apocalypticism: victory is sought not in the (uncertain) future, but in the prehistoric past. The origins and mystical construction of Hungarian language convey the Nation a spiritual supremacy over the other (now unworthily dominant) nations. The *apocalypticizing* character of this rhetoric is even more emphasized by the language used: simultaneously revealing and concealing through the many metaphoric word-plays the Hungarian language makes possible by its agglutinative character and root-word structure; as well as through the abundant presence of visual (even visionary) symbolism.

The easiest way of the ancient sacral stories of antagonisms into the modern narratives was through symbols, mainly purported by visual signs. I would like to emphasize the importance of visual metaphors in language, and through it in the

⁴ Some however, see the EU still in some positive light, as a hope for re-uniting the Hungarian Nation by the virtualization of political borders.

formation of the narratives. In the Hungarian national eschatology there are more incoherent, even contradicting theories that are held together by an elaborate language of quite eclectic imagery. Since even an inventory of the emblems building up this radical symbolism would far exceed the limits of this study, in the following paragraphs I will only highlight some representative elements of the dualistic image-thesaurus.

A main distinguishing mark of the adepts of radical nationalism is the heraldic use of the *red and white Árpád-stripes* that serve as a clear distancing from the official national discourse (represented by the traditional red-white-green flag) but also designate a return to the original Hungarian values.⁵ *Green* is also used in a positive sense, as a strong reference to old Hungarianist movements.⁶ As negative emblematic counter-colors *yellow* and *red*⁷ must be mentioned as symbols of Jews and Communists, as well as the stripes of the *rainbow* alluding to the international movement of homosexual emancipation. Lately *blue* has also acquired negative connotations as the color of the European Union. Geometrical signs abound in both sides of the binary imagery: the *cross*—whether straight or slant, simple or double (in extreme cases even the arrowed one)⁸ —, the *circle* and various combinations of them purport a positive meaning, while the *star* (whether penta- or hexagram) and the *pyramid*, as Jewish, Masonic, Communist or EU symbols, are usually used for defamation and blame. Closely related to geometry, some geographical representations are also of great importance. The *Carpathian-basin* is often visualized as metaphor for the lost Greater Hungary,⁹ and there are frequent representations of various maps of *Central Asia*, as showing the Altaic liaison—referring to both the sacral cradle and the life-space of present spiritual allies (Turkic peoples) of the Hungarian Nation. Maps of *Middle-East* or the *Globe*, or sometimes the *North American* continent are evoked usually in connection with the conspiracist narrative. Nor do the contours of the *European continent* always appear in positive context lately. Objects play an important role too. Whether real palpable objects, or only abstractions—such signs can focus and evoke strong emotions, and there is a whole arsenal of them, both with positive and negative connotations (from nationalist narrative aspect). Among the most characteristic, some objects of authority must be first mentioned, such as the *Holy Crown*—comprising all the positive meanings that the ethnic eschatology implies.¹⁰

⁵ see <http://www.maghar.gportal.hu/> or <http://mariaorszaga.hu/index.php>

⁶ see <http://www.nemzszoc.esmartdesign.com/index.html>

⁷ see <http://www.hunhir.hu/index.php?pid=hirek&id=33945>

⁸ See <http://magyarsors.hu/index.php>

⁹ E.g., <http://www.magyarharcos.hu/> or <http://magokvagyunk.blogspot.com/> Mention that the map of dismembered Greater Hungary represents concomitantly the death of the Nation by the Trianon/Treaty and the glorious resurrection of the Nation through reuniting the disjoint Parts.

¹⁰ See <http://www.szkosz.com/> or <http://szentkoronatarsasagbaratikore.ning.com/profiles/blogs-/keseru-igazsag-vigyazzatok-az>

On the other side the *book* has acquired some negative connotations, often symbolizing the Bible, or more specifically: the Old Testament; or the Torah that stand for a coercive, spoiled alien religion forced onto Hungarians; or in other cases the Law or the State with its imposed illegitimate order. Again, other representative symbolic objects are weapons! Among these, *bows and arrows* are the most common—being so specific for the ancient Magyar warfare, they evoke the glorious millennial Hungarian history, and lately together with the *horse & rider* these represent the special Hungarian martial art: the *Baranta*, meant to resuscitate the national spirituality.¹¹ On the opposite end, *machine guns and tanks and missiles* represent the imperialist powers, and bear absolute negative connotations. An interesting status, as almost authoritative and still perceived as weapon-like instrument is *money*: represented in the form of dollar bills (or lately even euro bills) it symbolizes the evil material power of globalization dominated by the US, the West, the international Jewish bankers' organization—in one idea, the Occult Conspiracy itself. In close relation to money, another universal token is worth mentioning, namely the *bar code* bearing real apocalyptic connotations. This sign, with its negative interpretation imported primordially from American religious fundamentalism and extreme rightist conspiracism, represents the evil sign *per se*: being identified explicitly with the Mark (and Number) of the Beast from Rev 13:18.

In a short glimpse to the bestiary, from the many creatures invoked on both sides of the narratives I pick out only three. On the good side, there is the well-known *Turul* falcon (identified usually with the Saker Falcon *Falco cherrug*), the mythical raptor of Hungarian legends representing nobility and freedom, and the *horse*, again as an allusion to the glorious history. As to a negatively charged symbol, I call the attention upon a very recent development: the *hedgehog*. This poor little animal attracted negative connotations during the latest anti-government street manifestations (2007-2009), when police applied a specific formation for isolating a demonstrator from the crowd. This formation, called “*sün*” in Hungarian (hedgehog) came to denote police, and through it an evil and illegitimate government. Fantastic-chimerical creatures usually do not participate in this bestiary, but among the few present one particular must be mentioned: an underhuman, inhuman monster, which is the typical case of demonization. This too is a very recent development, in the wake of the *Lord of the Rings* Tolkien-trilogy played in theaters in the first half of this decade:¹² as a very close at hand figure,

¹¹ See <http://www.dunakanyar.net/~baranta/>

¹² It is typical that although the novel-trilogy had previously been very popular already as a book, still the *Ork* figure, possibly because of its spectacular ugliness, entered the thesaurus of this rhetoric only after the *LOTR* movie-trilogy.

the *Ork* has entered the bestiary for denoting primarily Roma¹³ but rarely also Jewish people.

Finally, I would like to note one last, but very important supernatural element—beside the long row of historical heroes and leaders—present in a significant number of the radical narratives: the person of *Virgin Mary*. Through Her the whole discourse of ethnic eschatology acquires a real apocalyptic dimension! Marian apocalypticism is popular not only among Roman-Catholic Hungarians as would be expected, but also Protestants and—even more interestingly—unreligious people as well! Due to numerous Marian apparitions (see Baji Lázár) in the Carpathian-basin often containing restoration messages,¹⁴ the Queen of Heavens holding the Hungarian Holy Crown in Her hands represented on various websites alludes to the central meaning of the Hungarian eschatologic narrative, the resurrection of the Sacral Hungarian Regnum—if politically impossible, then “at least” on a spiritual level, as a *Homeland in the High*.

Although the narratives purporting anxieties expressed in such emblems have always been present, showing certain patterns of rise and decrease, the electronic media of the past century have definitely contributed both to the perpetuation of higher tensions and to the succession, visual transfer, wide spreading or even rediscovery of these story-bearing icons. However, the real penetrating power of these mediated symbols was facilitated by the re-emergence of visibility in the virtual world of hypermedia. Today, the Internet offers an excellent hotbed for both processes mentioned above: not only through unidirectional web pages but also, or even better through the self-organizing virtual net-communities. Relatively free and general access to the Internet (and implicitly the prevalence of computer literacy among the younger generation) together with the premise of online anonymousness contributes to the daring responsibility- and consequence-free action on the net. The Internet offers a virtual space, where—due to the relative lack of “gatekeeping” usual for traditional electronic media (Cardone 11-12)—radical narratives may freely circulate and proliferate without practically any setbacks. It enhances what Howard (2009) calls “topical community formation” where, based on a shared competence or common knowledge, individuals involved in a certain narrative discuss the relevancy of a specific fact to a larger shared issue of concern without any expectation of a final solution or resulting action emerging from the discussion (19). These topical online communities—in our case radical nationalist conspiracist groups—perform a so called “ritual deliberation” (see Howard, *Blogging*) that has multiple functions. In the sense of Austin’s and Searle’s speech

¹³ See <http://kuruc.info/r/35/67053/>

¹⁴ See http://lendvaykati.freeblog.hu/archives/2009/07/11/Maria_uzenete/

acts theory, these narratives operated within such groups' ritual deliberation work as verbal warfare by which a virtual annihilation of the antagonists is achieved.

There are countless anxious topical groups online, religious or ethno-political, each with its own symbolic iconography, but most of these signs are quasi universal, same as the stories they bear. Social crises, collective traumas perpetually revive mythical apocalyptic narratives promising that the righteous will overcome evil. Radical extreme rightists, extreme leftists, traumatized ethnic minorities, fundamentalist religious minorities, pseudo-racial communities all make use of the elements of the apocalyptic, actualizing them in apocalypticizing narratives to denounce the evil worldwide conspiracy aimed against their collectives—and Hungarians are no exception. The visual symbolism of Hungarian online topical communities investigated in this study reveal the power of these emblems to re-actualize apocalyptic myths in the National eschatology with the promise of some final victory. For those possessing digital literacy, the signs of our times purport the Signs of Times providing a powerful instrument of verbal warfare, calling the true devotees of the Nation now separated by political borders to unite in a spiritual community in the virtual world, and heralding the possibility of victory over the unreachable and undefeatable conspirating enemy.

Within this short analysis I could only offer a brief review of this much diversified and relatively unexplored phenomenon of online apocalypticizing rhetoric, hoping that it opened ground for further investigations into the issue. The results will be integrated into the wider course of our online communication research, which focuses on the image of the Other in intercultural and inter-confessional dialogue on a larger scale in international environment, and attempts to call the attention upon the importance of investigating the uncontrollable aspects of computer mediated social interaction, and the role that symbols and narratives play in these phenomena.

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