

Acta Universitatis Sapientiae

Philologica

Volume 11, Number 1, 2019

STUDIES ON LITERATURE

Sapientia Hungarian University of Transylvania
Scientia Publishing House

Acta Universitatis Sapientiae, Philologica is indexed by the following databases:

Central and Eastern European Online Library (CEEOL)

ERIH PLUS (European Reference Index for the Humanities and Social Sciences)

Genamics JournalSeek

NSD (Nordic Scientific Database)

SCImago (SJR)

SCOPUS

Proceedings of the Conference

SPACES IN BETWEEN

Sapientia Hungarian University of Transylvania
Department of Humanities, Miercurea Ciuc
26–27 April 2019

Contents

Caius DOBRESCU

The Limit as Centre: Some Considerations on the Political Imagination of
the In-Between, Starting from the Central Symbol of the Crime
Series *Bron/Broen* – The Bridge 7

Roxana EICHEL

Genre Transgression in Contemporary Romanian Crime Fiction 21

Vitaliy A. GAVRIKOV

Nonlinearism: The Paradigm That Replaced Postmodernism.
On the Materials of Song Poetry and Cyberliterature 35

Noémi ALBERT

“A Multitude of Drops.” David Mitchell’s *Cloud Atlas* and the Subject
between Space and Time 49

Zsuzsa TAPODI

Between Human and Animal 65

Ottília VERES

Spaces in Between in the Myth of Myrrha: A Metamorphosis into Tree 83

Vilma-Irén MIHÁLY

Aspects of Residual Narratives as Spaces in Between Based
on J. R. R. Tolkien’s Fantasies 93

Tamás KISANTAL

The Practical Past as a Field of Metahistorical Approach. Some
Remarks on the Contemporary Situation of Historical Theory 109



The Limit as Centre: Some Considerations on the Political Imagination of the In-Between, Starting from the Central Symbol of the Crime Series *Bron/Broen* – The Bridge

Caius DOBRESCU

University of Bucharest (Romania)

Department of Literary Studies

caius.dobrescu@gmail.com

Abstract. The crime series *Bron/Broen* [The Bridge], co-produced in 2011 by the public televisions of Denmark and Sweden, located at the centre of the bridge over the Øresund/Öresund maritime strait which represents the border between the two states, offers one of the most prolific thematizations of in-between-ness in the popular culture of the last decade. The fact that it struck a chord of global collective imagination is revealed in its quick transformation into a highly successful international TV format, relocated on various other state borders. More than a theme, the series proposes an entire aesthetics of the in-between organized around the symbolic constellation of the bridge. A bridge simultaneously divides and reunites, generates empathetic fusion but also ushers in reflexive distancing. But, above all, as it is narratively and poetically framed in the series, it transgresses its common understanding as a connective interspace and tends to become a world to itself. A rather dangerous one, for that matter, since within its confines the usual distinctions between right and wrong are seriously called into doubt. From a space of transit, the bridge becomes – the distinction is essential – a space of transition, of change, of becoming. A space replete with risks but, essentially, a space of freedom. The essay attempts to unpack political implications less explored until now of this core symbolism.¹

Keywords: Nordic noir, frontier, transgression, crime series, ideology, centre

1 This publication is part of “DETECT. Detecting Transcultural Identity in European Popular Crime Narratives,” a project that has received funding from the European Union’s Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under grant agreement No 770151. The publication reflects only the author’s view, and the Agency and the Commission are not responsible for any use that may be made of the information it contains.

The Bridge (2011–2018) is a four-season murder mystery series co-produced by DRK and SVT, the public televisions of Denmark and Sweden, and set at the frontier between the two countries. Following the path of the already established Nordic noir brand, it enjoyed a prodigious global success in itself, but it also became the first Scandinavian truly international and transcultural television format with a number of transpositions and relocations on different borders around the world: “The audience share in Denmark was about 50%. It has been sold to more than 50 countries all over the world and has also been remade in a British/French version (*The Tunnel*, Sky Atlantic/Canal+, Britain/France, 2013, 2015) and an American/Mexican version (*The Bridge*, FX, USA, 2013-14)” (Eichner and Waade 2015, 7).

The list of remakes has expanded in the meanwhile, now including the Russian–Estonian *Most/Slid* (2018); the Malaysian–Singaporean *The Bridge* (2018); the German–Austrian *Der Pass/The Strait* (2019). Beyond direct remakes, we might hypothesize the stimulating pre-eminence of the format on a whole international wave of series packaging the complex symbolism of state borders/limits in crime narratives: *Wataha/The Pack*, set at the Polish–Ukrainian border (2014–2017), *Okkupert/Occupied*, premised on a possible overtake of Norway by Russia (2015–2017), *Fauda*, which boldly confronts the moral intricacies of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict (2015–), *Sorjonen/Bordertown*, located at the border between Finland and Russia (2016–2019), *Grenseland/Borderline*, involving the Norwegian–Finnish border (2017), and German productions such as *Wolfsland/Land of the Wolf* (2016–), set on the German–Polish border.

Given this broad sphere of expansion, it is understandable that the scholarly interest – in the light of what begins to be known as “border aesthetics” (Agnese and Amilhat Szary 2015) – concentrated on the play of signifiers occurring when the format was adapted to new cultural and intercultural contexts (Eichner and Waade 2015, García Avis 2015, Åberg 2015, Waade 2016, Jensen, Nielsen, and Waade 2016, Steiner 2017, McCabe 2019). In the following considerations, I will adopt the complementary position of focusing on what is “repetition” rather than “transformation” – in the terms of the opposition considered as defining for adaptations by Hutcheon and O’Flynn (2013, 114). This is to say, I will attempt to discern the core magnetism of the *Bron/Broen* format, which made it travel to such distances, through a phenomenological approach of “the bridge” as seminal symbolism and conceptual crux of the series. This course of interpretation is inspired and led by the paradox that a definite limit, and process of delimitation, the form in which a state border is usually conceived, can acquire the semantic corollary of a cohesive Centre. The analysis will be therefore concentrated on the bridge – neither as a *physical* place, as the architectonic structure that connects Denmark and Sweden over the maritime strait called Øresund in Danish and Öresund in Swedish, nor (mainly) as a *mediated* place (i.e. the manner in which

the real place is represented) but first of all as an *imagined* place that works as a powerful metaphor (I follow here the distinction between physical, mediated, and imagined place, based on Peirce's semiotic triangle, formulated in Eichner and Waade 2015, 6).

Following the principles of phenomenological reduction, I will concentrate on the emerging symbolism of the bridge in the first season of the series, the one that founds and organizes the fictional universe. This is an extension of a principle formulated by Mittel (2015, 56) with respect to pilot episodes, which "must orient viewers to the intrinsic norms that the series will employ". Hermeneutical instruments will be used to explore the political imaginary coalesced around the central symbol of the bridge. There is a wide consensus that the series promotes a political agenda aptly synthesized by Jenner: "contemporary Danish detective dramas like *The Killing* (*Forbrydelsen*, DR, 2007–12) or *The Bridge* (*Bron/Broen*, DR/SVT, 2011–) are shaped by their contexts as Danish public service broadcasting, national debates surrounding feminism and immigration, foreign politics and the relationship between Denmark and Sweden" (2016, 3).

On the other hand, political theory has been applied on *Bron/Broen* and its subsequent variations from a gender perspective (e.g. Manolache 2018, McCabe 2019). While acknowledging the relevance of the above, my framing of the matter will be different. I will attempt to interpret the layers of meaning of the bridge not according to poststructuralist political theories but starting from an Aristotelian view of political order as general equilibrium, and of *mesoi*, the "people at the middle", as the most likely to keep checks and balances working. I argued elsewhere the significance of this vision for understanding the strategic value of representational arts for the imaginary foundation of modern polities (Dobrescu 2000, 2006, 2015). My present approach is articulated with the prospective conceptualizations of a centrist political philosophy, which – with the words of Dahrendorf Forum scholar Alexandru Filip – "may be what European politics needs to revive trust in compromise, moderation, and mature reform" (Filip 2018).

With the conceptual framework and analytical focus clarified, we can turn now to the bridge itself, the physical, mediatic, and, most of all, symbolic one. The real object, with its good eight kilometres, is the longest automobile and railway bridge in Europe, but aside from this its structure is also unique: after advancing from the Swedish coast to an artificial island set in the middle of the Øresund/Öresund maritime strait, it continues through a four-kilometre tunnel to a Danish island set in the immediate vicinity of Copenhagen (O'Dell 2003, Bucken-Knapp 2003). Mediatically, the first season offers a rhythmic alternation of broad views and close-ups, taken from a fluid variety of angles, of the architectural elegance of the bridge. The panoramas and close-ups are blended in the intro in a manner that immediately transports the viewer from the physical

to the imaginary level. That is to say, the bridge appears from the very beginning as defying the commonsensical demarcation between two states. The frontier, prominently represented in the social imaginary as a dividing frontal line, is transmogrified into a bizarre route on which you are supposed to advance. The intro could be construed as a visual essay that echoes the mental unrest with respect to borders' imagination expressed by Austrian-Swiss sociologist Dagmar Reichert: "The limit, the frontier, the boundary, time-series of boundaries, or ditches, the void, or *différance*, they are all modifications of the line, the form of topo-logical thinking. Can we escape this thinking in terms of spatial metaphors? Must thinking be visual? I am asking you. I don't know myself. So strong am I bound to the picture of spatial metaphors" (1992, 95).

The opening visual experience of the pilot episode is not an attempt to escape the visual but to transform it, by substituting the crossing of the frontier with an advancement, seen through a car screen, into the night, into the unknown and the undetermined. The identification with this sense of immersion has a mind-setting power, even if we will soon learn, assumedly with a cold shiver, that that was the perspective of the killer. The frontier imaginary glides towards the diaphanous concreteness of a no man's land, towards a space that literally emerges from the sea and generates a strange regime of physical suspension as well as a suspension of moral limits and conventions.

This immersion ends in a total blackout, which will soon prove to be a provoked 48-second power break. When illumination is restored, it exposes a female body placed at the exact middle of the Øresund/Öresund Bridge. Through this macabre manner of emphasizing the otherwise loose demarcation between Sweden and Denmark and through the police investigation that will follow it, an invisible, impalpable separating curtain suddenly becomes dense and forbidding, thereby freezing and completely reconfiguring the fluid nocturnal space in which we were initially lured. The bridge is rapidly turned into a crime scene, more precisely, into a forensic operational theatre. The investigators soon learn that they are not confronted with a normal corpse but with a *cadavre exquis*, a grotesque anatomical montage: the superior part belongs to Kerstein Ekwel, president of the city council of Malmö, while the inferior one to Monique Brammer, a Danish drug-addicted sex worker. The juxtaposition of administrative jurisdictions is thus ostentatiously duplicated by the juxtaposition of polarized social statuses: the pundits and the pariahs.

The start of the investigation procedures introduces us to the lead characters: Saga Norén from the Malmö criminal police, played by Sofia Helin, and Martin Rhode representing the Copenhagen public force, brought to life by Kim Bodnia. Both seem (calculatedly) ill-suited for the general conventions of the noir genre. Saga manifests a condition identified by various commentators (but never by the creators themselves – Townsend 2015) as the Asperger syndrome: she is incapable

of empathy and has a limited and abstract understanding of human emotions – hence her Apollonian incapacity of resenting fear or feeling depressed. At his end, Martin Rhode is highly emotional but at the same time displays a zest for life contagiously expressed in his outbursts of laughter, a disposition that sets him manifestly apart from the “miserable detective” stereotypical of noir movies. His Dionysian vitality is antinomically underlined by the fact that he has recently undergone vasectomy, indeed, after having acquired a substantial progeny from successive marriages.

The two central characters stand for classical attributes of consciousness whose harmonization is as difficult as it is necessary. The series reverses gender stereotypes, attributing to the female character an almost inhuman logical consistency, consubstantial with a sense of condemnation and punishment, while the male character becomes the agent of empathy, of comprehension, of care and tolerance. Their difficult relationship is expressive both of the fragility of every truce between intelligence and empathy and of their imperative reunion. In the plain words of *Guardian* TV blogger Vicky Frost: “While all the murder and mayhem has been going on around them it’s the bridge they’ve built between their impossibly dissimilar personalities I’ve found compelling” (Frost 2012). Indeed, the bridge also represents the difficult but necessary relation between the two characters and the two archetypes they stand for – an intermediate, connective space between the ethics of conviction and an ethics of responsibility.

The tissue of meanings woven around the bridge includes, quite saliently, thanatic and psychopomp ones – clearly exposed in the subtitle given to the series on German ZDF television: *Transit in den Tod* (Transiting to Death). The “audacious opening moments of the Danish-Swedish television co-production *Bron/Broen*” create a powerful link between “transnational in-between spaces of somewhere and anywhere, where jurisdictions collide, otherness is encountered and cross-border cooperation demanded” and the “female fatality – with a body that quite literally splits in two before our very eyes” (McCabe 2019). The surgical theme is accentuated by the creators by placing among the vehicles waiting on the Øresund/Öresund Bridge because of the forensic investigation an ambulance with a patient in urgent need of a heart transplant. An ambulance uncompromisingly blocked by Saga but permitted to cross by the empathetic Martin. Actually, this transplant involving property developer Göran Söringer will develop into a subplot which enlarges the symbolic constellation around surgery by acquiring overtones of life celebration but also of blind greed – the latter, through the cynical pressures of Charlotte, Söringer’s wife, for obtaining a new heart for her husband.

Returning to the obsessional image of the corpse on the Bridge, we could read here the suggestion of an aggression of the abstract, defined by the cruel precision of the anatomical cut, over the world of life. The sybillinic *signifié* that uses corpses as substance of its *signifiant* is an expression of radical logic typical for

a terrorist mind-set, as dependent on manifestoes as the next Avant-guard group (Kubiak 2004). On the one hand, the message of the original cut, of the beastly but hyper-lucid section of the two female bodies (a motive instrumental to both horror and noir fiction) and, on the other hand, the would-be body placed with precision on the frontier jointly suggest a ritual, or an alchemic procedure through which the abstract and impersonal power of the state is extracted, distilled, and subversively turned against itself.

The hypnotic, if not hallucinatory image of the corpse, or, shall we say, meta-corpse, placed on the frontier concentrates the attention on a line of division and, actually, on a “non-place” (Augé 1995). This limitation-as-section, as dissection, or bi-section – if we consider that there are two bodies involved (and, virtually, countless bodies, potentially processed into anonymization and reification) – is meant to anarchically suspend all spatial determinations. But the compensatory and therapeutic universe of the bridge absorbs the trauma of the line-limit, of the abstract delimitation that became in the meanwhile a bleeding wound, into a Centre – a virtual space that also seems to lack dimensions, but which also seems open towards a symbolism of regeneration.

At first, the no man’s land, the in-between, to wit non-space of the bridge seems to offer the operational basis for kamikaze attacks against established order. And almost through the end of the first season (an end that shifts briskly from an ideological to a private motivational range), the anti-system rhetoric is the only justification for the killer’s choice of the precise middle, both irradiating and sectional, of the Øresund/Öresund Bridge. Starting from this premises, all the means that the creators of the series assemble in order to dismantle this infernal symbolic machinery can be construed as a counter-offensive meant to reconquer this in-between space (and to capture the very essence of in-between-ness).

In spite of the concentration of public sympathy on the couple of investigators, and especially on Saga Norén, with her emotional silence brilliantly played by Sofia Helin (Nicholson 2014), the perspective of the criminal is tantamount to the semantic economy of the series. The focus is on an individual predator, a solitary and maleficent genius clearly resounding not so much with the classical film noir but with popular narratives of the turn of the twentieth century such as *Fantomas* (Dall’Asta 2009) – though filtered through the mythology of poetic and sophisticated serial killers the prototype of whom is, presumably, Hannibal Lecter (Brown 2013, 202–214). Actually, the villain of the first season can be seen as a phantasmagoric projection feeding on collective frustrations; what really matters is less his personality as such and more the aura generated around him. Up to a point, the magnetism, the ambiguous darkness of his criminal strategy exerted over the public represented in the fictional world is meant to equally take in its grip the real-life audience. *Guardian* TV blogger Vicky Frost, already evoked in these pages, displays his response with genuine clarity: “Many times in these

two episodes [five and six] the message was repeated: the killer's methods are not right, but his motivation is not without merit. It's a thought-provoking twist on the standard Scandi-crime motif of social comment. Only this time, the social commentary is coming from the bad guy" (Frost 2012).

This is to say that the criminal effectively presents crime as a trope of a rhetoric of social justice. With the help of Swedish journalist Daniel Ferbé, with whose lack of scruples the killer toys at will, hideous crimes come to be packaged by the denizens of the Internet as deeds of "The Truth Terrorist," *Sandheds Terrorist* in Danish or *Sanningsterrorist* in Swedish – an evolution which, in my view, goes far beyond "social commentary coming from the bad guy". It actually opens a new perspective on the topic of social justice, commonly associated with Nordic noir (Hansen and Waade 2017, 82; Robbins 2017; Stougaard-Nielsen 2017), from a sharp, uncomfortable, to wit sarcastic angle. The Truth Terrorist feigns to share major articles of the faith of social activists while fashioning himself as a secular angel of the Apocalypse. In fact, he is an enemy of the polis similar to the tyrant whom classical political philosophy epitomizes as a rabid beast (on the classical vision of the tyrant, see Avramescu 2009, 199–204).

His chiasmic *modus operandi* appears from the manner in which his criminal imagination transposes into criminal scenarios the five points of his programme diagnosing social scourges: lack of equality before justice, into the killing of two women from opposite social stands and the squalid mixing of their bodies; indifference to homeless people, into planting bottles with poisoned wine that will kill ten persons of the ranks of those whose cause he pretends to embrace; the unacceptable treatment of mental illnesses, into transforming persons suffering from paranoid schizophrenia into his minions and prompting them to assassination and arson; discrimination against immigrants, into moving a family of refugees to revenge the death of their son who died in police custody; exploitation of children, into inciting radicals to set fire to five companies presumed to tolerate and cover this practice in their overseas venues. One of the most ostentatious and suggestive of his acts, a kind of supplement, as it appears, to point number two, is the kidnapping of a homeless person that he promotes to notoriety through cruel and unusual procedures: the victim, a certain Bjørn Rasmussen, is tied to a chair, with open hand veins, while the public can follow his slow agony on the Internet. An ordeal to which the Truth Terrorist is not going to put an end unless four major real estate enterprises agree to jointly donate five million crowns to charities.² This anti-system statement is part of an agenda which European artistic and intellectual contrarian élites traditionally identify with. But the message is strongly jammed by the conflict between the social goals and the morally abhorrent means – a

2 The topic of anti-capitalist terrorists trying to extort money from a billionaire based on the menace of random killings was first introduced in 1901 by Jack London, in his novella *The Minions of Midas*.

conflict that should be obvious to the real audience but seems far less so to the public opinion represented in the fictional world. From this latter perspective, the Truth Terrorist is increasingly perceived as a cool vigilante, who uses distorted mirrors in order to expose the quintessential inhumanity of a robbing upper class. Actually, the creators of the series hold to the audience with a penchant for activism, presumably attracted by the Nordic noir social commitment reputation, a mirror in which it can contemplate the risk of mob psychology and crowd psychosis potential in its own self-righteous militancy.³ The first season of *The Bridge* carefully follows this process of public radicalization cum growing moral entropy. The mounting sympathy for the Truth Terrorist is paired with a gradual raise in insensitivity to the cruelty that he liberally dispenses. This insidious penetration reaches the most profound fibre of the narrative when the elder son of the Danish detective Martin Rhode is lured via e-mail into a personal relationship with the Truth Terrorist, a relationship with devastating consequences.

Actually, an essential in-between space emerges from the reflexive self-distancing induced to an otherwise self-righteous public opinion and from the interplay between the representation of civic participation as an expression of emancipatory reason as well as its representation as a chain of conditional reflexes and scapegoating mass impulses. A distancing, or in-between-ness, induced by art in order to facilitate public self-scrutiny and to foster, at least in a horizon of hope, a prudential and considerate public debate. Since maturity and wisdom almost fatally command a touch of metaphysical melancholy, this could also begin to explain the connection between this centrist philosophy and the resurrection of the noir genre.

The in-between-ness of the Bridge creates a space of suspension(s), but not of the kind that would evacuate social or personal drama. This becomes obvious

3 It is noteworthy that the Anonymous movement, still vigorous at the time when the first season was released, is premised on the resuscitation of a popular (anti)hero of early modernity: the famous conspirator Guy Fawkes, mastermind of the 1605 Gunpowder Plot set to blow up the British Parliament while in session. The history of the perception of this radical icon is relevant in the present context. In Britain, Guy Fawkes Day, or Night, is celebrated on the 5th of November and, even if originally instituted as a government propaganda manoeuvre, it became in time a genuinely carnivalesque form of relieving both social tensions and fears of social violence through playful fireworks and the burning of allegorical puppets (Sharpe 2005). A mutation occurred in the 1980s, when writer Alan Moore and graphic artist David Lloyd released the comics series *V for Vendetta*, thus reviving, without explicitly naming it, the myth of Guy Fawkes in a dystopian neo-fascist and theologically abusive Britain of the future (Moore and Lloyd 1988). For Alan Moore, the anonymous vigilante is intensely ambiguous since, on the one hand, it epitomizes the radical vanity of considering himself beyond and above good and evil, and destined to unleash limitless violence in the name of social justice; on the other hand, because it symbolizes the power (or at least the legitimate aspiration to it) of the human individual confronted with massive political machines and machinations (Keller 2008). The popular enthusiasm of the Occupy and Anonymous movements has adopted only the latter sense when turning the mask of the character imagined by Alan Moore and drawn by David Lloyd into their effigy.

with the grand finale of the first season, which symbolically takes place at the same midway between Denmark and Sweden. The criminal has attracted Rhode, by kidnapping his son, to the scene of his first displayed murder and urges the detective to shoot him and thereby become guilty of murder. This is the climax of what was revealed to be a plan of personal revenge of the Truth Terrorist, hidden under the appearances of a moral crusade, against a man who had seduced his wife and whom he considers guilty of the accident occurred years ago on the Bridge, in which she lost her life together with their child. However, the concluding act of the criminal performance should be equally located on the bridge. It implies revealing to Martin the murder of his son as a ransom for the other child's life, thereby committing a suicide of sorts since Martin was supposed to take immediate revenge and ironically end up in prison for murder himself.

In the course of the series, the bridge was generally flash-crossed in both directions, according to the urgencies of the inquiry, somehow recalling the thoughts of Nigel Thrift on the effect of mobilities on the human sense of place: "What is place in this 'in-between' world? The short answer is – compromised: permanently in a state of enunciation, between addresses, always deferred. Places are 'stages of intensity'. Traces of movement, speed and circulation" (1994, 212). But in the end speed and turbulence are suspended, and everything freezes again. The bridge is transformed into a place of freedom – fragile, discomfiting, even hurtful, such as the authentic experience of freedom always is. At the ends of the bridge, there are administrative accretions, the police precincts of Copenhagen and Malmö and beyond them state apparatuses that define and maintain moral order. But the bridge as such is a space of anomia because here the distinction between right and wrong is not premised on consensus, conventions, and procedures. The Centre is a space of moral freedom, under attack from all kinds of rage and despair.

The vital symbolic value of the Centre in imagination does not need to be demonstrated. Mircea Eliade notoriously connected it to the ineluctable search for an *axis mundi* (1961). Humanist geographer Edward Relph memorably stated that: "The essence of place lies in the largely unselfconscious intentionality that defines places as profound centers of human existence" (1976, 43). In the present context, I would, nevertheless, underline some of its political implications – political, in the basic meaning of the notion, which implies the search for a cornerstone of social cohesion. The acute sense of the dissolution of the Centre is notoriously expressed in W. B. Yeats's poem "The Second Coming," first published in 1919, in the short intermission between the ceasefire of WWI and the wake of the Irish War of Independence. Yeats conveyed a feeling of disaggregation that extends from the political to the most intimate existential recesses, a state of mind largely shared by the intellectual and artistic élites of the epoch, which acutely perceived the end of the European *ancien régime* without being able to

imagine the sources and forms of a new, more hospitable political and ethical legitimacy (Mackaman and Mays 2000). Hence the famous lines:

Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;
 Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,
 The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere
 The ceremony of innocence is drowned;
 The best lack all conviction, while the worst
 Are full of passionate intensity. (Yeats 1996, 89–90)

It is very tempting to discern here splinters of the *noir* imagination, be it classical or contemporary. But even if the general sense of threat, of a Centre that cannot hold anymore, as well as the image of the tide of blood, which mark the torturing premonitions of Yeats seem to resonate with the wave of interest in crime fiction, and in Nordic noir in particular, the pessimistic conclusion of the weakness of “the best” in front of the devastating passions of “the worst” is not unproblematically transferable to the present; at least, not as far as the political imagination of *The Bridge* is concerned. It is true that the “passionate intensity” of the killer represented in the series proves to be disquietingly able to manipulate proficiently the language of virtue and justice and to shake the mental foundations of civilized existence. But, unlike Yeats’s poem, the series opens a horizon of hope through the difficult, prudent, painful internalization of uncertainty. An attitude captured in the lines of the musical intro of the series *Hollow Talk* performed by the Danish band *Choir of Young Believers*. Even if ambiguous, dark, and touched by an apocalyptic mood not dissimilar to Yeats’s own, the poem hypnotically intoned by Greek-Danish vocalist Jannis Noya Makrigiannis ends in powerful, even if painful, suggestions of regeneration and healing:

Never said it was good, never said it was near
 Shadow rises and you are here

And then you cut
 You cut it out
 And everything
 Goes back to the beginning

As a cultural and social phenomenon, *The Bridge* helps us understand that the magnetism of Nordic noir is not limited, as commonly stated, to an extensive social agenda and to the revelation of that “something” that is “rotten in Denmark”, i.e. into the mythical Scandinavian welfare state (as argued, for instance, in Jensen 2013, Robbins 2017, Syvertsen, Trine, Gunn, Oleand Hallvard

2014). *The Bridge* demonstrates that Nordic noir is intimately related to the consciousness of the fact that the Scandinavian area has been the stage of a fringe civilizational experiment in egalitarian, grassroots democracy (on the intellectual history of Scandinavian utopianism, see Witoszek and Sørensen 2018). Within this experiment, the utopian impulses are always close to trespassing the limits, to committing a hubris. Therefore, the empathetic, fallible but self-amending rationality of the Centre should mount a permanent watch. *The Bridge* seems to mediate between the intensity of passion, which can be pushed to the extreme of murderous redeeming psychoses but is still essential for a life that is worth living, and the equally vital vibration of prudence, responsibility, and sceptical tolerance – which is in itself a proof of the fact that the noir genre has the capacity of exploring and configuring spaces of in-between-ness with a significant potential for political, moral, and existential regeneration.

The series does not explicitly stress the political implications of the emergence of the Centre as an in-between space, as circumscribed ethical and cohesive uncertainty. Nevertheless, I would point out the concomitance and affinities between *Bron/Broen/The Bridge* and *Borgen/The Castle*, a Danish series highly praised throughout Europe that presents the accession to and the complicated maintenance of power (“Borgen”, the Castle, being the familiar name given to the Copenhagen siege of the Danish Government), of a fictional Centre, led by the charismatic politician Brigitte Nyborg – a character interpreted by Sidse Babett Knudsen that has become an emblem of the new Scandinavian quality TV almost as salient as Sofia Helin’s Saga Norén. The connection between this political series and *The Bridge* should be the object of a separate analysis, but still it is worth reminding their insistent pairing at the first Nordicana festival meant to celebrate the modern overtake, this time conducted exclusively with peaceful multimedia means, of the British Isles by Scandinavians (Frost 2013). What is revealed in the associated ascension of the two series is the very special political significance of the Centre – i.e. of an in-between space of systematic doubt that is not articulated in retractile, defensive terms, as doubt is commonly figured, but is assertive, vibrating, attractive, and irradiating.

Works Cited

- Agnese, Elena dell’ and Anne-Laure Amilhat Szary. 2015. “Borderscapes: From Border Landscapes to Border Aesthetics.” *Geopolitics* vol. 20 no. 1: 4–13.
- Åberg, Anders Wilhelm. 2015. “Bridges and Tunnels: Negotiating the National in Transnational Television Drama.” In *Nordic Genre Film: Small Nation Film Cultures in the Global Marketplace*, eds. Tommy Gustafsson and Pietari Kääpä, 91–103. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

- Augé, Marc. 1995. *Non-Places: Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity*. Trans. John Howe. London, New York: Verso.
- Avramescu, Cătălin. 2009. *An Intellectual History of Cannibalism*. Trans. from Romanian by Alistair Ian Blyth. Princeton, Oxford: Princeton University Press.
- Brown, Jennifer. 2013. *Cannibalism in Literature and Film*. Basingstoke, New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Bucken-Knapp, Gregg. 2003. "Shaping Possible Integration in the Emerging Cross-Border Øresund Region." In *Culture and Cooperation in Europe's Borderlands*, eds. James Anderson, Liam O'Dowd and Thomas M. Wilson, 55–79. Amsterdam, New York: Rodopi.
- Dall'Asta, Monica. 2009. *Trame spezzate: archeologia del film seriale* [Broken Plots: Archeology of the Serial Movie]. Genova: Le mani.
- Dobrescu, Caius. 2000. *Semizeii și rentieri. Un studiu asupra identității imaginare a burgheziei modern*. [Demigods and Rent-Seekers. A Study in the Imaginary Identity of Modern Bourgeoisie.] Bucharest: Nemira.
2006. "Colliding Symbolisms of the Middle. The Emergence of the Cultural Identity of Modern Bourgeoisie." *Bulletin of the Transsylvania University of Braşov* vol. 13, no. 48: 561–566.
2015. "Moderația în *Moromeții*: o lectură aristoteliană" ["Moderation in the Novel *The Morometes*: An Aristotelian Reading"]. *Communication interculturelle et littérature* vol. 1, no. 22: 70–85.
- Eichner, Susanne and Anne Marit Waade. 2015. "Local Colour in German and Danish Television Drama: *Tatort* and *Bron//Broen*." *Global Media Journal, German Edition* vol. 5 no. 1: 1–20.
- Eliade, Mircea. 1961. *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion*. Trans. Willard R. Trask. New York: Harper Torchbooks.
- Filip, Alexandru. 2018. "On New and Radical Centrism." www.dahrendorf-forum.eu/new-radical-centrism/ (Last accessed 15 January 2018).
- Frost, Caroline. 2013. "Nordicana Festival in London Celebrates Best of Scandinavian Drama with Cast, Writers from 'The Killing', 'Borgen', 'The Bridge' and More." www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/2013/06/0 (Last accessed 4 June 2019).
- Frost, Vicky. 2012. "The Bridge: Episode by Episode : Season One, Episodes Five and Six." www.theguardian.com/tv-and-radio/tvandradioblog/2012/may/05/the-bridge-season-one-episodes-five-six (Last accessed 22 August 2019).
- García Avis, Isadora. 2015. "Adapting Landscape and Place in Transcultural Remakes: The case of *Bron/Broen*, *The Bridge* and *The Tunnel*." *SERIES International Journal of TV Serial Narratives* vol. 1: 127–138.
- Hansen, Kim Toft and Anne Marit Waade. 2017. *Locating Nordic Noir: From Beck to The Bridge*. Basingstoke, New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Hutcheon, Linda and Siobhan O'Flynn. 2013. *A Theory of Adaptation*. London, New York: Routledge.

- Jenner, Mareike. 2016. *American TV Detective Dramas: Serial Investigations*. Basingstoke, New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Jensen, Ib Keld. 2013. "The Nordic Welfare Model Makes Good TV." *Nordvision Annual Report 2012–2013*: 24–25.
- Jensen, Pia Majbritt, Jakob Isak Nielsen, and Anne Marit Waade. 2016. "When Public Service Drama Travels: The Internationalization of Danish Television Drama and the Associated Production Funding Models." *Journal of Popular Television* vol. 4, no. 1: 91–108.
- Keller, James R. 2008. *V for Vendetta as Cultural Pastiche: A Critical Study of the Graphic Novel and Film*. Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland.
- Kubiak, Anthony. 2004. "Spelling It Out: Narrative Typologies of Terror." *Studies in the Novel* vol. 36, no. 3: 294–301.
- Mackaman, Douglas and Michael Mays, eds. 2000. *World War I and the Cultures of Modernity*. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi.
- Manolache, Viorella. 2018. "The Politics of Feminine Body: A Manifesto and Three TV Series." In *Gender in Focus: Identities, Codes, Stereotypes and Politics*, eds. Andreea Zamfira, Christian de Montlibert, and Daniela Radu, 178–191. Opladen, Berlin, Toronto: Barbara Budrich.
- McCabe, Janet. 2019. "Bodies at the Border: Transnational Co-Produced TV Drama and Its Gender Politics in the Pilots of 'Bron/Broen' and Adaptations, 'The Bridge' and 'The Tunnel'." <https://necsus-ejms.org/bodies-at-the-border-transnational-co-produced-tv-drama-and-its-gender-politics-in-the-pilots-of-bron-broen-and-adaptations-the-bridge-and-the-tunnel/> (Last accessed 15 August 2019).
- Mittel, Jason. 2015. *Complex TV: The Poetics of Contemporary Television Storytelling*. New York: NY University Press.
- Moore, Alan and David Lloyd. 1988. *V for Vendetta*. New York: DC Comics.
- Nicholson, Rebecca. 2014. "Scandi Crush: The Bridge's Sofia Helin." www.theguardian.com/fashion/2014/feb/15/scandi-crush-the-bridge-sofia-helin-saga-television (Last accessed 4 May 2019).
- O'Dell, Tom. 2003. "Øresund and the Regionauts." In *Culture and Cooperation in Europe's Borderlands*, eds. James Anderson, Liam O'Dowd and Thomas M. Wilson, 31–53. Amsterdam, New York: Rodopi.
- Reichert, Dagmar. 1992. "On Boundaries." *Environment and Planning D* 10: 87–98.
- Relph, Eward. 1976. *Place and Placelessness*. London: Pion.
- Robbins, Bruce. 2017. "The Detective is Suspended: Nordic Noir and the Welfare State." In *Crime Fiction as World Literature*, eds. Louise Nilsson, David Damrosch and Theo D'haen, 47–58. New York, London: Bloomsbury.
- Sharpe, J. A. 2005. *Remember, Remember: A Cultural History of Guy Fawkes Day*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.

- Steiner, Tobias. 2017. "Bron/Broen, the Pilot Episode as Space between Cultures, and (Re)Negotiations of Nordic Noir." <https://hcommons.org/deposits/item/hc:17247/> (Last accessed 15 August 2019).
- Stougaard-Nielsen, Jakob. 2017. *Scandinavian Crime Fiction*. New York, London: Bloomsbury.
- Syvertsen, Trine, Gunn Enli, Ole J Mjøs, and Hallvard Moe. 2014. *The Media Welfare State: Nordic Media in the Digital Age*. Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press.
- Thrift, Nigel. 1994. "Inhuman Geographies: Landscapes of Speed, Light and Power." In *Writing the Rural: Five Cultural Geographies*, ed. Paul J. Cloke, 191–250. London: Paul Chapman.
- Townsend, Lucy. 2015. "How *The Bridge's* Heroine Became a Role Model for Women with Autism." www.bbc.com/news/disability-34995327 (Last accessed 4 June 2019).
- Waade, Anne Marit. 2016. "Nordic Noir Tourism and Television Landscapes: In the Footsteps of Kurt Wallander and Saga Norén." *Scandinavica* vol. 55, no. 1: 41–64.
- Witoszek, Nina and Øystein Sørensen. 2018. "Nordic Humanism as a Driver of the Welfare Society." In *Sustainable Modernity: The Nordic Model and Beyond*, eds. Nina Witoszek & Atle Midttun, 36–58. London, New York: Routledge.
- Yeats, William Butler. 1996. "The Second Coming." In *William Butler Yeats: Selected Poems and Four Plays*, ed. M.L. Rosenthal, 89-90. New York: Scribner.

TV Series

- Borgen/The Castle* (2010–2013, Denmark: DR).
- Bron/Broen/The Bridge* (2011–2018, Sweden/Denmark: DR/SVT).
- Der Pass* (2019–, Germany/Austria: Sky Deutschland).
- Fauda* (2015–, Israel: Yes Oh).
- Forbrydelsen/The Killing* (2007–2012, Denmark: DR).
- Grenseland/Borderline* (2017, Norway: TV2 Norge).
- Most/Slid* (2018, Russia/Estonia: NTV).
- Okkupert/Occupied* (2015–2017, Norway: TV2 Norge).
- Sorjonen/Bordertown* (2016–2019, Finland: Federation Entertainment etc.)
- Sprewaldkrimi/Crimes of the Spree Forest* (2006–, Germany: ZDF).
- The Bridge* (2013–2014, US: FX).
- The Bridge* (2018, Malaysia/Singapore: HBO Asia).
- The Tunnel* (2013–, UK/France: Sky Atlantic/Canal +).
- Wataha/The Border* (2014–2017, Poland: HBO Europe).
- Wolfsland/Land of the Wolf* (2016–, Germany: Das Erste).



Genre Transgression in Contemporary Romanian Crime Fiction

Roxana EICHEL

University of Bucharest (Romania)
Department of Literary Studies
roxana.eichel@litere.unibuc.ro

Abstract: Crime fiction is currently evolving towards a literary genre which encompasses the intertwining of several textual practices, rhetorical modes, cultural identities, and topoi. Multiculturalism and the relation to alterity are gradually conquering the realm of detective fiction, thus rendering the crime enigma or suspense only secondary in comparison to other intellectual “enjeux” of the text. Transgressing the national horizon, contemporary detective fiction in Romanian literature can be thus considered as “world literature” (Nilsson–Damrosch–D’haen 2017) not only because it does not engage representations of Romanian spaces alone but also due to its translatability, its transnational range of cultural values and practices. This article aims to discuss several categories of examples for this fresh diversity that Romanian crime fiction has encountered. Novels written recently by authors such as Petru Berceanu, Caius Dobrescu, Mihaela Apetrei, Alex Leo Șerban, or Eugen Ovidiu Chirovici employ variations such as either alternative narrators or cosmopolitan characters, or contribute to anthologies, writing directly in English in order to gain access to a more complex audience. The paper sets out to analyse the literary or rhetorical devices at work in these transgressional phenomena as well as their effects on contemporary Romanian crime narratives and their possible correlations to transnational phenomena.¹

Keywords: crime narratives, contemporary Romanian literature, intertextuality, hybridization, cultural intersections

1. Introduction

This paper will refer to transgression in relation to the poetics of the genre but also to auctorial strategies for publishing and marketing. One of the most remarkable traits in contemporary Romanian crime fiction concerns the fact

¹ This paper has been written within the frame of the research project *DETECT* (*Detecting Transcultural Identity in European Popular Crime Narratives*), funded from the European Union’s *Horizon 2020* research and innovation programme.

that the authors and publishers themselves are actively and explicitly assuming positions of advocacy for a more nuanced critical reception of the genre. This type of advocacy seems to adopt two main forms. On the one hand, we can point out the practice of speaking up for “the aesthetic rights of crime fiction”, which engenders a type of discourse that we may call “a defence of crime fiction”, to some extent in the sense of Shelley’s “defence of poetry”; writers and editors themselves emphasizing the livresque and aesthetic value of crime stories (George Arion, Bogdan Hrib). On the other hand, one can identify the tendency of responding to prejudice and condescending views in literary criticism with creative strategies for reshaping crime fiction.

2. New Techniques of the Genre – Stimuli for Textual Cooperation and Readership

The tension between elitist criticism and crime fiction writing can be regarded as a structuring factor for genre transgression and for subverting the classic *topoi* of detective stories. I will argue that these transgressions are made by willingly emphasizing the intersecting spaces of high culture and mass/popular culture. Multiculturally framed relations to alterity, plural modes of consciousness, voicing discontent with real political contexts, as well as poetic language play, are gradually conquering Romanian crime fiction patterns, with mystery or suspense as parts of the narrative becoming almost secondary for the fictional world construction. Thus, crime fiction has been developing techniques for stimulating several variations of textual cooperation (in Umberto Eco’s sense from *Lector in Fabula*) and readership (Eco 1984, 245).

2.1. Seriality

One of the main targets of negative criticism has been seriality itself, both as a poetic/production strategy and as a reading mode:

Much of the criticism on crime fiction – and on serial crime fiction in particular – faults its heavy reliance on formula and convention. To cite two (in)famous examples, Wilson (1947) compares readers of detective stories to drug addicts and alcoholics, eager to get their next fix and unconcerned with the quality of the product they consume; and Eco (1966) describes Fleming’s spy novels as a narrative machine that ‘produces redundancy’. Crime fiction, then, is either a narcotic or an elaborate yet cheap carnival ride, offering thrills and distraction but little else. (Blandford 2015, 11)

W. H. Auden's *The Guilty Vicarage* (1948), referenced by Blandford, can be regarded as a quintessential confession that separates between detective stories and the function of art, based on reader reactions and addiction. He also coins an important trait of crime fiction, in his view: being un-rereadable. Such texts can be mentioned here because they illustrate the history of the defamation of crime fiction and the minimization of its chances to be considered good-quality, aesthetically valuable literature. In spite of such views, as we will point out, contemporary crime fiction seems to have found its way out of developing the features that exposed it to such criticism.

The idea of crime fiction as un-rereadable literary production leads to another association made possible by Eco's 1979 classification of open and closed texts in *Lector in Fabula* (English translation: 1984) with the tendency to place crime fiction in the latter category, thus making it a type of text decidedly coordinating its reader in very precise, predictable manners, making rereading for the purpose of clarifying meaning rather unnecessary (Eco 1984, 47). Such reading schemata have sometimes been proven wrong in the case of pseudo-crime fictions such as Borges's *Death and the Compass*; for instance, Matei Călinescu explains the story mechanism as "allegory of reading/writing" in his essay "Adventures of Misreading: Borges's 'Death and the Compass', a Commentary" (2003), describing the path of rereading. Recent Romanian crime narratives are, in their turn, rereadable in the sense that they make a reading offer that opens the path for several interpretive possibilities, and they do not follow the rigorous guidelines of the genre.

In connection with seriality and with crime fiction deflecting its seriality traits to new directions, two strategies can be identified in recent Romanian crime fiction: either aborting seriality completely or reinterpreting seriality. The first direction moves away from the unique detective figure and develops new characters for each new storyline. Seriality reinterpreted may feature recurring characters but not necessarily as heroes or central identities for the plot, or sometimes it resorts to thematic series such as collective works, anthology series, and so on. Another string of accusations against crime fiction has to do with ideological interpretations conveyed by many of the critics, often unidirectional and logically insufficient.

[The] indictment of crime fiction as subliterate is often accompanied by a second charge – that its formulae are ideologically conservative, and that thus, like a drug, crime fiction's repetitive pleasures may have pernicious effects. Along these lines, Porter (1981) argues that crime fiction's apparent redundancy serves the ideological purpose of reassuring readers, managing our anxieties about crime by containing its threat to social order within familiar and predictable structures. (Blandford 2015, 11)

Blandford argues instead – and the present paper adopts a similar point of view – that “crime literature’s seemingly endless recycling of characters and tropes can have unpredictable and potentially even disruptive effects” (Blandford 2015, 11). This has become one of the most prominent features in Romanian crime fiction nowadays in that familiar formal building blocks of crime fiction are combined in such ways as to generate “disruptive,” uncanny effects: they can include poetry techniques, they involve different other fields of knowledge and activity in their discourse, such as: philosophy, physics, even gastronomy in digressive passages, they intertwine various states of the same narrator or feature challenging narrator shifts, etc.

2.2. From Marginal Layers to Criminal Superstructures

In his recent study *Fictions à la chaîne* [Serial Fictions] (2017), Matthieu Letourneux discusses “L’oeuvre face au genre” [The Work Facing the Genre], also taking into consideration several variations of the *récit noir* and *thriller* during the second half of the twentieth century and after. His observation that crime representation is transferred from marginal layers of society to the depiction of criminal superstructures can also be an object of reflection concerning Romanian crime fiction, though with a different contextualization, since questioning superstructures and corrupt mechanisms of power is only possible after 1989. However, in this case, some writers claim that the lack in popularity of crime narratives may be at least partly explained by people’s mistrust with justice and authorities: “the audience does not believe in Romanian justice, so it is difficult to come up with the proposition of a plausible hero from the field of law enforcement since everybody has learned of policemen, prosecutors, judges, who are known for law infringement themselves”² (Arion 2010). Therefore, genre adaptations and conversions from classic conventions to mixed techniques occur in order to meet the changing requirements and predispositions of readers, thus building the space for a renewal of character creation as well as for textual strategies straying from the traditional detective story (*policier* or “*militist*” – with a parodic term coined by Romanian writers in order to refer to ideological crime fiction written before 1989, alluding to the militia of the time).

Letourneux also provides an image of genre as becoming involved with transgressive practices:

In relation to genre, there is a remarkable amount of dialogic practices: mere simple variations of serial formulae, transgeneric hybridizations, transpositions, subjective appropriations, parodical or critical

2 Translations from Romanian and French literature or critical texts are my own throughout the article.

deconstructions, camp detours, postmodern pastiche, subcultural rearticulations, countercultural reversals; all these means bring into play the perpetual realignment of critical distance and of the relation to norm and encyclopaedic approach. (Letourneux 2017, 284–285)

In his comments on Letourneux's position towards genre, Lionel Rérat outlines the fact that, especially in serial productions, the reader or viewer is invited to approach the text either *within* or *against* genre borders, thus emphasizing the in-betweenness of crime fiction in its variations (Rérat 2018). Such traits that have been discussed frequently in relation to European (especially Western-European) literature and TV or cinema production are to be considered also concerning Romanian crime fiction, given the fact that recent novels and short stories often engage in dialogic outflow that illuminates the attempts to make the renewed genre more popular by using sometimes unexpected strategies, e.g. partaking in “conversations” with other novels (not necessarily detective stories), poems, or films.

3. New Techniques in Romanian Crime Fiction

3.1. Reinterpreting Seriality – A New Variation of Voices and Characters

Seriality is one of the features that has accompanied crime fiction since its beginnings, and traditionally it had often been constructed through the recurring presence of one main character in all books or episodes, either the investigator of murders and mysteries (i.e. Poirot, Miss Marple, Detective Montalbano, Harry Hole, and other famous characters) or the murderer. This feature often changes, and it becomes an object of genre transgression. Reinterpreting seriality traits is obvious in contemporary Romanian crime fiction, for instance, in Caius Dobrescu's *Vlad Lupu Series* (2017–ongoing). For other crime fiction writers, seriality does not even seem to be a tempting option (Petru Berteanu, Mihaela Apetrei, Eugen Chirovici – whose novels the paper will refer to). Furthermore, they employ intertextuality, innovative narratological structures, postmodern blurring of the lines between reality and fiction, and so on as traits which illustrate the hypothesis that crime fiction is changing and embracing new forms and patterns of representation.

Moving on to the attempt to prove the presence of transgressive features in contemporary Romanian crime fiction, the article will focus on gradually outlining some possible nuclei in the analysis of examples. While exhaustivity cannot be the aim of the present article, it could perhaps serve for future developments in the study of this field, which has not been frequently explored in recent Romanian

criticism or literary theory. In the *Vlad Lupu Series* already mentioned above, the lead character mentioned in the title of the series is atypically only represented in the others' narratives and is sometimes quite passive; for instance, the second novel of the series sees the protagonist in a hospital, comatose after being involved in a car accident that might have been the outcome of a conspiracy. The main character is himself an enigma, ambiguously being spoken of by the narrators as, in turn, a heroic figure fighting to reveal the communist crimes, and someone who jeopardizes his old friends' safety and well-being, seemingly protecting obscure political interests and forming unlikely alliances. While typical seriality usually involves the main character as a homodiegetic narrator or as coordinated by a heterodiegetic narrator, here Vlad Lupu's image is a construction stemming from the discourse of unreliable narrators addressed to an unreliable narratee.

Characters such as a half-German migrant who struggles with recovery after an alcohol addiction, a failed and deceitful physician, a female singer and composer fashion rhetorical modes that engage "variations of distance," as Wayne C. Booth would put it (1983, 155). All the narrators' rationale and sometimes even soundness is shaken by the corrupt environment they live in, and this trait is conveyed through the narrators' hesitations, disruption of chronology, and palindomic dramatization. Two of the narrating characters display an intriguing mannerism by (deliberately) mistaking the narratee's name (apparently Corina), which becomes itself an object of linguistic and identity play and ambiguity. This narrative diversity is certainly not the norm for classic crime fiction, which is substantially enriched in Dobrescu's novels through the involvement of complex poetics.

The voices we never encounter in any of the novels are Vlad Lupu's and Corina's. The latter is a PhD candidate from Central European University, documenting the story of a subversive group of youngsters during the last communist decade in Romania. So, the novels are actually shaped as research interviews with a twist, also engaging the topic of suspicion specific to a post-communist society, as the plot is set in nowadays' Romania, and the 1980s are just an object of recollection. Recording one's memories and confessions echoes, to the mind of the narrators, surveillance and investigation practices during the former regime.

Dialogic frames are at play since each of the three novels structurally relies on interactions with other genres or modes of artistic productions: *Death in Szeklerland* often refers to the graphic novels of a certain Sonja Mireille; Tiberiu Goanță's deceitful, unreliable narrative in *Dust* is based on Lars von Trier's *Riget*; while *Requiem for Nobody* becomes partially a verse narrative due to the narrator Mona's habit of speaking in rhymed phrases as she would with her Israeli role model and friend singer Chava Gur.

3.2. The Social Body as a Character

In Petru Berceanu's novel *Cumsecade* (*Good Neighbours* should probably be considered as an option for translating the title; 2016), the structure and the plot reflect each other. The structure of the book is atypical as the chapters are titled "Ground Floor," "First Floor," "Second Floor," and so on, mirroring the structure of an apartment building. In this novel, the investigator is a young photographer trying to build a career path in Bucharest, summoning echoes of Antonioni's iconic *Blow-Up* (1966) as he stumbles upon mysterious incidents in the building where he had rented a flat: a rock singer disappears (people assuming he was a victim of the loan sharks he was indebted to), a young girl is nowhere to be found, and a postman vanishes with the pension money he was supposed to deliver to the senior residents.

Meanwhile, Robert works for a small agency selling online photographs of "exotic" places and of people from Romania to foreign visitors. The agency is led by a journalist who reluctantly turns into an entrepreneur trying to establish a more profitable business during the rise of online commerce and press. International stereotypes and common ignorance about Romania are reflected in the questions Robert has to answer for the visitors of the website: "What is actually going on at the Maiden Fair on Mount Găina? Are there deserts in Romania? Is there a wax museum in Bucharest? Are the pictures of abandoned railways recent?" (Berceanu 2016, 165). Robert also takes photographs for non-commercial uses, featuring transcultural characters such as the members of the Silent Band, a music band formed by "three Roma men and a fat Moroccan drum player they had befriended while taking their shot in Porto" (Berceanu 2016, 141).

Linguistic play can also be detected in the title, which can also be read as "how to fall" (*cum se cade*). The blurb on the back cover states that it is an "atypical thriller because the main corpse is that of a neighbourhood" (rather than the classical pattern of detective stories where one learns about a victim or a series of victims but not of an entire urban community as a "corpse"), and also "an uncanny social novel, where people disappear inexplicably, one by one." The setting of the novel is focused on realistic descriptions and comments aiming to convey an accurate imagery related to the communist urban environment: "A quiet atmosphere reigned, enabling one to claim that eternity was born in an apartment building in the neighbourhood" (Berceanu 2016, 21). The narrator obviously rephrases Lucian Blaga's iconic view of the village as the place where the sentiment of infinity is conceived; the assertion is phrased so as to simultaneously mimic the communist party rhetoric, self-glorifying national accomplishments in modernization and progress. Ideologically biased rewritings of classics were also a notorious commonplace of socialist propaganda. This kind of rewriting is parodied in Berceanu's novel through such rhetorical strategies as reinterpreting

Blaga's poetry. In spite of the "eternity" feeling quoted above, "the street grew old early, long before its dwellers" (Berteanu 2016, 21) and the neighbourhood became a *topos* witnessing difficult times and transforming as dictated by the economic and administrative crisis of the 1980s: "Crossing each other's path on sidewalks, people would stare at one another's shopping bags, trying to guess if and where something they needed was on sale. Precious information was being exchanged on geographies of salami, beer, women's stockings, cheese, batteries, or coffee" (Berteanu 2016, 22). The decline in confidence and authority is followed carefully and then analysed as a site predisposed for felonies:

During any holiday, women would wake up at night to bake their cakes because that would be the only time when gas flames burned at noticeable intensity. Stray dogs, their count always rising, had various shades of grey too. Order itself seemed shabby, the announcements in buildings were in their places but had gotten manky, elevator doors would bear key-scratchings and out-of-order notices more often than not, the local policeman would patrol more carefully, watching his step as though slightly fearful. (Berteanu 2016, 22)

The realistic and social turn in post-communist Romanian crime fiction extensively embraces depictions of transition as felt in urban neighbourhoods. In this sense, new authors' presence on the scene of Romanian crime fiction continues and brings additional emphasis to previous works such as the novels of George Arion, Bogdan Hrib, Stelian Țurlea, and Rodica Ojog-Brașoveanu, who in their turn had alluded to this social scenery. However, for Berteanu, the social body with its degenerative disorders is itself a central character of the novel: "Communism left on Christmas Eve. The residents on Ilie Melcu St. woke up without it one day. They queued at the soda shop while they could listen to the Patriarchal Cathedral mass aired for the first time, on a loud radio [...] A collective divorce was beginning to put down roots" (Berteanu 2016, 23).

Crime and the mystery surrounding it are just one side of the fictional pact proposed in *Cumsecade*. The police officer in charge of the disappearance cases is Sandra Sas, a woman dedicated to her profession, who is also described in terms of her personal life, at the end of her marriage to a disappointing also-ran, wondering about issues such as: "Why is there no masculine term for *housewife*? I have been living for years with a house-man who did nothing for the house" (Berteanu 2016, 174). Gender roles and relations are also scanned in manifold layers of the represented society: couples, parent-child relationships, and so on, mainly rendered as by-products of the staggering transition from a totalitarian state to democracy. A similar perspective is adopted when describing professional roles, where characters displaying high standards of work ethics

are facing individuals who only pretend to act properly, according to the orders they were given. Another important polarity guiding the plot is the reference to the generation gap, subtly converted into a war-like conflict where senior citizens in the neighbourhood try to re-establish by any means the order they had known in their youth, thus reprimanding new behavioural features of the younger generations. In such novels, crime fiction is set to explain possible worlds where the exacerbation of social conflict invites one to speculate on political philosophy. In this case, the explanation for the missing people's cases is eventually deciphered by Robert, and it has much to do with the motto of the novel, chosen from Chesterton's reflections: "The Bible tells us to love our neighbors, and also to love our enemies; probably because generally they are the same people" (Chesterton 1910).

Dialogic and transgressive genre features are involved also because one of the victims, Dan Nişici, would write seemingly fantastic stories about some collective entities named "goblin" creatures, in fact coded references to the murderers. Another key topic is collective crime, alluding to specific traits of communist and post-communist societal trauma. Therefore, mystery solving is just one stage in reading Berceanu's novel as it further prompts towards the critique of superstructures mentioned before and towards community-shaping issues.

3.3. Crime Fiction – The Playhouse of Language

3.3.1. *English as Means of Going Global*

Apart from transgressing well-known conventions of the genre, recent Romanian crime fictions also trespass linguistic borders and aim for transnational markets or at least linguistic play that involves transcultural suggestions. Two very different but relevant cases for this direction are represented by Alex Leo Şerban, author of *The Parlayed Letter*, and Eugen Ovidiu Chirovici, *The Mirror Room* (2016). Both are written in English by Romanian authors. However, *The Parlayed Letter* was only published in Romanian translation (*Litera din scrisoarea misterioasă*, 2011), while Chirovici's novel became an international best-seller through its circulation in English. Before that, the author had published several crime and mystery novels in Romanian. *The Mirror Room's* trajectory was unpredictable, and its details became quite famous as well since it had been rejected by several editors before it was finally singled out by a small publishing house in the United Kingdom and recommended to important stakeholders in the field. Chirovici's setting and characters are all-American, with each part of the novel "coordinated" by another narrator, whose name is also the title of the section: Peter Katz, John Keller, and Roy Freeman all approach a murder mystery from different angles, making the story embrace

both the private eye perspective and the police investigation procedures. A literary agent, a writer and a retired police officer try to learn the truth about the murder of a university professor named Joseph Wieder. The fictional world is shaped here rather by literary and television references while also engaging in resurfacing the American critique of psychiatric and investigation procedures and their limitations, based on the author's research and literary interest in American culture rather than on direct experience.

3.3.2. *Intertextuality and Other Postmodern Tools*

Another significant mode of transgression, though widely practised before, involves the use of extensive intertextuality. In Alex Leo Serban's *The Parlayed Letter*, the characters are the world-famous writers Jorge Luis Borges and Fernando Pessoa. They are involved in clarifying the enigma of a conman named Franz Osberg. Mr. Franz is tracked by Interpol for various crimes such as using false identities and dealing in art forgeries. Osberg is obviously one of his false identities, and an experienced reader can easily guess that. Borges and Pessoa are trying to defend this apparently vile character, and one can promptly figure out why: Osberg is the famous anagram that Vladimir Nabokov used in order to mock Borges. At the same time, the author creates identities for the Interpol agents using parts of Borges' name. The entire story prompts the reader to reflect on typical postmodern issues such as the ontological framing of the narrative, the intertwining of reality and fiction, the topic of identity, and questioning the notion of guilt in relation to all elements of existence. This micro-novel can be placed under the category of "self-voiding fiction" postulated by Brian McHale in his seminal work *Postmodernist Fiction* (1987) since in the end no hermeneutical path or conclusion seems to stand. "Self-erasure" and "flickering worlds" in postmodern literature have been referred to as pointing to "an irresolvable paradox of the world *outside* the character's mind" (McHale 2004, 101); furthermore, "[n]arrated events, then, can be un-narrated, placed *sous rature*; and, in much the same way, projected *existents* – locales, objects, characters, and so on – can have their existence revoked" (McHale 2004, 103). In Leo Serban's novel, the characters of Borges and Pessoa are represented as not very interested in each another and having difficulties in finding anything to communicate, a view which casts a different light on writers belonging to the same spiritual family. Literary affinity is portrayed as triggering lack of interpersonal dynamics in "real life". The main motifs of the novel also revolve around references to Poe's famous stories, not only the *Purloined Letter* that has already been referenced in the book's reception but also alluding to *Tell-Tale Heart* and *The Imp of the Perverse*. Serban and Chirovici elude the local or national dimension of the work by plunging directly into another language and transnational cultural horizons. Both writers share the

taste for referencing international classics of the crime fiction genre, thus pairing their novels to world literature trajectories.

Chirovici explains his beliefs about the value, hierarchy, and genealogy of his work and of crime fiction viewed *in extenso* by explicitly linking mystery stories to canonized literary works and norms:

Well, you might say that my book is a whodunit, a crime novel. But I would say that it's a whydunit. I have always thought that after three hundred pages the reader should get something more than just who killed Jane or John. I have also always thought that a writer should aspire to discover the magic land of good stories that are literary at the same time. A so-called crime novel should be as stylish as a literary novel—please be so kind as to read *The Long Good-bye* by Raymond Chandler or *Who Killed Palomino Molero* by Mario Vargas Llosa or *The Pledge* by Friedrich Dürrenmatt. (Chirovici 2016)

3.4. A Different Web of Interests

Mihaela Apetrei employs a different thematic thread, drawing more from American patterns of the serial killer and *gastro-noir* elements. The plot is set in Bucharest, but its development reveals various transnational elements shaping transcultural readership. The main character, named Murki, is a cuisine aficionado inviting random guests to eccentric dinners using Facebook. He is also an art critic and curator who brings and exhibits in Romania Brueghel's *Allegories of the Senses*. His choice reflects a deviant philosophy of senses, and thus the novel also becomes an *ekphrastic* text, to some extent. The murder mystery occurs as Murki's dinner guests die one after another, and the detective plot only seems to accumulate details in order to reveal his guilt. The protagonist is referred to in relation to childhood psychological trauma (his emotions fade away after the death of a kindergarten girlfriend depicted as an angelic child, just as a typical Renaissance image), and the narrator explains how the purpose of the dinner invitations is in fact a theft of energy and "vibration" from his guests, according to principles of traditional Chinese medicine and philosophy. These eccentricities single him out as a probable murderer, especially since he is closely watched by a neighbour, an elderly lady named Sophie, described by the narrator, the main character and herself as a paragon of the "unofficial detective" or private eye similar to Melania Lupu, a famous protagonist of Rodica Ojog-Braşoveanu's popular crime novels. However, the red herring technique is subtly used by Apetrei, and the clues are later on proved to be false. While other contemporary Romanian crime novels resort to using peripheries or remainders of the socialist regime as environments for crime, Mihaela Apetrei's novel casts the characters into a decadent aristocratic

web of interests such as exquisite art, medicine, and cuisine not at all typical for the national literature or for the popular culture of the recent years.

The detective plot initially seems to have the only function to catch up and intersect the crime timeline but is gradually developed into an independent story focusing on the policemen Marc Aureliu (the name of the stoic Roman emperor is referenced with irony) and Doina, a witty and unwavering detective, the latter having gained much popularity among the readers.

3.5. Thematic Anthologies

Another trend in reinterpreting seriality is represented by collective volumes of short stories revolving around a given topic, therefore commissioned by the editor. Tritonic Publishing House has developed this practice, having already reached more than five such anthologies. The writers featured are often well-established crime fiction authors such as Bogdan Hrib, Teodora Matei, or Petru Berceanu. They possibly reflect to the highest extent the mixture of “vernacular and cosmopolitan” (Nilsson et al. 2017, 125) as their horizons are determined by the choice of topics and by the spatial turn: *Bucharest Noir*, *Timișoara Noir*, *GastroNoir*, *Domino 1* and *2* reunite “glocal” features as well as bringing together large numbers of the contemporary Romanian crime fiction writers. They would be best suited for analysis in the context outlined by “crime fiction as a discursive field – a network consisting of elements and nodal points that connect and build on each other. The nodal points forming this discursive field can include subgenres, iconic works, authors, and domestic literature” (Nilsson et al. 2017, 111).

4. An Attempt to Conclude

In her study on the poetics of detective stories, Daniela Zeca argues that one of the rules of the game is “to provide the reader with readily graspable interpretive approaches” (Zeca 2005, 198). However, recent crime fiction proves that this is no longer the case or at least that authors no longer seem to find this type of poetics mandatory. Even when they do recycle elements of the classic works, they do so with a “disruptive” outcome, as the selection of novels discussed above demonstrates. The “interpretive links” are also intertextual in each of the contemporary novels mentioned here, and this can be easily followed by analysing another tool that can be found in almost all of them: the mottos and quotations set as chapter markers, which often provide literary journeys to other genres (see the Chesterton quotation example mentioned above).

Although mostly part of just the national range of literature (with the notable exception of Chirovici among the authors the article referred to), Romanian crime

stories emerge as connective elements that not only surpass internal conventions of the genre and open gates to other types of poetics but also transcend local topics and representations and could make for a potential interesting transnational diffusion phenomenon, granted the proper translation and marketing strategies. They displace common clichés in the reception of crime fiction by using transgressive strategies which strongly impact the bridges between crime fiction and canonized literary production as well as the active channels between Romanian literature and European or world literature.

Works Cited

- Apetrei, Mihaela. 2018. *Cină cu ficat și inimă* [Liver and Heart for Dinner]. Bucharest: Editura Trei.
- Arion, George. 2010. "Atac în bibliotecă. Cât de mare poate fi o literatură mică?" ["Attack in the Library. How Great Can a Small Literature Be?"]. *Dilema Veche* no. 336 (July): 22–28. <https://dilemaveche.ro/sectiune/tema-saptamanii/articol/atac-in-biblioteca> (Last accessed 10 March 2019).
- Auden, W. H. 1948. *The Guilty Vicarage*. <https://harpers.org/archive/1948/05/the-guilty-vicarage/> (Last accessed 29 August 2019).
- Berteanu, Petru. 2016. *Cumsecade* [Neighbourly]. Bucharest: Tritonic.
- Blandford, Jon. 2015. "Stephen Burroughs, Serial Offender: Formula and Fraud in Early US Crime Fiction." In *Serial Crime Fiction: Dying for More*, eds. Anderson, Joan, Carolina Miranda, and Barbara Pezzotti, 11–20. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Booth, Wayne C. 1983. *The Rhetoric of Fiction*. Second Edition. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press.
- Călinescu, Matei. 2003. "Adventures of Misreading: Borges' 'Death and the Compass,' a commentary." *Literary Research/Recherche littéraire* vol. 20, no. 39–40: 247–257. http://epe.lac-bac.gc.ca/100/201/300/literary_research-ef/no39-40/articles/articles13.html (Last accessed 21 August 2019).
- Chesterton, Gilbert K. 1910. *Illustrated London News*. <https://www.chesterton.org/quotations-of-g-k-chesterton/> (Last accessed 6 August 2019).
- Chirovici, Eugen Ovidiu. 2016. Personal blog: www.chirovici.com (Last accessed: 4 April 2019).
2017. *Cartea oglinzilor* [The Mirror Book]. Bucharest: RAO.
- Dobrescu, Caius. 2017. *Moarte în ținutul secuilor* [Death in Szeklerland]. Bucharest: Crime Scene Press.
- 2018a. *Praf în ochi* [Dust]. Bucharest: Crime Scene Press.
- 2018b. *Recviem pentru nimeni* [Requiem for Nobody]. Bucharest: Crime Scene Press.

- Eco, Umberto. 1984. *The Role of the Reader. Explorations in the Semiotics of Texts*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Letourneux, Matthieu. 2017. *Fictions à la chaîne. Littératures sérielles et culture médiatique* [Serial Fiction. Serial Literature and Media Culture]. Paris: Éditions du Seuil.
- McHale, Brian. 2004 [1987]. *Postmodernist Fiction*. London, New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis e-Library.
- Nilsson, Louise, David Damrosch, and Theo D'haen. 2017. *Crime Fiction as World Literature*. New York: Bloomsbury.
- Rérat, Lionel. 2018. "Book chronicle for Matthieu Letourneux, fictions à la chaîne. Littératures sérielles et culture médiatique." *Genesis* no. 46 (June). <http://journals.openedition.org/genesis/2774> (Last accessed: 2 April 2019)
- Șerban, Alex Leo. 2011. *Litera din scrisoarea misterioasă* [The Parlayed Letter.] Trans. Antoaneta Ralian. Iași: Polirom.
- Zeca, Daniela. 2005. *Melonul domnului comisar. Repere într-o nouă poetică a romanului polițist clasic* [Mr. Inspector's Trench Coat. Reference Points for a New Poetics of the Detective Novel]. Bucharest: Curtea Veche.



Nonlinearism: The Paradigm That Replaced Postmodernism. On the Materials of Song Poetry and Cyberliterature

Vitaliy A. GAVRIKOV

Bryansk branch of The Russian Presidential Academy of National Economy and
Public Administration under the President of the Russian Federation
(Bryansk, Russian Federation)
yarosvettt@mail.ru

Abstract. This article is an attempt to delineate a new paradigm in the literary arts (including print literature and song poetry). According to the author's hypothesis, this paradigm cannot be attributed simply to the onset of "digital culture." The primary reason for the emergence of the new paradigm is the transition from the modernist-postmodernist text to the non-linear text. The transition began in print literature, continued in song poetry, and found its ultimate expression in cyberliterature. The second reason was a change in the artistic paradigm. According to Roland Barthes, in literature, the era of authorial intent (with the author's mind as the focus) had given way to the period of textuality before reception (which focused on consciousness) became dominant. In this article, the author hypothesizes that at the end of the twentieth century the active postmodernist reception of literary texts was replaced by interactive nonlinear reception.

Keywords: nonlinearism, postmodernism, creative paradigms, song poetry, cyberliterature

Bob Dylan and the Revolution of Academic Consciousness

Literature is defined as a form of artistic activity connected with writing. However, creative literary production is not limited to print literature but also includes song poetry, which until recently was considered marginal; not quite literature. Thus, in English and German studies, rock-and-roll and other types of songs are often approached from cultural, sociological, historical, and other perspectives. However, purely literary scholars have been wary of this object of study. Perhaps

only the works of The Beatles and Bob Dylan have an established tradition as the object of literary study (Khumichev 2014, 7).¹

In modern Russian academia, the situation is different. Song poetry is studied primarily from the position of literary scholarship. In the USSR, it was uncommon to write about rock-and-roll (rock poetry), and what was written about the genre was consistently negative. The situation changed after 1991. Some 150 theses, dealing with various aspects of rock-n-roll, have been defended in Russia in the 25 years since the fall of the Soviet system.² Most of them are philological. Although I have not counted the theses devoted to guitar poetry (bard songs), the number should be comparable due to its lesser marginality. As of 2018, about 40 theses (predominately philological) deal with the works of Vladimir Vysotsky alone.

Nevertheless, the debate continues as to whether it is appropriate to define songs as poetry. There are many examples of instances when the written text of a song is considerably worse than its performed equivalent. In other words, not every hit song can be considered poetry. Indeed, every intermedial text of a song consists of at least three aesthetic components: poetry, vocals, and music. The latter can be divided into melody and rhythm. It goes without saying that rhythm alone is capable of creating powerful emotional energy, and so even a song with poorly written lyrics can provide a significant amount of aesthetic pleasure if the music or vocals are powerful enough. How can then one distinguish between “good song poetry” and “bad song poetry” in that case?

A large number of rock songs are not poetry simply because the authors do not aspire to create works of literature. Quite often they are musical compositions without lyrics or with a minimal amount of words. For example, the tracks “Larks’ Tongues in Aspic: Part One” and “Larks’ Tongues in Aspic: Part Two” on the album “Larks’ Tongues in Aspic” by the band King Crimson do not contain verbal texts. There is no doubt that these compositions should be considered rock-art, and they are often included in the collections of legendary rock songs, yet they are not poetic texts.

Sceptics who insist that songs cannot be studied with the use of literary theory frequently argue that what is considered song poetry does not resemble poetry when it is transferred to the written page; it is a collection of phrases without the traditional poetic artistry, structure, or coherence, and sometimes, as it was noted, there is no verbal text. They also contend that a song is inseparable from music and voice, so it cannot be analysed using the tools of literary theory. Indeed, literary theory was created in order to analyse written texts. A scholar may study a song’s words on paper, but it is not the same as analysing the recorded version of song poetry.

1 Translations of quotes from Russian specialist literature are my own throughout the article.

2 See my study presenting the list of these works (Gavrikov 2013).

In response to these general challenges, one can argue that literary study has considerable experience in working with oral sources such as folklore. This experience can be used to analyse songs. Furthermore, literary scholars can carry out interdisciplinary research together with musical experts, art historians, and researchers from other fields. Finally, it is possible to develop a research apparatus for the analysis of song texts on the basis of literary study, and such methods are being actively developed in this field.

As for the quality of the poems sung, the impact on the recipient (first and foremost, on the professional, educated one) appears to be virtually the only criterion for artistic value today as all other criteria have been discredited by Antoine Compagnon (1998). On the whole, despite some resistance from traditional literary scholars, academic scepticism towards song poetry as an important branch of contemporary literature is gradually weakening.

Bob Dylan's 2016 Nobel Prize was a landmark event for scholars of song poetry. Finally, the Nobel Committee was ready to confer official recognition upon singing poets. This event will surely shake the scepticism of the academic literary establishment in regard to song poetry. Moreover, it could be the beginning of a long journey towards the equality of the two lyrical branches.

Manifestation Paradigms in Poetry

Manifestation (or explication) is the material means of expression (generation) of the verbal text. This term is not associated with literature, genres, artistic eras... Manifestation is a technical aspect of verbal art determined by its material medium. Below we shall attempt to summarize the various manifestation paradigms that have existed throughout history.

An ancient literary text consisted of oral, mimetic, kinetic, and other elements that were recorded only in the mind of the singer/narrator. The medium of the literary text was the body of its performer. A discrete literary work in all its uniqueness did not leave behind any material traces: "This syncretic complex does not exist in between performances; each time it is reconstructed anew according to certain rules in accordance with specific conceptions and norms" (Chistov 1986, 129). Thus, even though such singers/narrators attempted to perform texts they had learned, they inevitably created new versions of the texts. "This 'verbal variability' is one of the key characteristics of oral tradition and although it is not a definitive criterion capable of distinguishing oral from written tradition, it can be helpful in shifting the probability of a tradition's origins in one direction or another" (Mournet 2003, 180).

Subsequently, with the development of writing and due to the transition to a consciousness of a new type (reflective), the original synthesis of the arts is

dissolved. The expressive arrays, once inseparable from one another, become autonomous. The arts that are familiar to us today, such as painting, literature, music, and dance, appear. In short, a literary text noticeably changes its status as a signifier. However, “the oral culture does not immediately disappear by the mere fact of its being in contact with writing, nor does the literature of the oral society disappear because of the introduction of written literature. Rather, a synthesis takes place in which characteristics of the oral culture survive and are absorbed, assimilated, extended, and even reorganized within a new cultural experience” (Obiechina 1992, 197).

There was a particularly important change in the field of literature: with the appearance of the written language, the recipient acquired the unprecedented ability to return repeatedly to the source text in its unchanged original form. As Boris V. Tomashevsky states: “A literary work has two properties: 1) independence from the accidental everyday conditions of utterance and 2) the fixed immutability of the text. Literature is self-contained fixed speech” (1996, 23). It should be emphasized that Tomashevsky does not raise the question of readers’ interpretations but rather that of the stability and invariability of the written text although it is clear that for every reader a literary work has a separate individual meaning. Each era and culture will discover new meaning in a literary work. Stanley Fish notes: “meanings are the property neither of fixed and stable texts nor of free and independent readers but of interpretive communities that are responsible both for the shape of a reader’s activities and for the texts those activities produce” (1980, 322). The primary focus here is the fixation of literary art in a tangible medium, rather than reception or intention. The second stage in the development of literary art gave it permanence, but only printed texts became fixed. Intermedial semiotic complexes containing elements of motion and sound (singing, music, dance, etc.) remained unfixed as audio and video recording had yet to come into existence.

Roughly a century ago, owing to technical progress, it became possible to record audiovisual texts. The widespread distribution of sound-recording equipment in the 1950s and 1960s led to a tectonic shift in literary oral expression. The dawn of this “new era” in oral artistic expression did not stem from the mass audience for records but rather from the wide accessibility of audio-recording. Thus, a “new literature” appeared; a new kind of artistic intermedial text that combines folkloric orality with the permanence of printed (written) literature. Moreover, this development was integrated into the history of traditional literature “on paper.” As a rule, there is no third type of explication in the scholarship. Researchers treat either literature in the oral (folkloric) or preliterate stage or in the “print” stage or the cybernetic stage.

The third paradigm of interpretation of the literary text appeared with the transition to a digital culture: “Somewhere in the late 1990s or early 2000s,

the emergence of new technologies re-structured, violently and forever, the nature of the author, the reader and the text, and the relationships between them” (Kirby 2006, 35). This new era has not received a conventional name yet. “Digimodernism” is one of the most successful terms (Kirby 2009). But its originator Alan Kirby views this paradigm from a different point of view than the author of the current article. First, digimodernism applies to far more than literature, and this study deals only with the literary process. Second, in the current study, my focus is on the technological aspect of the question and not its other characteristics such as creative thought or the semantic particularities of individual utterances. There are some other terms denoting the end of postmodernism: altermodern, hypermodernism, performatism, automodernism, and others (Osipova and Yungblud 1992). Thus, today there are many concepts dedicated to understanding the latest cybertextual discourse. Such pluralism of opinions is clear: the new paradigm has generated an unprecedented shift in the field of the language arts and media.

There is one more productive term, “digitalism.” For example, Laurențiu Malomfălean says, “cybertext is a transition between hypertext and digitext or, in more words, a paper text translated into digital form, but without any digital qualification.” The author further says, “if hypertext remains on paper and cybertext remains the virtual form of a paper-written text (or the virtual reality put on paper), we now can define digitext as a writable, operable and performable text only in a digital medium, inconvertible to a paper support” (Malomfălean 2019). However, in our view, it would be better to use the term “cybertext” as it absorbs two concepts (a computer text and a digitext) in the above mentioned meanings.

Thus, literature has moved to a new format technically, too, and changing technologies for the creation and transmission of a literary text modify the “generation of meanings,” as well, and literary “digitalism” should be integrated into a series of creative paradigms.

Creative Paradigms as the Interrelation of Intentions, Textuality, and Referentiality

There are several views on the development of literature. In this context, it is interesting to view them as the interplay of intentions, textuality, and referentiality. Roland Barthes considers several successive strategies used by authors in his article “Death of the Author.” He associates archaic literature with the lack of authorship as the works are created by anonymous narrators. The author appears in the modern period and assumes a central role under positivism. Then the language itself becomes the central category, acting, “performing,” getting aware

of the subject, but not the person. This change in the point of view (research focus) occurs in the period of the formation of modernism (Barthes 1967).

A more detailed concept is offered by Valery I. Tyupa (1997), who begins his research of “paradigms of artistry” not with the ancient syncretism but with “reflective traditionalism.” At this stage of development, genre is the central idea of art: a work is considered good if it fits into the generic canon. The second stage is “post-classicism.” At this stage, the “text is only an imprint of the author’s inspiration”, with the author’s consciousness at the centre. Nevertheless, the role of the reader as a subject capable of empathy with the author is also important. The third paradigm is “romanticism.” The author’s position is strengthened; he is viewed as a genius, able to create something that others cannot. The author’s style becomes the central focus. The reader is thought of as the author’s partner in the artistic game. The fourth paradigm is “post-romanticism,” which makes verisimilitude the central criterion of artistry. The author is seen as a “historian of the present” (Balzac), who understands the underlying nature of things. The fifth paradigm is “post-symbolism,” in which the perceiving consciousness assumes the central role, and artistry, first and foremost, is connected with the recipient’s response. The key phrase here is “the creative object is relocated into the consciousness of the addressee” (Tyupa 1997). Therefore, it becomes apparent that both scholars are generally talking about the same thing, about the changing relationship in the triumvirate “author – text – reader,” with the lone exception that Tyupa operates with one more element – the relationship to reality, i.e. referentiality.

With all their differences, modernism and postmodernism are united in the most essential thing, in the ratio of the key categories. The main thing here is that both modernism and postmodernism focus on the perceptive consciousness of the reader. However, the position of the recipient is active rather than interactive. The reader “recreates” another’s text but only in the sense that he generates it as an interpretation. Modernist and postmodernist texts develop in a linear projection, though they have a plurality of individual interpretations or a different focalization (several points of view on a single event).

Thus, it is reasonable to talk about the transition to a new creative paradigm. Now it is not only a new way of structuring a literary work but a new kind of interrelations among the representatives of the triad: “author – text – reader.” For the first time in history, the author does not supply the reader with a finished text: he provides only the “details,” and the reader’s function is to assemble the device. Only then can this “device” be put into use, i.e. the work can be interpreted. Under this new paradigm, the question is raised: what is primary – the new text or its new reception? At present, it is difficult to answer this question. Perhaps it is precisely the increased focus on reception that has led to experimentation in textuality. On the other hand, however, even the Bible can

be seen as a nonlinear text both due to such factors as the use of footnotes or concordances and the variability of the four Gospels. Perhaps, this new paradigm could be called interreceptivism (from “interactive reception”) rather than nonlinearism. However, if song poetry is to be included in the paradigm, the term “nonlinearism” would seem to be preferable.

As we have seen, the new paradigm did not arise overnight. Nonlinearist (nonlinear) works began to appear during the postmodern period. The development of intermedial literature allowed nonlinearism to flourish. Then, with the transition to the “digital age,” a new paradigm came into being. Thus, cyberliterature (or “digiliterature”) is only one manifestation of this new mechanism for the generation of texts.

Forms of Nonlinearity in Verbal Art: Variability

In 2011, the author’s theoretical monograph *Русская песенная поэзия XX века как текст* [Russian Song Poetry of the Twentieth Century as a Text] explored the difference between song poetry and print literature (Gavrikov 2011). One of the primary differences between these two types of verbal art is variability. I draw a distinction between the concepts of the song (hereafter referred to as “the work”) and the text (a specific audio- or video-recording). The work is a supertext, the sum of all its specific manifestations (explications). Each of the texts are, at the same time, included in one or another cyclic context: an album, concert, etc. Thus, while on the one hand, each subsequent performance of the same song seems to supersede the previous ones (classical textual studies), on the other hand, a specific audio-recording is inextricably bound to the structure of its cycle. It turns out that even an early version of a song cannot be nullified by a later one, much as the early albums of a music group are not rendered obsolete by their later albums. But this is simply one aspect of the variable nonlinearity of song poetry. In Russian-language philology, this phenomenon is referred to as “вариантообразование” (“generation of variants”).

Another aspect of variability can be seen in the Russian song poetry of the past quarter century, in which we find variations of the same song that have radically different meanings. Thus, we are faced with two text-homonyms: they sound identical but carry different meanings. This is not a frequent occurrence, but it significantly changes our understanding of verbal art. A supertext usually has one conceptual meaning – a single invariant. But sometimes we find two “general lines,” two “meanings” within a single work. This process can be called “инвариантообразование” (“the generation of invariants”). However, the term “reinterpretation” may be more familiar to an English-speaking reader. This is not simply the reworking of the original conception, but the creation of

a new meaning based on the previous one. Let us turn to some examples of “the generation of invariants.”

The rock-poet Egor Letov almost never included his early songs in his later albums. The lone exception is the song “Снаружи всех измерений” [Outside of All Dimensions], which first appeared on the album “Поганая молодежь” [Rotten Youth] (1985). Letov sang it again in the cycle “Зачем снятся сны” [Why Do We Dream Dreams] (2007). The early version is primarily different from the later one in the status of the lyric hero. In the first version, he is a dead man, whereas in the second he is a “psychonaut,” a man traveling through multiple realities by means of shamanistic, narcotic experiences.

In early Letov, the lyric hero is generally characterized in terms of death: “Blood is gushing from his throat/His whole body has turned into rain” (“He смешно” [Not funny]); “The snow will close our eyes,” “We will leave this house/We will freeze and fall asleep” (“Мама, мама...” [Mum, mum...]); “We are under a layer of frozen earth” (“На наших глазах” [Before our eyes]); “I got up and found that I was dead” (“Кто ищет смысл” [Who is seeking the meaning]), etc. The lyric hero in Letov’s later works, in contrast, is in a state not of death but of “the ebullient motion of the sparkling mind” (“Калейдоскоп” [Kaleidoscope]). While still alive, he has achieved insight into certain mysteries through an altered state of consciousness. The song “Слава психонавтам” [Glory to Psychonauts] is a hymn to the “new alchemy”: “This is our chemical home/For the sad inhabitants of the Earth.” The album contains slang terms used by drug users. Moreover, Letov mentions his drug experiences in interviews from this period.

The truncation of one of the means of expression (the words, the music) can significantly change the meaning of a musical composition. For example, Pyotr Mamonov’s “Спиритизм” [Spiritism] (a track from the album “Транснадежность” [Transreliability] 1991) loses its verbal subtext in the album “I collected some good songs on one CD” (2000).

Sometimes authors combine two songs into one. Clearly, such a “hybrid” is not the equivalent of either of its prototexts. The bard Vladimir Vysotsky went even further, often combining several songs into a single unit sung without pauses. Such potpourris were composed of thematically similar songs. These medleys could consist of full-length versions of shorter works and of fragments of longer works. For example, when Vysotsky sang six war-themed songs without pause at a concert on 27 March 1980 (Moscow, Cultural Centre “Commune”), he performed two of them in full, two verses each of three other songs, and one verse of one song. Such a megatext is not a chaotic heap of fragments. A potpourri has its own logic in semantic dynamics. It is a piece with a complex plot composed of episodes from different songs.

There are occasions when it is enough to change one keyword to substantially transform the meaning of a song, resulting in a chain reaction across the whole

piece. For example, the first line of Bashlachev's song "There is no one to break the birch" reads as follows: "Take away the copper pipes." This is a well-known image, referring to the triad: "water, fire and copper pipes," the passing through of which signifies overcoming great difficulties. When performed at the Fifth Annual Festival of the Leningrad Rock Club in June 1987, Bashlachev sang "Take away the copper corpses." In the Russian language, the words "pipes" and "corpses" sound almost identical, and only attentive listeners will notice the difference. Yet the difference is significant!

Originally, the song was called "Windows to Europe", and it was built upon the opposition of the West and Russia. However, by the late 80s in Soviet rock circles, it was seen as bad taste to criticize Western civilization because communist ideology had proven untenable. At precisely that time, rock in the Soviet Union underwent its counter-cultural phase, characterized by the rock poets' open struggle with the Soviet political system. This struggle is reflected in this altered line of Bashlachev's song. The copper corpses are monuments to Soviet leaders. Thus, this image in the first line alters the entire meaning of the song. If originally it was concerned with the deep contradictions between the West and Russia, now the song focuses on the divisions within Soviet society into "them" (the Soviet élite) and "us." Thus, by changing one letter ('b' to 'p'), Bashlachev achieves a radical change in the meaning of the song. Meaning can also be transformed through intonation. Sometimes the manner of performance (e.g. mocking, substandard) turns the song from serious to humorous. There are several examples of Vysotsky's performance of initially serious songs in a travesterial (clownish) manner. The verbal text is not changed, but the song's sense is inverted by the distortion in the vocals (antics).

There are other ways of reinterpreting songs. Artists covering other artists' songs frequently rework the pieces they perform. Moreover, there are many cases where musicians insert someone else's song into their own albums. Thus, someone else's material is adapted not only to the voice and music of another artist, but it is also used in the context of another's album. It is as if the song becomes part of the conceptual artistic framework of the borrowing author. Of course, the borrowing of complete works is a broad topic and requires a more detailed analysis, which lies outside the scope of the current study.

Thus, many authors are employing a new creative strategy when at the level of the author's consciousness the song does not have a stable text, and, sometimes, a stable semantic invariant. As in folklore, the text is adapted to the situation, in particular, to the performer's mood, to context among other songs, to the audience's reactions, etc.

Types of Nonlinearity in Verbal Art: Verbal Paradigmatics

The second type of nonlinearity in song poetry is “verbal paradigmatics” (a term coined by the author of this article). The concept of “paradigmatics” has been borrowed from linguistics, bearing in mind that whereas syntagmatics implies horizontal movement, paradigmatics implies vertical movement. “Verbal paradigmatics” is a property of an audio text to form two or more print versions. The simplest example of “verbal paradigmatics” is homophonia. Singing poets have learned to use this duality as a “literary device,” and sometimes this duality arises spontaneously. For example, in the song “Purple Haze” by Jimi Hendrix, we find the phrase: “Excuse me while I kiss the sky”/ “Excuse me while I kiss this guy.” The group “Nirvana” performed a song “Smells Like Teen Spirit” with the variability: “Here we are now, entertainers”/“Here we are now, entertain us.” Moreover, interlingual homophones may arise. The song “What Can I Do” by the group “Smokie” is popular in Russia. Many Russians, however, hear the Russian phrase “водки найду” (“I’ll find some vodka”) in the phrase “What can I do.”

The above are all simply singular examples of a “multilayered” audiotext. I am not familiar enough with English-language song poetry to speak of it as a systematic phenomenon. In Russian songs, however, verbal paradigmatics is a systemic device employed by some authors such as Aleksandr Bashlachev, Aleksandr Kholkin, Dmitry Ozerskiy, or Venya D’Rkin (Aleksandr Litvinov). Verbal paradigmatics is very similar to Japanese kakekotoba but in a different cultural background. It adds “volume,” a “stereoscopic” nature to the text. Two homophones (A/B, C/D) in the song result in four equal variants of paper transcripts, according to the principle:

1. AC
2. AD
3. BC
4. BD

As the number of verbal paradigmatic homophones increases, the variants on paper grow exponentially. Moreover, elements of verbal paradigmatics are not limited to homophones but also include variability of punctuation (commas, quotation marks for titles, quotation marks for direct speech, etc.), syntactic variation (splitting/merging of words and morphemes), variability of register (at the junction of lowercase/uppercase letters), bilingual variability, etc.

It is essential that the authors elicit a dual semantic interpretation based on context. That is to say, this is not a random trick of articulation, it is a conscious aesthetic device. One example of this device can be found in Aleksandr Bashlachev’s song “Name of the Names,” which contains the phrase (“Красно солнышко врежет по почкам”). This line can be translated with at least two English

equivalents: “The red sun will punch people in the kidneys,” or “The red sun will burn the buds on the trees.” Here we find two homonyms and one homophone of register. Let us start with the latter one. In Russia, Prince Vladimir is not referred to with the word “Солнце” but with the affectionate diminutive “Солнышко.” This is difficult to translate into English, but the difference is the same as between “cat” and “kitty.” This affectionate form appears to be the recognizable appellation of the Prince although in theory the same word could be used to denote the sun.

It should be noted that the common translation “Vladimir the Red Sun” is not quite true. Historically, it would be more correct as “Vladimir the Beautiful Sun” since “красный” can mean either “beautiful” or “red.” The first meaning almost never occurs in modern speech. Bashlachev, however, employs the rare archaic form of the adjective (“красно” instead of “красное”), which makes the entire expression archaic. Accordingly, the old meaning “beautiful” is evoked in the listener’s linguistic memory. Nevertheless, the current meaning does not disappear. Finally, in the Russian language, both the words “kidney” and “bud” are denoted as “почка.” The most important thing is that the homophone reveals two homonyms. If not for the Prince in the context, there would be no reason to look for duality in other words.

In the above-mentioned monograph, the author describes one song by Venya D’Rkin that contains more such verbal paradigmatics than poetic lines (Gavrikov 2011, 495–506). Additionally, in my other book (Gavrikov 2015), there is the study of the rock album “Ballad of a Minstrel” by Aleksandr Kholkin, where all the songs are based on the principle of verbal paradigmatics.

The Types of Nonlinearity in Verbal Art: Paper Hypertext and Computer Hypertext

This section will deal with the history of literary hypertext in brief. Perhaps the first written monument built on the principle of hyperlinks is the Bible. There are numerous footnotes that give the reader an opportunity to approach the text nonlinearly. Additionally, any dictionary with a system of internal hyperlinks is also a hypertext.

As for the literary hypertext, the works of James Joyce are often considered its starting point, although elements of nonlinearity can be detected earlier (for example, in the works of Sterne, Cervantes, etc.). Borges with his “The Garden of Forking Paths” (1941) is, of course, another pioneer of hypertexts. One of the first literary hypertexts by Vladimir Nabokov is his novel *Pale Fire* (1962). A year later, one of the most famous literary hypertexts appeared, namely Cortazar’s *Hopscotch* (1963). The first Russian-language hypertext is Andrei Bitov’s novel *Pushkin House* (1971). Although the book reads linearly, its second part is an

alternative version of the first one, as indicated by its title “A Hero of Our Time. A Version and Variant of the Part One.” In Milorad Pavić’s 1984 *Dictionary of the Khazars*, nonlinearity is complicated by the triplicate structure of the work. The author gives three interrelated dictionaries, each of which describes the same event from the point of view of three different religious traditions.

A literary hypertext, wrapped in a computerized shell, first appeared in the United States as the experiment of a linguist. It is ironic, but the first “computer writer,” the creator of the hypertext, has the last name Joyce, only his first name is not James but Michael. His novel *Afternoon, a Story* (1987) was the first computer literary hypertext. The novel unfolded according to the known principle of hyperspace, namely, the reader chose the course of events. The book did not have a paper version. It was produced on floppy disks. It was possible to read it only with the use of a computer. Some critics called Michael Joyce a “new Gutenberg,” who had started a revolution in the history of literature. Today, there are many literary hypertexts, and one can say with certainty that this is only the beginning of a long journey. Possibly, hypertexts will take their worthy place in the history of literature in the future.

Findings: A Nonlinearity Table

Table 1. *The characteristics of the four types of nonlinear texts*

	A	B	C	D	E
		Literary hypertext (paper book)	Multiplicity of variants (song poetry)	Verbal paradigmatics (song poetry)	Cybernetic hypertext (computer literature)
1	Interactivity	+	+/-	+	+
2	Intermediality	-	+	+	+/-
3	Hypertextuality	+	-	-	+
4	Cybertextuality	-	-/+	-/+	+

Cell 1C. Interactivity in song poetry is manifested at concert performances. The number of the albums recorded in the studio by singing poets is much smaller than the number of concerts they perform. The concert is an interactive act although the activity of the recipients is limited. Until recently, it was not customary for Russian “bards” to record albums.

Cells 1C, 2D. Song poetry is an intermedial text because it combines several expressive series: music, articulation (speech component), word (language component). Furthermore, some visual semiotic components: facial expressions, gestures, stage design, performance, etc. are also present in video recordings.

Cell 1D. The interactivity here lies in the choice made by the listener: he can choose the first transcript of the homophone, the second one, or both as the correct variant.

Cell 2E. In modern cyberliterature, visual design elements are frequently used, and they are not just illustrations but visual ways to create intermediality (see Shelley Jackson's *Patchwork Girl* [1995])

Cells 4C, 4D. A recording can be digitized or left on magnetic tape, vinyl record, etc.

Finally, the author of the article does not insist on the terms “nonlinearism” or “interreceptivism.” However, the main feature of future literary discourse will be the nonlinear way in which the text unfolds and the interactivity of its perception. The new paradigm will surely come into force when a consumer of a literary text perceives nonlinear literature organically, not in a rejecting way. It is the Internet that contributes to such a change in reader's/listener's consciousness. For the time being, there is no assurance that this process will be global, and nonlinearism will become a through line of the verbal art. Perhaps, these findings can be applied to other arts and, on the whole, to the modern digital era.

Works Cited

- Barthes, Roland. 1977 [1967]. “The Death of the Author.” In *Image, Music, Text*, trans. Stephen Heath, 142–148. New York: Hill and Wang, 142–148.
- Chistov, Kirill V. 1986. *Народные традиции и фольклор* [Folk Traditions and Folklore]. Leningrad: Nauka.
- Compagnon, Antoine. 1998. *Le Démon de la théorie: Littérature et sens commun*. Paris: Seuil.
- Fish, Stanley. 1980. *Is There a Text in This Class?: The Authority of Interpretive Communities*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Gavrikov, Vitaliy A. 2011. *Русская песенная поэзия XX века как текст* [Russian Song Poetry of the Twentieth Century as a Text]. Bryansk: SRP “VOG”.
2013. “Кого чаще цитируют в российских рок-диссертациях(Библиография для начинающего rockolog)” [“Who Do People Often Quote in the Russian Rock-Dissertations? (The Bibliography for the Beginning Rockolog)”. *The Russian Rock Poetry: Text and Context* vol. 14: 369–386.
2015. Александр Холкин: “Баллада о скоморохе” (*Опыт комплексного исследования*) [Alexander Kholkin: “Ballad of a Minstrel” (An Intermedial Study Experience)]. Bryansk: Bryansk Centre of Scientific and Technological Information.
- Khumichev, Igor V. 2014. *Жанр и мифопоэтическая специфика рок-баллады конца 60-х – 70-х годов XX века (на материале творчества американских и английских рок-групп)* [Genre and Poetic Specificity of the Rock Ballads of the Late 60–70s

- of the Twentieth Century (On the Material of Art by American and English Rock Bands)]. PhD in Philology dissertation, Immanuel Kant Baltic Federal University.
- Kirby, Alan. 2006. The Death of Postmodernism and Beyond. *Philosophy Now* vol. 58: 34–37.
2009. *Digimodernism: How New Technologies Dismantle the Postmodern and Reconfigure our Culture*. New York and London: Continuum.
- Laurențiu, Malomfălean. 2019. “Hypertext. Cybertext. Digitext.” <http://phantasma.lett.ubbcluj.ro/?p=659> (Last accessed 22 March 2019).
- Mournet, Terence C. 2003. *Oral Tradition and Literary Dependency: Variability and Stability in the Synoptic Tradition and Q*. Doctoral thesis, Durham University.
- Obiechina, Emmanuel. 1992. “Narrative Proverbs in the African Novel.” *Oral Tradition* vol. 7, no. 2: 197–230.
- Osipova, Nina O. and Valeriy T Yungblud. 1992. “Постмодернистский синдром: культурный шок или ‘долгое прощание?’” [“Postmodern Syndrome: A Cultural Shock or ‘a Long Goodbye?’”]. *Vestnik VGGU* vol. 9: 11–15.
- Tomashevsky, Boris V. 1996. *Теория литературы* [Literary Theory]. Moscow: Poetics.
- Туупа, Valery I. 1997. “Парадигмы художественности (конспект цикла лекций)” [“The Paradigm of Artistry (Compendium of Lectures)”]. http://old.nsu.ru/education/virtual/discourse34_22.htm (Last accessed 17 September 2019).



“A Multitude of Drops.” David Mitchell’s *Cloud Atlas* and the Subject between Space and Time

Noémi ALBERT

University of Pécs (Hungary)

Institute of English Studies

noemi_albert@yahoo.com

Abstract. David Mitchell’s *Cloud Atlas* (2004) presents its readers with a “borderless world.” This borderlessness concerns space and time, with complex and interweaving spatiotemporal planes. In this fictional world, the subject will serve as an entity that brings together disparate spatialities and temporalities through an intricate symbolic web that connects the subject’s body to the world it inhabits. Numerous versions of past, present, and future run in parallel, the actual and the virtual coexist, and the text folds upon itself. The novel operates a constant state of liminality, a state that will be embodied by the subject. Seemingly in a paradoxical way, the multiple liminal states identifiable in the novel convey the ultimate sense of borderlessness. It is exactly the work’s heterogeneity, its jumps through time and space, its interrupted chapter structure that lend it a special unity and coherence that erases both geographical and temporal borders. The novel’s structure goes into thematic depths and creates a bridge, a constant interplay between form and content, captured in the metaphor of the concertina. Consequently, *Cloud Atlas* creates a constantly shifting world where the only fixed entity is the subject and its comet-shaped birthmark.

Keywords: subject, borderlessness, liminality, concertina, birthmark

Introduction

David Mitchell’s *Cloud Atlas* (2004) operates with a constant state of liminality, which seemingly in a paradoxical way conveys the ultimate sense of borderlessness. It is exactly the work’s heterogeneity, its jumps through time and space, its interrupted chapter structure that lend it a unity and coherence which erases both geographical and temporal borders. The novel spans through several centuries (starting from the 18th to the 22nd century, and a post-apocalyptic

world), guides the readers to disparate parts of the planet (either through jumps or through the characters' strolls), and creates a fictional world that thwarts any considerations of a clear beginning and an end.

The current enterprise proposes to outline the way through which the subject becomes the central entity in Mitchell's novel, one that brings together multiple spatialities and temporalities. The subject accomplishes this, paradoxically, through never being centralized: the entire novel rejects the idea of a single focus through its numerous characters, with no one protagonist, through its structure, through the different temporal and spatial scenes it chooses for the six disparate (and interrupted) chapters. There is no linear narrative, no true beginning and no end, the apocalyptic moment from the book's centre is resolved by a counter-movement in time. Nevertheless, the subject, through the multiple selves comprising it, becomes the titular cloud atlas: a means through which the interconnections can be charted. The selves will show rhizomic connections through an intricate symbolic web, one that connects their bodies, spanning time and space, and creates a link through the comet-shaped birthmark.

The novel's structure goes into thematic depths and creates a bridge, a constant interplay between form and content. This interplay is reflected in the numerous interpretations circling around the structure of six stories. One gradually notices that all interpretations are guided by the very text. The terms applied come from the novel itself, and this way the novel presents us with a double and contradictory gesture: it interprets itself, shows a great amount of metafictionality, and at the same time mocks itself, and ironizes each attempt at deciphering it.

One way to capture the structure and time conception of *Cloud Atlas* would be through the object of the Russian doll, one that appears in two distinct scenes in the novel. In its first appearance, the image of this artefact is in the name of a musical composition created by Vyvyan Ayrs, the reclusive English composer living "in the Belgian backwaters" (Mitchell 2004, 45). His *Matryoshka Doll Variations* alludes to the structure of the entire novel, where the reverse effect is achieved by the stories being embedded in the one following them. Later on, the image of the doll appears in the Luisa Rey-chapter as a clearly formulated theory of time:

One model of time: an infinite matryoshka doll of painted moments, each "shell" (the present) encased inside a nest of "shells" (previous presents) I call the actual past but which we perceive as the virtual past. The doll of "now" likewise encases a nest of presents yet to be, which I call the actual future but which we perceive as the virtual future. (Mitchell 2004, 409)

Isaac Sachs proposes a theory that builds on the dichotomy of actual versus virtual time, shedding light on the paramount importance of memories in shaping one's past. As he writes in his notebook, the actual past event gradually falls

into oblivion; however, the virtual past event, “created from reworked memories, papers, hearsay, fiction – in short, belief – grows ever ‘truer’” (Mitchell 2004, 408). The virtual past indubitably takes over the actual past, and, according to Sachs, it has its influence on one’s present and future. The result is that chance is a constant element in one’s fate, and the multitude of virtual pasts creates a row of possible futures that run side by side.

A further interpretation approaches time as a musical composition: an artwork, a creation that is free, unbridled, and unforeseen. The novel’s central metaphor also appears in the name of Robert Frobisher’s greatest musical composition (*Cloud Atlas Sextet*). This title points both towards temporality (conceived as an atlas of clouds: attempting to chart the fortuitous movement of the clouds) and structure (the sextet reflecting on the six stories that comprise the narrative). Frobisher describes his composition as a “‘sextet for overlapping soloists’: [...] each in its own language of key, scale, and color. In the first set, each solo is interrupted by its successor: in the second, each interruption is recontinued, in order” (Mitchell 2004, 463). This conception about the musical piece harmonizes with the way the six consecutive narrators of Mitchell’s novel take turns to inhabit totally disparate worlds, embodying different personas.

I agree with the interpretation put forth by Peter Childs and James Green that “the image of Mitchell’s novel as a musical composition suggests that each of its narratives should be understood as symphonic movements of a larger whole” (2013, 150). This is visible in the “cacophony of voices” (McCulloch 2012, 16), in the numerous genres, styles, and media through which the different chapters are rendered. This mixture of voices and registers may be understood as “erasing literary and cultural boundaries,” through which we are presented with the “nomadic journey of six interconnected or intratextual narratives,” as Fiona McCulloch remarks (2012, 15). My investigation proposes to outline the novel’s aspiration towards encompassing totally disparate elements, thus creating an amalgam of voices, temporalities and spatialities, which will result in a borderlessness that is both liberating and seemingly chaotic.

Time as a Concertina

In *Cloud Atlas*, everything is interconnected, and thus the novel, through its intricate structure, reflects on the multitude of temporalities and spatialities. Past, present, and future, with both their virtual and actual manifestations, continuously invade each other’s planes, and they comprise a distinct way of understanding the passing of time: they create a fluidity that allows conflicting conceptions of time to exist side by side, gradually revealing the concept of time itself to be a quasi-protagonist to the novel.

Through Timothy Cavendish's story, one can easily follow the stages of different time conceptions as they gradually gain focus in the novel. For instance, the cyclical understanding of time appears to be proposed as a solution to linear time, and hence to history itself. Nevertheless, in "The Ghastly Ordeal of Timothy Cavendish," one can find a rather ironic take on cyclicity. When Cavendish arrives at Aurora House (a nursing home he believes to be a hotel), he is certain that "[i]n the morning life would begin afresh, afresh, afresh. This time round I would do everything right" (Mitchell 2004, 175). But, to use Heather J. Hicks's words, "[i]n a parody of rebirth, when Cavendish awakes, he discovers that he will now be treated as a helpless baby," and his "body becomes a palimpsest of linear and cyclical narratives, both of which can be deployed by the institutional apparatus of the nursing home to deny him agency and to strip his life of meaning" (2016, 65).

Consequently, both linearity and cyclicity are surpassed, and a novel understanding of time is required. For this purpose, I will borrow Fiona McCulloch's term of "space-time compression" (2012, 152) in order to capture time's movement inside the story. Cavendish's story shows how both approaches to time prove deficient, when, upon entering Aurora House, he remarks: "My watch was stuck in the middle of last night" (Mitchell 2004, 171). The measuring of time itself is doomed to failure inside this bubble, and Cavendish realizes: "I was stuck in Aurora House all right. A clock with no hands" (Mitchell 2004, 372), words through which he re-enforces the metaphor of the clock as representative of a new understanding of time.

Cavendish, who starts off from the remark that "Time's Arrow became Time's Boomerang" (Mitchell 2004, 149), after a stroke suffered in a nursing home, revises his theory, claiming: "Time, no arrow, no boomerang, but a concertina" (Mitchell 2004, 369). With both the arrow and the boomerang proving deficient, Cavendish's imagery of the concertina starts to fascinate some of the critics (O'Donnell 2015, 95; De Cristofaro 2018, 247).

The concertina as a metaphor for time requires our closer investigation of the instrument itself. It is made up of "two hexagonal or square wooden end pieces, which carry the reeds and the buttons that control them, [...] linked by folded cardboard bellows" (Montagu 2002, qtd. in De Cristofaro 2018, 249). Time, envisioned as this musical instrument, becomes malleable: at once linear and cyclical, or something completely different from both of these, but it will never be exactly the same as before. As time's boomerang fails to return to the exact starting point, the novel reveals the changes, the mutability of time as its central interest. I agree with Diletta De Cristofaro, who claims that "the concertina as a model of the novel's structure suggests that what goes on between [the beginning and the conclusion] is not the repetition of the same, as in eternal recurrence, but repetition with difference" (2018, 250). With the help of this metaphor, the novel's intricate symbolic web can also be positioned in the new time conception.

Furthermore, De Cristofaro also reflects upon the novel’s claims regarding the apocalyptic narrative:

The concertina-like structure articulates a critical temporality as it resists a telic closure, warps the deterministic linearity of apocalyptic history and of traditional plots, and links the various recurrences of the will to power in the novel, foregrounding the dystopian implications of apocalypticism, from colonialism to the future neo-colonial biopower of corporations and anthropogenic environmental crises. (2018, 247)

She articulates throughout her interpretation the anti-apocalyptic structure of the novel, an observation that might seem paradoxical at first glance, but it is exactly the novel’s structure that allows us this realization. Although the apocalypse as catastrophe is definitely featured in *Cloud Atlas*, it does not signify any kind of ending or closure whatsoever. Despite the post-apocalyptic story of Ha-why (future Hawaii), the structure of the novel thwarts all attempts at closure: the chapters start to gradually unfold again. Furthermore, the existence of each story is facilitated and preserved through characters encountered in the following chapter. Hence the novel transcends the apocalyptic theme and ultimately unravels a different kind of temporality.

Oceans and Clouds

This new compressed time the novel operates with sheds light on identity as a central concept for *Cloud Atlas*. Consequently, the main question around which the present enterprise builds is how the subject is explored by the novel as creating a bridge between disparate spatiotemporal planes. At the end of Adam Ewing’s story, we read the following:

‘He who would do battle with the many-headed hydra of human nature must pay a world of pain & his family must pay it along with him! & only as you gasp your dying breath shall you understand, your life amounted to no more than one drop in a limitless ocean!’

Yet what is any ocean but a multitude of drops? (Mitchell 2004, 529)

The following unit purports to analyse this concept of identity in its numerous manifestations in *Cloud Atlas*. The above quote, which introduces the issue of identity, is a representative one: at first glance, the choice might seem paradoxical since the passage can be found at the very end of the novel, and thus it functions as a conclusion; however, *Cloud Atlas* abandons the linear narrative, and the text

opens up to numerous possibilities in tracing its interconnections. Adam Ewing's chapter is both the first and the last one, a starting point and a return but never really an ending. These final words are tightly connected to the entirety of the novel, and through them one circles back to previously voiced definitions of identity.

The symbol of the ocean is linked to another nature metaphor, namely that of the cloud, which is central to the novel. The image of the cloud atlas highlights the mutability, incomprehensibility, just as Cavendish's lament voices it: "What wouldn't I give now for a never-changing map of the ever-constant ineffable? To possess, as it were, an atlas of clouds" (Mitchell 2004, 389). This metaphor captures and preserves more the individuality inherent in the hectic movement of the clouds. And what further emphasizes the uniqueness pertaining to the phenomenon is an artwork, a musical composition bearing the title *Cloud Atlas Sextet*. The instruments, the sounds stand for the individual characters, leading separate lives in the distinct chapters but also interlinked through a symbolic web.

In a representative scene, Zachry, the main character of "Sloosha's Crossin'," interprets the clouds as the metaphors for souls, while he witnesses his native tribe being slain by the enemy:

I watched clouds awobbly from the floor o' that kayak. Souls cross ages like clouds cross skies, an' tho' a cloud's shape nor hue nor size don't stay the same, it's still a cloud an' so is a soul. Who can say where the cloud's blowed from or who the soul'll be 'morrow? Only Sonmi the east an' the west an' the compass an' the atlas, yay, only the atlas o' clouds. (Mitchell 2004, 324)

His wish echoes that of Timothy Cavendish, and at the same time it reinforces the realization that fate is unknowable, an eternal mystery, but this is ultimately what prompts actions, fights. In an interview, Mitchell himself explains the novel's title, and through it a central motif: "the 'cloud' refers to the ever-changing manifestations of the 'atlas,' which is that fixed human nature, which was always thus and ever shall be" (2007, n.p.). Furthermore, Hywel Dix recognizes in this quote the implication that "islands and civilizations, like people, have life cycles that arise, mature and become obsolescent" (2010, 119), a remark that ties this central symbol back to time as rendered in the novel. However, while Dix emphasizes the finality that lurks in the scene, in the nature of clouds one may recognize the possible futures, too. Clouds reflect souls and their infinite mutability, and thus we can interpret the entire novel as building around the transmigration of souls; however, I agree with Patrick O'Donnell, who claims that this "is to be distinguished [...] from any simple [...] concept of the reincarnation of a singular identity across centuries since the 'migration' inevitably takes place intermittently, sporadically, as the consequence of chance contact or circumstance across multiple identities" (2015, 80).

The text presents several instances when some fragment of consciousness is shared by two very distinct characters. In a first instance, Frobisher, while lying in bed with his lover “[...] dreamt of a ... nightmarish café, brilliantly lit, but underground, with no way out. I’d been dead a long, long time. The waitresses all had the same face. The food was soap, the only drink was cups of lather. The music in the café was’—he wagged an exhausted finger at the MS—‘this’” (Mitchell 2004, 80). This dream represents a milieu where two distant spatiotemporal planes are united through music: through that composition that encompasses the creation of the novel’s world (*Cloud Atlas Sextet*). Frobisher unwittingly dreams about Papa Song’s, the futuristic fast food restaurant, where Sonmi-451 works and imbibes Soap with the other fabricants of Nea So Copros.

In the following chapter, Luisa Rey, who reads Frobisher’s letters written to Rufus Sixsmith, cannot help but feel that there is a deep connection between her and Frobisher: “Luisa has reread Sixsmith’s letters a dozen times or more in the last day and a half. They disturb her. [...] It is [...] the dizzying vividness of the images of places and people that the letters have unlocked. Images so vivid she can only call them memories” (Mitchell 2004, 121). Her sense of connection is further re-enforced when she reads about Frobisher’s birthmark: the same shape as hers. Furthermore, although she only wants to get *Cloud Atlas Sextet* for investigative reasons, when she unwittingly hears the music in the shop, she describes it as “pristine, riverlike, spectral, hypnotic... *intimately familiar*,” and she is convinced that she *knows* that music (Mitchell 2004, 425; emphasis in original). Luisa’s connection to Frobisher is palpable. A final example would be the moment when she receives the last letters of the exchange between Frobisher and Sixsmith, a moment when she asks: “*Are molecules of Zedelghem Chateau, of Robert Frobisher’s hand, dormant in this paper for forty-four years, now swirling in my lungs, in my blood? Who is to say?*” (Mitchell 2004, 453; emphasis in original). All these characters, belonging to very different fictional worlds, are connected, and they share visions and sensations that travel across disparate spatiotemporal planes.

Art, human creation, is the bridge that brings together not only past, present, and future but disparate temporalities and spatialities together with very different identities. As Gerd Bayer remarks, “the novel resorts to music, film, literature, and biography to explain how humanity manages to bridge time through the creation of timeless values” (2015, 348). The different chapters all present us with several artistic manifestations, such as Ewing’s diary, Frobisher’s music, Luisa’s thriller, or Cavendish’s movie, and all these comprise a link through which one artistic expression helps the succeeding character, at times bridging several chapters and worlds. Consequently, I cannot agree with Shanahan’s following remark:

Zachry’s carved icons, the dendroglyphs Adam Ewing stumbles upon, and the people, religions, ideas, technologies, and media forms that repeatedly

go up in flames over centuries in *Cloud Atlas*, even Frobisher's ethereal music, all stand in the end as mere proxies to be seen through on the way to apprehending more permanent because disembodied glimpses of souls as clouds in time. (2016, 139)

Contrary to this view, it seems that these artistic products are the only ones that can really form a strong enough link capable of bridging both actual and virtual temporalities, of bringing together fiction inside the fiction with "mere" fiction, and ultimately creating something lasting. As Bayer claims, "*Cloud Atlas* presents art as existing outside of time, in the very realm traditionally reserved for religion and, later, enlightened science" (2015, 348). Its power and timelessness comes from the fact that "it touches some aspect of [the characters'] humanity" (Brown 2016, 88). The *Cloud Atlas Sextet*, as the central artistic manifestation, is echoed throughout the novel, through several centuries and lives, bringing characters and readers alike to the reassuring rhetorical question: "Yet what is any ocean but a multitude of drops?" (Mitchell 2004, 529).

Comet-Shaped Birthmarks

After detailed considerations of the symbolic web in the novel, I will turn to the most embedded symbol: the comet-shaped birthmark. It is a minor sign that can be found on the body of one particular character from each story. It is first mentioned in Frobisher's letters, who writes to Rufus Sixsmith about his new lover playing with the birthmark (Mitchell 2004, 85). Conversely, Luisa, while reading the correspondence, recognizes the mentioned naevus and tries "to get a clearer view of a birthmark between her shoulder blade and collarbone. [...] it is undeniably shaped like a comet" (Mitchell 2004, 124). Besides these two, the reader will learn about a similarly shaped distinctive mark being on the bodies of Timothy Cavendish, Sonmi-451 and Meronym, the Prescient visitor living in Zachry's home.

This birthmark works together with the novel's temporal conception to bridge characters that otherwise could not have a palpable connection among them. As De Cristofaro claims: "[t]he birthmark engenders a sense of spatiotemporal compression and extension that can be pictured through the contraction and expansion of concertina folds and encapsulates the way in which the teleology of apocalyptic/narrative logic is warped and subverted in the book" (2018, 249). This claim leads to the realization that the novel is constantly open for both contraction and expansion: it is like an ever-changing organism. Consequently, what the birthmark expresses is this ineffable thing that is the world (past, present, future, particular and universal, etc.). Possibly the most accurate grasp of this

duality and fluidity is O’Donnell’s kōan: “everything is always the same; nothing is ever the same” (2015, 70) since, as Berthold Schoene remarks, “humanity is invariably the same, but different” (2009, 119), and the novel represents the whole of humanity. Although the birthmark bears a unifying power on the characters, it also emphasizes their differences and spatiotemporal distances. No homogenizing or centralizing tendencies can be recognized in this concertina-world Mitchell’s novel evokes. I agree with Fiona McCulloch, who claims that the novel rejects the Cartesian identification with a central character, and thus it decentres “the subject in a Braidottian non-linear nomadic resistance to unified self, time or place” (2012, 147). The birthmark ultimately comprises the identity as situated temporally and spatially, at the same time opening up towards and resisting universality.

Cloud Atlas’s comet-shaped birthmark brings together the individual and the universal and reinforces the concertina-like conception of time and space. However, the birthmark’s corporeal significance should not be sidestepped since ultimately the body housing the birthmark will comprise the link between self and world. O’Donnell terms the mark “a vestige or remnant that suggests how the past corporally resurfaces in the present and the future” (2015, 70). Possibly the most evocative instance may be found in Sonmi’s story since she, despite being a fabricated clone, has the same sign as the novel’s other characters. In this case, the sign points towards her inclusion not only in a universal pattern, in the ocean where she is one of the multitude of drops, but in the context of the world she inhabits; the birthmark adorns her with uniqueness, with difference: another clone calls it “Sonmi-451’s stain” (Mitchell 2004, 205). Through this character, the relationship between mind and body is polarized in the novel since the birthmark in the end proves to symbolize her ascension and, through it, a clash between her cloned body and “human”-like intellect: it functions – to use McCulloch’s term – as a “genetic tattoo” (2012, 153) that helps her surpass her clone self and be part of humanity. Nevertheless, to her, the clash is solvable. When at university, a pair of students marvels at her communicative skills:

“It must be hell,” said the second, “to have an intelligent mind trapped in a body genomed for service.”

I had grown as attached to my body as he had to his, I responded. (Mitchell 2004, 232)

The birthmark can function at once as a bridge and divider between body and mind, between the particular and the universal. Sonmi becomes a unique being who is an integral part of the constant mutability of the novel’s world. To cite McCulloch: “Linked by a birthmark, each character charts a journey across time and space,” through which the novel “epitomises this transpositional mobility

through nomadic subjects who interweave the past, present and future of humanity's influence on Earth" (2012, 149).

Bodies, their states, their existences occupy a significant place throughout the novel even if they do not have the symbolic birthmark. To start with, we first get acquainted with Adam Ewing as he catches a man gathering teeth on the beach. The new acquaintance is Henry Goose, who claims: "In days gone by this Arcadian strand was a cannibals' banqueting hall, yes, where the strong engorged themselves on the weak" (Mitchell 2004, 3). This remark perpetuates a powerful principle throughout the novel, namely: "The weak are meat the strong do eat" (Mitchell 2004, 508). Cannibalism, although usually relegated to the distant past and to uncivilized tribes (starting in a similar way through the presentation of the Maori and Moriori tribes), in Mitchell's work gains both actual and symbolic meanings that pervade the entire world of the novel.

The same motif reappears in an accentuated way in the 22nd-century state of Nea So Copros, whose very mechanism requires constant consumption. This is the ultimate capitalist society where Catechism Seven states that "[a] Soul's value is the dollars therein" (Mitchell 2004, 341), and "[u]nder the enrichment laws, consumers have to spend a fixed quota of dollars each month, depending on their strata. Hoarding is an anticorpocratic crime" (Mitchell 2004, 237). So, body and soul in this future world are reduced to mere physicality, and finally they are robbed of this as well. A great part of the society is dying: they inhabit cities and spaces that "reek of waste and sewage" (Mitchell 2004, 331), people there have "skin enflamed by prolonged exposure to the city's scalding rain" (Mitchell 2004, 331), or they are "migrants with enceph or leadlung" (Mitchell 2004, 332). These migrants are in constant search of a liveable land, all in vain. The terrain is poisoned beyond repair: "malaria, flooding, drought, rogue crop genomes, parasites, encroaching deadlands" (Mitchell 2004, 332) paint a picture of a world unstopably approaching utter destruction. This is the ultimate *Untermensch*, destined for death: "Every conurb [...] has a chemical toilet where the city's unwanted human waste disintegrates quietly, but not quite invisibly" (Mitchell 2004, 332). This world represents the epitome of liminal existence, where people are rather dead than alive, where the land is hostile, where the majority of the population lives under abominable circumstances. Hence, consumption, the destruction of the weak is complete through this symbolic representation. However, it is this very same chapter that tackles the issue of actual cannibalism as well, through processing fabricants for food and recycling them for future fabricants and *purebloods* alike.

Liminal Spaces

The birthmark becomes the symbol of the disparateness of the characters but also of their connection. As McCulloch formulates it, “Mitchell’s multi-layered narrative [...] level[s] and equalise[s] the space between through the umbilical birthmark of panhuman relations” (2012, 149). This panhumanism is a powerful motif running through the artwork; however, I cannot agree with McCulloch’s further claim that this gesture would reject “unified individualism” (2012, 149). It is exactly the duality of individualism and universality that is celebrated by the novel, through a birthmark that ultimately does not assume any sort of actual soul crossing but the intricate web of connections among different identities scattered across time and space.

The temporal vistas and intricacies have already been touched upon, but how does space interact with the individual and, more importantly, how does it affect the identity? It is Sonmi-451 who remarks: “I understood one’s environment is a key to one’s identity, but that my environment, Papa Song’s, was a key I had lost” (Mitchell 2004, 238). This quote, beyond signifying the ascension of a clone into knowledge and into the world, with its attendant dangers and her fears, seems to focus on a state gradually gaining more and more ground in Western societies. The place we call home is often lost, supplanted by transitional places, more and more time spent in those *non-places* Marc Augé defines, in a state of nomadism. McCulloch’s remark accurately captures the novel’s gesture when she states: “[b]y transpositioning each section that spans from the 1850s to a post-apocalyptic future, Mitchell resists the territorial fixity of Western hegemony and presents a philosophically nomadic text of border crossings” (2012, 142).

The world as mapped out in Mitchell’s novel could very well be grasped through psychogeography, defined by Guy Debord as “the study of the precise laws and specific effects of the geographical environment, whether consciously organised or not, on the emotions and behaviour of individuals” (2006a, 8). According to this definition, psychogeography captures the effect the environment has on the psyche. Mitchell’s novel consciously employs settings that further deepen the text’s complexity. For instance, the places the characters inhabit serve, on the one hand, as a distinct type of characterization; on the other hand, they themselves get to be characterized by the people through whom we encounter them. What the reader witnesses in the novel is the mutual effect the environment and the subject exert upon each other. Another aspect of their complexity lies in the interconnections the novel abounds in: it seems that although we are dealing with six disparate stories with their own protagonists, all of them scattered across a large spectrum (further sliced by the chapter interruptions), there is nevertheless a pattern discernible, with some repetitive schemas that further

highlight the dualism inherent in *Cloud Atlas*: the dichotomy of the individual and the universal, spiced with a cyclical design.

Possibly one of the most striking examples of such a play can be captured through the island chain of Hawaii, situated in the Pacific Ocean. I believe it cannot be accidental that, although the novel purports to focus on the entire planet, it still resorts to a repetitive pattern in its setting. Hawaii appears in three of the novel's chapters. Chronologically speaking, the first instance would be "The Pacific Journal of Adam Ewing," in which the *Prophetess* transports Adam to Honolulu, where, with the help of Autua, his life is saved from the progressive poisoning by Henry Goose. For him, the island of Oahu serves as a haven, and also as a quasi-resolution to Adam's story and journal. The second instance is presented in the world of 22nd-century Korea, where (and when) clones working in Papa Song's after twelve years of service are promised to be taken to the paradisiacal island of Hawaii. However, as Sonmi-451 realizes, the ship meant to transport the fabricants is nothing more than an abattoir recycling the clones. Finally, the post-apocalyptic tribe of the Valleysmen (Zachry's people) lives on Hawaii, the island that becomes one of the few still inhabited places on Earth, housing peoples reverted to a primordial lifestyle: the result of losing knowledge and memory of essential skills. It seems thus that this particular island is meant to re-enforce hope, to stand for a place that can still function as a haven in a world filled with people with murderous intent, a society that inhabits a rapidly dying world: "Nea So Copros is poisoning itself to death. Its soil is polluted, its rivers lifeless, its air toxloaded, its food supplies riddled with rogue genes" (Mitchell 2004, 341).

Beyond or despite discernible repetitive symbolic patterns enmeshing this fictional world, and seemingly reducing it, it is still borderlessness that characterizes this world. To return to psychogeography, Debord captures in one of its principles the people who just let "themselves be drawn by the attractions of the terrain and the encounters they find there" (2006b, 62). I agree with O'Donnell's observation that the journeys taken by the novel's characters are rhizomic (2015, 6). Beyond the patterns that can be charted subsequent to the novel's ending, there is great emphasis laid on chance and, conversely, on no one paramount centre. The symbolic charge of the title is meant to further emphasize this aspect. Furthermore, we cannot forget about Isaac Sachs's theory concerning virtual and actual temporal planes, whose very existence testifies to the randomness that must be inherent to the world of *Cloud Atlas*. The future each character gets is one of the numerous possible futures laid in store for them. Consequently, this novel proves to be akin to a living organism that constantly shifts and changes, just like the clouds in the sky.

In light of these considerations, Sonmi's previously analysed imagery of the key that she lost, beyond the denotative meaning, also possesses the prospect of

a new world, new sites opening up to her. As McCulloch remarks, “she realises the benefits of nomadically crossing intellectual and physical thresholds in transposing subjectivity beyond the familiar so that she no longer recognises that naive self” (2012, 152). As a result, a constant rapport is created between the self and the surrounding world, this requiring the self to capture “the outside world by making itself receptive to the totality of an assemblage of elements, in an almost geographical or cartographic manner” (Braidotti 2008, 145). Just as Rosi Braidotti’s cartographic approach, the novel’s cloud atlas invites readers to chart and map the complex web interspersing the novel (characters, places, symbols, etc.), but it also reflects upon identity as the ineffable that, nevertheless, one constantly attempts to capture. McCulloch aptly interprets Braidotti’s conception of identity when she claims: “Rather than traditional notions of unified identities, transpositional philosophical nomadism offers resistant subjectivities that are multiple, mutable and decentred, yet simultaneously coherently patterned” (2012, 141).

The comet-shaped birthmark brings not only disparate characters together, creating invisible links among them, but it also enhances the connection between self and the space it inhabits. The distinct selves come together to highlight the interplay between the individual and the entire cosmos, just as it is embodied by Meronym, Zachry’s Prescient visitor: her name denotes “part of something but which is used to refer to the whole of it” (*Oxford Dictionaries*, n.p.). This character, together with the others, contains in miniature the entire world she inhabits; she stands for the environment that is filtered through her body, through her birthmark. She, together with other selves inhabiting different spatiotemporal planes, is both the part and the whole, the individual and the universe.

Conclusions

In lieu of a conclusion, let me return to Adam Ewing’s final words: “Yet what is any ocean but a multitude of drops?” (Mitchell 2004, 529). This question reinforces the formal and thematic complexity of David Mitchell’s *Cloud Atlas*. The novel’s structure, with the interrupted narratives folding upon each other, is closely aligned with the intricate symbols enmeshing these chapters. To use Berthold Schoene’s words, this novel materializes “our consciousness of humanity’s global being-in-common by writing onto the body of his protagonists the mysterious actuality and endurance of history” (2009, 116). It accomplishes this by a constant in-betweenness: emanating both insecurity and a different kind of assurance. The multitude of drops paints the picture of endless stories running in parallel, sometimes overlapping, always coexisting. *Cloud Atlas* paints a world where the virtual takes over the actual, where pasts overwrite each other and several futures coexist, but this world is never chaotic. Through the symbolic

web, with the comet-shaped birthmark in its centre, all possible pasts and futures are filtered through the self. The subject, through the multiple selves, unites all the threads and creates a web where spaces and times can meet.

The subject of *Cloud Atlas* is not one unified entity: it is the multitude of subjectivities, shattered identities that maintain their singularity and also unite in this borderless, endless world. Actual and virtual are interchangeable in this fictional realm, pasts and futures fold upon each other and reveal ever-new narrative threads. The novel consciously does away with all sorts of finality: there is no beginning and no ending, the apocalypse is not the end but a moment, one fold on the concertina. The subject, exactly through the multitude of subjectivities appearing in the novel, unites these spatiotemporal planes, celebrating the coexistence of singularity and multiplicity.

Despite signs of a cyclical conception of time working as a determining mechanism, it is more accurate to build our reading of the novel around the concept of the concertina. This musical instrument opens up the fictional space: it enables the text to juggle several spatiotemporal planes, so much so that the omnipresent comet-shaped birthmark (meant to symbolize a sort of transcendence) can appear on two separate characters with crossing timelines and, going one step further, characters inhabiting different fictional worlds. Furthermore, the concertina gradually becomes a symbol of music and, on a more encompassing level: art itself. Starting from musical compositions as “Eternal Recurrence” (by Vyvyan Ayr) and, more importantly, Frobisher’s *Cloud Atlas Sextet*, music not only reflects on the novel, but it enriches it, complements it, and finally soothes it. With the unavoidable ephemerality, there is also the promise of something surviving: in the music, in the birthmark, in the self.

Works Cited

- Bayer, Gerd. 2015. “Perpetual Apocalypses: David Mitchell’s *Cloud Atlas* and the Absence of Time.” *Critique: Studies in Contemporary Fiction* vol. 56, no. 4: 345–354.
- Braidotti, Rosi. 2008. *Transpositions*. Cambridge: Polity.
- Brown, Kevin. 2016. “Finding Stories to Tell: Metafiction and Narrative in David Mitchell’s *Cloud Atlas*.” *Journal of Language, Literature and Culture* vol. 63, no.1 (April): 77–90.
- Childs, Peter and James Green. 2013. *Aesthetics and Ethics in Twenty-First Century British Novels Zadie Smith, Nadeem Aslam, Hari Kunzru and David Mitchell*. New York: Bloomsbury Academic.

- Debord, Guy. 2006a. “Introduction to a Critique of Urban Geography.” In *Situationist International Anthology*, ed. Ken Knabb, 8–11. Berkeley, CA: Bureau of Public Secrets.
- 2006b. “Theory of the Dérive.” In *Situationist International Anthology*, ed. Ken Knabb, 62–65. Berkeley, CA: Bureau of Public Secrets.
- De Cristofaro, Diletta. 2018. “‘Time, No Arrow, No Boomerang, but a Concertina:’ *Cloud Atlas* and the Anti-Apocalyptic Critical Temporalities of the Contemporary Post-Apocalyptic Novel.” *Critique: Studies in Contemporary Fiction* vol. 59, no. 2: 243–257.
- Dix, Hywel. 2010. *Postmodern Fiction and the Break-Up of Britain*. London: Continuum.
- Hicks, Heather J. 2016. “‘This Time Round:’ David Mitchell’s *Cloud Atlas* and the Apocalyptic Problem of Historicism.” In *The Post-Apocalyptic Novel in the Twenty-First Century. Modernity beyond Salvage*, 55–76. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- McCulloch, Fiona. 2012. “‘Around We Go’: Transpositional Life Cycles in David Mitchell’s *Cloud Atlas*.” In *Cosmopolitanism in Contemporary British Fiction. Imagined Identities*, 141–163. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Mitchell, David. 2004. *Cloud Atlas*. London: Sceptre.
2007. “‘*Cloud Atlas* – David Mitchell.’ Interview by James Naughtie.” *Book Club. BBC Radio 3* June. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b007mdcg> (Last accessed 6 August 2018).
- O’Donnell, Patrick. 2015. *A Temporary Future: The Fiction of David Mitchell*. New York: Bloomsbury.
- Oxford Dictionaries*. 2010. Oxford University Press.
- Schoene, Berthold. 2009. *The Cosmopolitan Novel*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Shanahan, John. 2016. “Digital Transcendentalism in David Mitchell’s *Cloud Atlas*.” *Criticism* vol. 58, no. 1 (Winter): 115–145.



Between Human and Animal

Zsuzsa TAPODI

Sapientia Hungarian University of Transylvania (Cluj-Napoca, Romania)
Department of Human Sciences
tapodizsuzsa@uni.sapientia.ro

Abstract. The traditional way of representing animals was either by a metaphor or by anthropomorphization. In parallel with the slowly growing ecological sensitivity of our times, in contemporary literature, animals are depicted as specific subjects. The study surveys a selection of representative works from world literature and groups them into thematic, motivic groups, tracking the route of animal motifs from the Antiquity to the present, with special focus on a set of Hungarian literary works that deserve a place in the “animal canon” of world literature. The survey is aimed at providing the background against which two contemporary Hungarian novels, Zsolt Láng’s *Bestiarium Transylvaniae IV* and Zsuzsa Selyem’s *Moszkvában esik [It’s Raining in Moscow]* will be discussed. These novels organically grow out of, but also displace, the outlined literary tradition, basing their aesthetics upon the subversive perceptual, narrative potential of the animal subject.

Keywords: human and animal, contemporary Hungarian literature, Animal Turn, hybridization

Introduction. The Example of the Ortolan

Humans are part of the animal kingdom, biological beings who, through their consciousness, actions, and the transforming work of nature, stand out from their environment, yet at the same time have many strains in common with the animal world. The distance between people and animals has been changing from a historical perspective, but the ideology that assumes humans as superior, not responsible for their environment, still defines human cognition to this day. The processes of alienation are counterbalanced by images conveyed by culture, myths, and literature, which illustrate kinship and interdependence in different ways. The animal figure appearing in art and literature alike can represent a metaphor, sometimes a fearsome opponent which shall be overcome, sometimes a fellow companion.

Christian religion separates the “Human” from the animal kingdom as regards its essence (the “Human” is the only being created in the image of God, which is in this case Jesus, saviour of only the humans according to St Paul’s teachings) and its function (God gives power to the people to dominate the nature). This radical separation between the human world and the animal kingdom has been vigorously criticized, corresponding more broadly to the idea of “posthumanism,” which was further developed in the social sciences especially by Claude Lévi-Strauss (the source of this concept is Rousseau’s philosophy). The animist religions (African, Asian, American, etc.), the Chinese religions (Confucianism, Taoism), and especially the Indian religions (Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism) completely integrate the animals and the humans in the same universe, without a break in the continuity (the difference is one of degree, not one of nature), all creatures being endowed with a soul, with the same vital principle (of the same “will to live”, according to philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer). Theories born against the ideology that the human race is superior operate with the concept of animal subject. This is how Zsuzsa Selyem sums up the behaviour of humans towards the animals:

For centuries, the relationship between humans and animals has been determined by a hierarchical, dominance-seeking, double-standard practising and privilege-yielding power propaganda. According to this propaganda, at the top of the pyramid, there sits the rational, well-off, and free white man, who has the lesser responsibility towards the lower levels, and deep down has the possibility to use things at his pleasure. Animals are things (mostly misled by a supernatural pretext, hiding from one’s own insensitive and egocentric point of view). Attitude to this topic hasn’t changed much, but technology, logistics, and the earth’s population have. As a result, animals marked out as nourishment live their short-lived lives in cages tailored to their physique, deprived of all freedom of movement, hormone-treated and with antibiotic-swollen bodies until they are butchered and processed at will in slaughterhouse complexes.¹ (Selyem 2015, 856)

Preparing the ortolan delicacy is an example of the inhuman behaviour. Eating ortolans belongs to the French cuisine, but it is banned because it is pushing the species to the brink of extinction. In Zsolna Ugron’s novel entitled *Úrilányok Erdélyben* [*By the Black River – A Transylvanian (Love) Story*], we find a way to make it:

1 Translations from Hungarian literature and specialist literature were made by Árpád Kémenes throughout the article.

so the exclusive way of making a really delightful ortolan delicacy is to walk out into the woods, trap an ortolan (it mustn't be injured), then the dicky shall walk in good health and cheerfully in a dark mini-chamber, where it will be locked away for forty days without light or food, having to drink the best French cognac, after forty days dying because of the brandy, it shall be eaten whole, what remained of it at least. By that time, his feathers are supposed to be lost and his bones soaked to jelly from the cognac. (Ugron 2016, 210)

In her report on this gastronomic tradition, Natalie Parletta (2019) presents the way it is consumed: "Ritualistically, diners eat the bird feet first in one mouthful with napkins over their heads. Some say the napkin captures the steaming aromas to enhance the gastronomic experience; others contend it hides the act from the eyes of God."

The different definitions of animal welfare are centred around the same concern: to preserve the welfare of animals, in other words, to spare them all of unnecessary suffering. The well-being of the animal encompasses its physical and physiological condition, which implies a satisfactory physical health and a sense of well-being. Animal welfare is defined in five freedoms corresponding to the basic needs of the animal: 1. physiological freedom (absence of hunger and thirst); 2. environmental freedom (absence of discomfort); 3. right to health (absence of diseases and injuries); 4. behavioural freedom (right to the expression of normal animal behaviour); 5. psychological freedom (absence of fear and anxiety). The assurance of these conditions is compulsory to the human society.

The traditional way of representing animals was either by a metaphor or by anthropomorphization. In parallel with the slowly growing ecological sensitivity of our times, animals are depicted as specific subjects in contemporary literature. As follows, the study surveys a selection of representative works from world literature and groups them into thematic, motivic groups, tracking the route of animal motifs from the Antiquity to the present, with special focus on a set of Hungarian literary works that deserve a place in the "animal canon" of world literature. The survey is aimed at providing the background against which two contemporary Hungarian novels, Zsolt Láng's *Bestiarium Transylvaniae IV* and Zsuzsa Selyem's *Moszkvában esik [It's Raining in Moscow]* will be discussed. These novels organically grow out of, but also displace, the outlined literary tradition, basing their aesthetics upon the subversive perceptual, narrative potential of the animal subject.

Metamorphoses

Ancient Greek and Roman mythological stories feature elements of a totemistic cult where gods can appear in the shape of animals (Zeus abducts Europa in the form of a bull, kidnaps Ganymede in the shape of an eagle, and seduces Leda in the form of a swan. The constant epithets used for describing Pallas Athena – *the “owl-eyed”* – and Hera – *the “cow-eyed”* – both betray this link to the animal kingdom.).

The zoomorphic figures in Greek mythology – such as satyrs, centaurs, sirens, and the Sphinx – behave like humans; their whole being is endowed with a number of human features. Nevertheless, their hybridity is frightening as they trigger a certain feeling of ontological horror similar to that excited by stories of metamorphosis. The best-known hybrid monster, the Minotaur, requires human sacrifice, and so do the sirens and the Sphinx, who, on their turn, are also embodiments of the menacing aspects of femininity.

In his mythical narrative poem entitled *Metamorphoses*, Ovid often writes about humans transformed into animals, but these transformations always happen at the end of the story, as an outcome of the plot. Arachne, the self-conceited weaver, is defeated by Pallas Athena, who eventually transforms her into a spider, but the story does not tell the reader anything about the life of the woman turned into a spider. The same can be observed in Lycaon’s story, where the protagonist is transformed into a wolf: the ruthless, blood-thirsty king, who attacked Jupiter while he was sleeping, keeps his gruesome character even after being transformed into a wolf. This story presents the point of view of people who are afraid of wolves, but it does not reveal any details on Lycaon’s life as a wolf.

Franz Kafka’s enigmatic short story, *Metamorphosis*, is horrifying because, although Gregor Samsa’s transformation into a bug happens right at the beginning of the story when the protagonist wakes up, the reader is not given any explanation on the reason of this absurd event. It is a story of alienation characteristic of the twentieth century, in which this creature is gradually denied by his family. At first, they are still aware of the fact that the young man who used to look after them now lives in another form, but at the end of the story they regard him only as a disgusting creature they have to get rid of, and, relieved, they go out on a trip when Gregor dies.

The Golden Ass by Apuleius is the first novel in ancient literature which provides explanation on the way human subject can be present within an animal’s body. Due to a wrongly performed magic spell, the protagonist called Lucius is transformed into an ass, and taken away by robbers. Although he is always aware of the way he can regain his human shape, at first he chooses to remain in his new form out of sheer curiosity, while later he simply does not have the possibility to eat a rose in order to return to his human state. Finally, being invited into the cult

of Isis, he succeeds in regaining his human form and tells his adventures. As a medium, he also relates on the stories he has overheard as an animal.

In his writing entitled *A Report to an Academy*, Kafka provides a grotesque and ironic interpretation of this story. This time, it is an ape that transforms into a human being, accepting the social rules and conventions that are part of human life. The same grotesque approach can be captured in Bulgakov's "sci-fi" story *The Heart of a Dog*, written in 1925. A stray dog follows a professor back to his flat in Moscow. The professor gives the dog food, and later, as an experiment, he implants the brain of a man killed in a fight into the dog's skull. The dog starts growing, erects on two feet, starts speaking and behaving like the person who the brain formerly belonged to – a brutal, uneducated barfly. The grateful dog turns into an unbearable person, who inherited from his former animal being only the predilection for chasing cats. He even gets a job with the help of the representatives of the proletarian power: he kills stray cats and ruins the professor's career with his intolerable behaviour. Fed up with this person's affairs, the doctor and his disciple perform another operation on him, giving back his original dog brain, and reinstate the order. Crossing the human–animal boundary, the writer raises the readers' attention to the negative processes that are going on in society; it is a parody of the ruling mob that is overcoming civilization: those who are helped to power by the Bolsheviks are worse than animals. This satire resembles the one written by Jonathan Swift, who, in *Gulliver's Travels*, presents the wild, instinctual, human-shaped yahoos as the frightening antithesis to the wise, horse-shaped creatures, evoking hilarious and creepy ambivalences in the reader.

Detailed descriptions on animal behaviour can be found in the ancient Greek scholars' works, as well. Aristotle (384–322 B.C.) wrote ten volumes about animals. The information these volumes comprise is based partly on his own observations and partly on what he heard from others. One can read, for example, about the idea of reincarnation, as well. The transition between the human and animal conditions can take place in both directions within the same piece of literature. Circe, for example, turned Odysseus's crew into swine, and then, due to Odysseus's insistence, she transformed them back into humans.

People from India regard reincarnation as a natural phenomenon where humans and animals can mutually take each other's form, while Christians believe that only humans possess a soul. In the Islamic culture, the tragic consequences of this metamorphosis are illustrated by Caliph Stork's story from the collection of folk tales *One Thousand and One Nights*, retold by Wilhelm Hauff, an outstanding figure of German Romanticism, and since then it has become popular in Europe as an exemplification of the split character of Romanticism. As a punishment for having forgotten the magic word, the caliph is doomed to remain an animal with human consciousness.

A blend of fantastic and irrational elements intruding reality explain why in Mikhail Bulgakov's *The Master and Margarita* Behemoth is sometimes described as a cat who is able to speak and walk on two legs, and sometimes he is presented as a man.

Allegories, Metaphors

In ancient literature, Aesop's and Phaedrus's fables – just like folk tales – feature anthropomorphic animals endowed with the ability of speech and human reason, whose role is to illustrate human relationships interpreted through situations typical of animal life, and the morals of these stories are addressed to people. Animals have allegorical roles in Biblical parables, as well, a well-known example of which is the story of the lost sheep. The mediaeval *Roman de Renart*, the Renaissance and classicist fables, Goethe's *Reineke Fuchs*, and Orwell's *Animal Farm* are all allegorical stories that blend typically human features with situations characteristic to animals in order to present and influence human behaviour. It is enough to recall the well-known Orwellian quotation: "All animals are equal, but some animals are more equal than others."

Animal Destiny as a Symbol

The peak of the satire in Jaroslav Hašek's *Švejk* is the episode when police agent Bretschneider is eaten by the dogs he bought from Švejk, wanting this way to observe and incriminate the dog-dealer, but he proves not to be aware of the fact that dogs have to be fed.

In his novel entitled *Zátony* (The Shallow, 1931), Lóránd Daday, a Hungarian writer from Transylvania, features a dog called Wotan as the narrator. It follows its keeper, a landowner who went blind in the First World War and is gradually deprived of his wealth. Choosing an animal narrator makes it possible for the writer not to provide detailed descriptions of the characters' physical features – animals have an instinct for feeling who is good and who is evil, and so they can focus more easily on the essential features of people's characters. This way, the events can also be presented without any interpretation at all. The dog is a medium that does not look for coherence and antecedents, it only transmits what it can see and hear. The dialogues that take place around him reveal the characters' defencelessness and disillusionment. Dog and owner are equally incapable of action, which is an allusion to the total defencelessness of those whom they represent (i.e. the Hungarians from Transylvania left alone after the change of empire). Unlike humans, animals do not have a sense of judgement.

This is where the trap of narratorial fiction is hidden: although the events of the ten years blend together, they outline a tendency towards unstoppable decline. At the end of the novel, the dog buries himself alive.

In Tibor Déry's autobiographical short story *Niki: The Story of a Dog* (1955), the relationship between nature and society is presented through the life of a dog. The plot is about the abuses of power of the dictatorship which the owner of the dog falls victim to and the opposite of this line: the gentle and benevolent order that governs Niki's world. The faithful animal dies when she is separated from her owner.

The Animal as a Companion

In Longus' novel *Daphnis and Chloe*, the protagonists, after having been exposed at birth, are saved by sheep and goats, animals that will become their companion and who the couple will return to because they feel happy only in nature, among the animals that brought them up. In the legend of Francesco Assisi, the poet of the mediaeval love of life, one can read that "God's Pauper" used to preach for birds, and he also made peace with the wolf in Gubbio, who eventually promised him to give up with his ferocious way of life and, in return, the population of Gubbio started to feed the wolf. In Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, the situation in which Titania finds herself reveals a strong relationship between humans and animals: "My Oberon! What visions have I seen! / Methought I was enamour'd of an ass."

Classical writers of the twentieth century also present animals as equal counterparts to humans, as real companions, for example, in Thomas Mann's *A Man and His Dog* and Virginia Woolf's *Flush: A Biography* (1933), where city life is presented through the eyes of a dog. The novel is, on the one hand, a criticism of anthropomorphism because the stream of consciousness does not convey a human being's point of view. On the other hand, it is also a parable because both Elizabeth Barrett Browning and her dog come from a negatively discriminated minority whose members have to fight for their freedom.

Flowers for Algernon by Daniel Keyes is more than science fiction, it is actually a story of a shocking process. Charlie Gordon, a man with a low IQ, undergoes brain surgery as a result of which he becomes a genius, and then he falls back into his initial state. First, the experiment is carried out on a mouse called Algernon, through which Gordon – now with a remarkably high intelligence – realizes that his mental decline is inevitable. In his last message, where he expresses his desire for life and human dignity, he sends flowers for the laboratory mouse because the animal has become his equal companion.

The Universal Dignity of Creatures

There are writings in the literature of modernity that present animals in their natural habitat together with a number of accurate ethological observations. This is the way the dog's life is presented in Jack London's *The Call of the Wild*, or, in Hungarian literature, in István Fekete's novels, where the protagonists are animals – the fox in *Vuk*, the swallow in *Csí*, the owl in *Hú*, and the otter in *Lutra*. In these works, there are only indirect allusions to the human world, the animals' sufferings being caused by the destructive activities of humans.

In the first version of his theory of evolution, Darwin already lays special emphasis on the importance animal behaviour plays in the evolutionary processes, while his last work entitled *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals* (1872) is the first book on ethology ever written. Darwin's observations are remarkably accurate, yet, at the same time, he is cautious with conclusions. He states that the principle of evolutionary continuity can be applied not only to the morphological but also to the behavioural features of creatures. Without lessening the importance of the differences between humans and animals, he reveals the biological roots, the evolutionary origins of different human feelings such as anger, rage, love, etc. (Csányi 2002)

In *The Day of the Dolphin*, Robert Merle builds ethological observations into his novel, which can be regarded both as science fiction and as a political parable. The destiny of the dolphins that are able to speak provides a picture of nature at the mercy of humans, an insight into armament race and political manipulations. It is, at the same time, mankind's cry for help, who is worried for the future of the planet. It is a book about the relationship between humans and animals, between the researcher and the establishment funding his work. It also seeks answers to questions such as the responsibility of people carrying out experiments with animals and the ethical concerns regarding such activities. The characters that stay closest to one's heart are the dolphins, who, owing to their innocence and sincerity, are degraded to living bomb-carriers by the omnipresent human viciousness.

Nature fallen prey to human destruction is depicted with shockingly realistic colours in the great Kyrgyz writer Chingiz Aitmatov's novels. The novel entitled *The Day Lasts More Than a Hundred Years* continues the tradition in Russian fiction that Mikhail Bakhtin termed "the polyphonic novel," creating a conscious synthesis of the main trends characteristic of the twentieth-century European fiction. The plot, just like in Bulgakov's *The Master and Margarita*, unfolds in three intertwining spheres, which, due to the recurring motifs, mutually convey each other's message: the real, the mythical, and the fantastic. The sphere of reality deals

with the Soviet regime during the period between the end of the Second World War and the 1980s. Parallels can be traced between the events that take place in nature and social life, between the animal world and that of humans. For example, the fox between the rail lines becomes a symbol, and Buranniy Karanar, the untameable camel, can be interpreted as the alter ego of his owner, Buranniy Yedigay. The vixen ambling between the rail lines, the picture of the ignorant animal suffering from the outcomes of humans' lifestyle predicts in a way the set-up of the whole plot:

The hungry vixen had to be patient as she searched for prey among the dried-out gullies and the bare ravines. Following along the intertwining, giddily wandering tracks of the small burrowing animals – now furiously digging out a marmot's lair, now waiting until a small jerboa which had been hiding in an underground storm channel jumped out into the open where he could be quickly despatched – she moved quietly as a mouse, slowly and purposefully working her way towards the distant railway. (Aitmatov 1988, 5)

People deprived of the memory of their own past, unsure about their identity can easily be turned into perfect slaves. This is the message left onto us by the Kyrgyz myths and legends, by the Ana-Beiit cemetery, which provide the mythical background for a universal perspective that allows the interpretation of the present-day happenings. The sphere of the fantastic level appears in the positive utopia represented by the society of a remote planet. Its negative counterpart is the operation "Obruch," the purpose of which is to isolate the Earth from the positive influence of this remote civilization.

Myths and reality are blended in another work by Aitmatov, *The Scaffold*, as well, where the tragic events the people are involved in are held together by the destiny of the two wolves. Their sufferings are caused by people's destructive activities, which have gained cosmic dimensions. The wolves are not the only ones that die in the novel. Avdeu, the journalist, also loses his life because he rebels against the band that slaughters the antelopes with machine guns. The journalist is crucified and left alone in the wilderness. The former student of theology relives the story of Christ's sufferings. Although the wolves can see him, they can do nothing to help him. In Avdeu's vision, the female wolf appears as Nature, who cannot defend herself against people's greed and viciousness. In the second part of the novel, the wolves manage to escape, but in their new home the evil shepherd steals their kid, and the good shepherd loses everything: instead of shooting the wolf that is stealing its kid, he shoots his own child. In this Soviet reality, everybody is doomed to die: the animals together with those people who are more than the hypocritical, greedy crowd that endangers its own existence by the brainless destruction of nature.

The Fantastic Creature – Crisis of the Classical Narrative Tradition

The fantastic creatures that appear in mediaeval bestiaries are embodiments of human desires and fears. At the dawn of the postmodern era, Jorge Luis Borges came out with a collection of imaginary beings, while Julio Cortázar's cronopios² stories, which are part of the magical realist paradigm, let fantasy fly without limits.

In his novel series entitled *Bestiarium Transylvaniae* (1997, 2008, 2011), Zsolt Láng shows the presence of fantastic animal narrators being just as self-evident as it was obvious for people in the Antiquity that the hero of Apuleius's novel preserved his human consciousness, while experiencing adventures in the form of an ass. At the same time, ancient literature clearly indicated the fundamental difference between humans, able to communicate with words, and animals that are not. Behemoth, the animal-shaped creature, spoke human words only in Bulgakov's novel; this procedure produced a powerful grotesque-fantastic effect. Zsolt Láng plays with the reader when he leaves the transitions between reality and fantasy unexplained. The plot of Borges's and Cortázar's short stories can be completely integrated into the realm of fantasy, while Láng blends with fantasy elements referring to reality, namely the historical experiences of Hungarians living in Romania.

In the first part of *Bestiarium Transylvaniae*, entitled *Birds of the Sky*, Zsolt Láng provides an insight into the world of the seventeenth-century Transylvanian nobility, blending the genre of the historical novel with the world of mediaeval bestiaries. The plot revolves around baron Sapré, who keeps chasing with his love the always disappearing, ethereal Xénia Vidrányi and, at the same time, treats the Prince and the whole country as his own puppet, using worldly and supernatural powers to achieve his goals. Like in mediaeval bestiaries, the text features a number of living and legendary birds, around which the chapters are structured. These creatures – for example, the human-faced parrot able to look into the future, the dust sparrows born from the dust, the serpent bird, the flame bird, the death bird who sings about the impenetrable silence – appear again and again, playing an active role in shaping the plot. As far as the structure of each chapter is concerned, the solutions chosen can be traced back to the different functions played by the animal characters, Márton Szilágyi (1998, 100) observes. By featuring these creatures, the book succeeds in creating a magic space which helps the reader capture the atmosphere of those times better than any description.

In the middle parts of the series, with the title *Animals of Fire and Water*, there appear a number of imaginary animals – firebirds, the bastard fish, the lavis, the silk-weaver tamaril, the fire worm, or the mirror animal –, which have the

2 Cronopios and famas are fantastic creatures invented by Julio Cortázar.

function of moving the plot forward. The plot unfolds along two timelines. In the present of the story, Eremie, the protagonist, sets out from a Moldavian monastery on a journey to Kolozsvár (Cluj-Napoca) to find his relatives. He also wants to find the girl whom he saw in the library. In his visions, he meets Vazul, Prince of Moldavia, also known under the name of Despot, who disseminated the ideas of the Renaissance and Reformation in Moldavia, establishing an academy in Cotnari in 1561. The fantastic creatures are the elements that link the divergent timelines and storylines. The singing worms, for example, sing about the joy of encounter when Eremie finds his surrogate sibling. Sometimes Eremie, the actor-narrator himself, appears in the form of an animal, reiterating the magical elements of the text: "(...) a sound came out of me, unexpectedly and unexplainably even for myself. Hearing my cry, Márta came out of the house and gazed inquisitively, is it a banshee screaming, or what? I was also surprised by this sound. A wolf's howl, a bird's screech, a deer's bellow or the squeak of a rabbit on a hook?" (Láng 2008, 210). According to József Imre Balázs, this procedure can be correlated with the phenomenon of fictionalization of the actor-narrator (2015, 198).

In *Bestiarium Transylvaniae IV. The Animals of the Earth*, Láng presents the last days of Ceaușescu's dictatorship, the 1989 regime change, through a peculiar space structure. The setting of the plot is a city that can be identified as Szatmárnémeti (Satu Mare). The "monologues" of the animals that find shelter in the city's sewer system add further details to the events happening on the surface from a grotesque bottom view. The plot gravitates around an adolescent girl called Bori and relates both the events that happen at school and the transitions that take place in the girl's personal life such as her initiation into sexual life. With a puzzle-like structure, the text successfully captures the postmodern scatteredness, dealing with relationships fallen into anarchy and deficient interpersonal relations. The world represented in the book "resists the strategy of homogeneous narratability. What become indispensable are heterogeneity and a multi-coloured, multi-levelled perspective" (Bányai 2016, 43).

"Using 'non-canonical' perceptual strategies (animal perspectives, sounds and smells), the novel reveals a textual world that is, without doubt, referential for the reader, but, at the same time, the referential reading is undone by the narrative twists of the plot" – Judit Pieldner observes (2013, 231). The animal characters have a major role in creating the feeling of uncertainty. For example, one can identify the perspective of the frog, the fish, the star, the mosquito, and the worm, too. During a grotesque conversation, which serves as an introduction, the interlocutors – two young people – are swinging a dead fish and a dead rat in their hands.

The plot is moved forward – in a grotesque and ironical way – by the rat living in the sewer system. He steals the listening device purchased from abroad in order to impress the female, who is eventually devoured after the intercourse. The animal's behaviour mirrors the attitude of the ruthless regime towards its citizens, which

does not show mercy even to its most devoted servants. The human counterpart of the rat is Gigi, the manager of the Party's cafeteria, who was made to work in the canteen due to the brutality he had shown during police interrogations. He also deceives the woman who does the dishwashing with empty promises, then rapes her with brutality and throws the skinned rat into the fridge, ordering that it should be mixed with the food and cooked. Another character of the same type is the editor-in-chief who, abusing of his position, initiates an intercourse with his humiliated employee's wife. Autocratic regimes used underground cellars as torture chambers, and in 1989 the animals living in the sewer network could overhear these interrogations, which are sometimes quite grotesque: "The state's wall. The people's wall. To smear it with shit, what kind of animal are you?" (Láng 2011, 56) – hears the rat. First Lieutenant Ursu,³ the Securitate officer with a name of an animal listens with excitement to the noises made by animals during sexual intercourses. Human characters are endowed with animal features like in Ádám Bodor's novels: "So, let him be Pondró, a shivering, naked creature, a slug, let him be so. None of the forms ensuring access to life can be refused. His wound is the body of a larva cocooned into the roles it plays", thinks the girl, the protagonist, about Sebe,⁴ the boy she is planning her first sexual intercourse with (Láng 2011, 125). After his uncle's death, who was his protector, First Lieutenant Ursu is taken to a psychiatric institution where he spends his time sitting on a branch of a tree together with Doctor Haris.⁵ In Bori's way of thinking, there are dialectic links between the notion of human and that of animal, which become relative at the same time:

If, for instance, rats didn't live in sewer systems but among velvet upholstered furniture in rooms with lustres, and they ate by the table, it would be more difficult to poison them, probably. Or if dogs kept on two-metre-long chains didn't wag their tails for its keeper approaching with the pail, but they ate from clean bowls and slept in dog beds next to their keepers, they could not be kicked so easily. Probably. (Láng 2011, 73)

On the other hand, the blue-furred rat living in the sewer network under the city is presented in an anthropomorphic way: "he dreams, projects pictures for himself, wants to learn to read and write, to express his thoughts in his own language" (Bányai 2016, 46). As a grotesque inversion, "the language above would hardly be suitable for rendering the ideas of a brain living underground" (Láng 2011, 33). The smell of the underprivileged, manipulated crowd waiting for the Party's Prime Secretary penetrates the sewage system where, feeling the smell, the blue-furred rat is dreaming that:

3 *Urs* is the Romanian equivalent for bear.

4 *Seb* is the Hungarian for wound.

5 *Haris* is corn crane in Hungarian.

He will keep eating until the fat on his bald head gets folded and the dirt stuck between the folds looks as if it were hair. And the fatter he gets, the more overwhelmed with fear he is; this is why he keeps eating and gets fatter and fatter. [...] He will be huge. Then he will shake himself, the pieces of concrete will fall from his back, and he will be standing in front of Mr Gigi, whom he will swallow in one gulp, and he will swallow even Comrade Dulea together with his chair and telephone [...] and he will have so much fear in himself that he will just give a snort, and the black tar from his mouth will flood the people and cover the whole city. (Láng 2011, 122–123)

At the end of the novel, during the revolution, Bori hides from the police in the sewage network, where she meets the rat. The rat's vision will not come true. Light will prevail over darkness, and, instead of terror, people will experience the euphoria of freedom.

Besides the episodes inspired by ethological observations, there are also scenes evoking the magical realism of bestiaries. The singing horse that lives under the ground can be interpreted as a complex symbol. It can be regarded as the embodiment of the indescribable diversity: “The world on the surface is the opposite of the one existing underground; it is the link between trees and egos, the proof of the continuity between past and present” (Láng 2011, 171). Bori's dream of the hero of her school composition that comes to life is a symbol of the unconscious, but, at the same time, it is also a memory of the recent past: once a craftsman, the dispossessed grandfather chases away his horse, which comes back home from the co-operative. Past traumas buried into the unconscious burst to the surface through images of animals. The dog that left the family turns out to have been poisoned by the people of the secret police. The fantastic image of flying moles that turn into blood-sucking bats is disclosed at the end of the novel: the secret police spread poison on pigeons, and this is the reason why there appeared black animals floundering on the ground, which sometimes tried to rise into the air and flew into people's faces causing darkness and provoking horror.

Playful and Ironic Anthropomorphism – A Posthuman Perspective

Theories born against the ideology that the human race is superior operate with the concept of the animal subject. Jacques Derrida (2006) clearly places humans among animals, while Gilles Deleuze (1995) proposes a new interpretation of animal existence. In contemporary art, animals are represented as equal beings.

In the puppet-theatre piece *The Battle of Stalingrad* by Rezo Gabriadze, Georgian writer and director, two horses and two ants appear as equal actors

in addition to the human figures. Besides, there is a poor little ant, desperately trying to protect her young as the madness of battle ravages the landscape. The evening's last word is given to this creature. "Has anybody counted us ants?" – she pointedly asks (Isherwood 2010).

Anthropomorphism, i.e. feelings projected onto non-human creatures, is presented in a grotesque light in Zsuzsa Selyem's novel entitled *Moszkvában esik* [*It's Raining in Moscow*] (2016). The narrative technique is an ironical counterpart of what we can find in Ádám Bodor's writings, where defenceless, loser characters are endowed with animal features. Zsuzsa Selyem does not explain the inclusion of animal narrators either, the question how and to whom animal narrators address their narration remains open. In this respect, the novel reminds of Lóránd Daday's novel mentioned before. On the other hand, the problem of the animal subject, suggested by the text as a whole, is very pronounced.

The sombre atmosphere created by the presentation of dispossessed people deported to forced labour camps is eased by political jokes: "Radio Yerevan is asked: 'Which one was earlier: the chicken or the egg?' 'Earlier there were both chicken and eggs'"⁶ (Selyem 2016, 94). The title of the novel is an allusion to a Romanian woman activist who used to carry out without hesitation any orders coming from Moscow ("Why is Ana Pauker walking with an umbrella in her hand in the streets of Bucharest in full sunshine?' 'Because it's raining in Moscow.'"). Moreover, it is a hint at the author's main line of reasoning: regarded from a different point of view, the painful historical events in which Zsuzsa Selyem's grandparents were involved might seem to be funny in their absurdity. As a result of the multiplication of the narrators, events are presented from an ironic distance. The scandal that broke out following a bank forgery (one of the family legends) appears in the book as follows: "'Whaaat?' asked one of the crickets, who happened to be called Alain, Alain Badiou (isn't the fellow French?), stopping rubbing his fore legs. 'The years do not tally, my little ant? Then don't count it in years, but in words, and it might yield the number 1927'" (Selyem 2016, 41). The most striking episode is the one in which a bedbug on the wall informs the reader on István Beczásy, the grandfather, who is closed in the prison of the secret police. What the animal says is full of cultural clichés, and intertextuality turns into irony:

I have to admit, the atmosphere is not very jovial in the cell, but if you are really determined to, and you don't think too much, just let the flow take you, you will always find time to relax, and if you accept the downs in life, and you only have blue and yellow colours, with a bit of creativity you can

6 Relying on an unsolvable paradox, the joke refers to the fact that the political slogans of communism promised prosperity, an earthly Paradise, while in reality there was shortage economy, and not even basic food products could be purchased. Neither eggs nor chicken could be bought, just as there was no flour, sugar, or oil either.

mix fifty different shades of green because life is a big journey, and it's up to you where you end up. (Selyem 2016, 71)

In Ihab Hassan's view, postmodernism is characterized by a range of radical epistemological and ontological doubts, which are linked to the decentralized view on the world: "decreation, disintegration, deconstruction, decentrement, displacement, difference, discontinuity, disjunction, disappearance, decomposition, de-definition, demystification, detotalization, delegitimization – let alone more technical terms referring to the rhetoric of irony, rupture, silence" (1987). Traditions ironically turned inside out as part of the game express the unnarratability and the illusory character of grand narratives. Moreover, family stories as part of grand history also become relative because of the one-sidedness of the memory perspective. In 1995, István Beczásy published his memoir with the title *Life behind Barbed Wire. Heavily Censored Edition*.

My grandfather wrote the story of their forced deportation from the single viewpoint that mattered for him: the organization of agriculture. Political circumstances did not bother him the slightest; he got over them by simply stating that the system is sordid [...]; the possible psychological trauma of their separated children did not even come to his mind, or he simply did not know the words how to describe it [...]. (Selyem 2016, 33–34)

The brutal interrogation that humans regarded as food are subject to is presented through an animal point of view:

When Beczásy is dragged by the leg into the cell, there is a moment of silence. Then one of the foods approaches him, tries to feel the pulse at his wrist. He stands up and goes back to his place. Then he approaches him again, and puts his hand on his neck. The others are watching him in silence. Then this food tears a shred from his cassock, takes a leak on it, and starts wiping the blood off the eyes, the face. (Selyem 2016, 79)

The motto of the novel, which is a childhood memory of the author's mother about the place where they were deported, explains the reason why animals have a central role in the novel: "Nothing was there except a huge shack full of mice, frogs, rats, snakes, and all kinds of animals you can imagine" (Selyem 2016, 5). The other motto, taken from Wittgenstein, suggests the impossibility of communication: "If a lion could speak, we could not understand him."

The closing chapter entitled *Circus Finale* is about the stunts performed by monkeys on a ginkgo tree, evoking the world of Büchner's drama *Woycek* – a grotesque picture of the history of the twentieth century.

Conclusions

In the writings that appeared at the end of the last century, the presentation of animal destinies has the role of highlighting the traumas the world of humans had gone through. In the twenty-first century, metamorphoses and transubstantiations think further the possibilities of postmodern hybridization. The parallels resemble the allegories that appear in fables, lacking, however, the unambiguity encountered in fables. The animal narrators have the role of introducing the relativity of values, the pluralization of points of view, distancing the plot from the grand narrative regarded as the only true interpretation, from the possibility of having a unified view on the world, questioning thus the possibility of narrativity.

Contemporary works go beyond the allegorical, metaphorical portrayal of earlier eras, and the anthropomorphization of animal characters. Following the viewpoint of biomorphism, we can clearly observe that they attempt to adopt a just and much more ethical approach. The approach of the discussed contemporary Hungarian novels from Romania can be paralleled with current ethical, philosophical, and legal questions concerning animals as well as with the views of ecocriticism. At the same time, there is a strong emphasis on references that refer to the real context of the works, continuing the tradition of Eastern European artists such as Mikhail Bulgakov or Chingiz Aitmatov. Zsolt Láng's novel relativizes the boundary between humans and animals; Zsuzsa Selyem's work also encourages the reader to reflect on the nature of the animal subject.

Translated from Hungarian by Árpád Kémenes

Works Cited

- Aitmatov, Chinghiz. 1988 [1980]. *The Day Lasts More Than a Hundred Years*. Trans. Katerina Clark. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- 2000 [1986]. *The Scaffold*. New York: International Academy of Sciences, Industry, Education & Arts.
- Apuleius, Lucius "Africanus". [2nd century.] *The Golden Ass*. Trans. William Adlington. <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/1666/1666-h/1666-h.htm> (Last accessed 27 April 2019).
- Balázs, Imre József. 2015. "A test és történelem mint fikció" ["Body and History as Fiction"]. In *Erdélyi magyar irodalom-olvasatok* [Essays on Hungarian Literature from Transylvania], 185–203. Cluj-Napoca: Egyetemi Műhely Publishing House–Bolyai Association.
- Bányai, Éva. 2016. "A föld szaga (Láng Zsolt: *Bestiárium Transylvaniae IV. A föld állatai*)." ["The Smell of the Ground (Zsolt Láng: *Bestiarium Transylvaniae*

- IV. *The Animals of the Earth*”]. In *Fordulat-próza. Átmenetnarratívák a kortárs magyar irodalomban* [Prose of the Turn. Narratives of Transition in Contemporary Hungarian Literature], 41–51. Cluj-Napoca: Transylvanian Museum Society.
- Beczásy, István. 1995. *Bekerített élet. Súlyosan meghúzott kiadás* [Life behind Barbed Wire. Heavily Censored Edition]. Budapest: Literátor.
- Borges, Jorge Luis and Margarita Guerrero. 1969 [1967]. *El libro de los seres imaginarios*. [The Book of Imaginary Beings]. New York: E. P. Dutton.
- Bulgakov, Mikhail Afanasyevich. 1967. *The Master and Margarita*. Trans. Michael Glenny. London: Collins and Harvill Press.
- 1994 [1925]. *The Heart of a Dog*. Trans. Mirra Ginsburg. New York: Grove Press.
- Csányi, Vilmos. 2002 [1994]. *Etológia* [Ethology]. http://www.tankonyvtar.hu/hu/tartalom/tamop425/2011_0001_519_42477/ch01.html (Last accessed 28 April 2019).
- Daday, Lóránd. 1931. *Zátony*. [The Shallow]. Budapest: Memphis.
- Deleuze, Gilles. 1995 [1988]. *A comme Animal, L'Abécédaire de Gilles Deleuze, entretien avec Claire Parnet* [A as in Animal. Gilles Deleuze's Alphabet Book, Interview with Claire Parnet], dir. Pierre-André Boutang and Michel Parnet. Sodaperaga.
- Derrida, Jacques. 2006. *L'Animal que donc je suis* [The Animal That Therefore I Am]. Paris: Galilée.
- Déry, Tibor. 2003 [1955]. *Niki. Egy kutya története* [Niki. The Story of a Dog]. Budapest: Ciceró Könyvstúdió.
- Fekete, István. 1965 [1940]. *Csí, Vuk*. Budapest: Móra Ferenc.
- 1970 [1955]. *Lutra*. Budapest: Móra Ferenc.
- Hassan, Ihab. 1987. “Toward a Concept of Postmodernism” (From *The Postmodern Turn*). <http://faculty.georgetown.edu/irvinem/theory/HassanPoMo.pdf> (Last accessed 27 April 2019).
- Isherwood, Charles. 2010. “Souls Suspended on a String in the Shadows of a Russian City under Siege.” *The New York Times* July 21. <https://www.nytimes.com/2010/07/22/theater/reviews/22battle.html> (Last accessed 28 April 2019).
- Kafka, Franz. 2016 [1912]. *Metamorphosis*. Trans. Ian Johnston. South Carolina: Create Space Independent Publishing Platform.
- [1917]. *A Report for an Academy*. Trans. Ian Johnston. <https://www.kafka-online.info/a-report-for-an-academy.html> (Last accessed 28 April 2019).
- Keyes, Daniel. 1966. *Flowers for Algernon*. <http://www.sdfo.org/gj/stories/flowersforalgernon.pdf> (Last accessed 29 April 2019).
- Láng, Zsolt. 1997. *Bestiárium Transylvaniae I. Az ég madarai*. [Bestiarium Transylvaniae I. The Birds of the Sky]. Pécs: Jelenkor.
2008. *Bestiárium Transylvaniae II–III. A tűz és víz állatai* [Bestiarium Transylvaniae II–III. The Animals of Fire and Water]. Pécs: Jelenkor.

2011. *Bestiárium Transylvaniae IV. A föld állatai* [Bestiarium Transylvaniae IV. The Animals of the Earth] Pécs: Jelenkor.
- Merle, Robert. 1969 [1967]. *The Day of the Dolphin*. Trans. Helen Weaver. New York: Simon & Schuster.
- Ovid. [1st century]. *The Metamorphoses*. Trans. Anthony S. Kline. <https://quotebanq.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/Ovid-Metamorphosis.pdf> (Last accessed 20 April 2019).
- Parletta, Natalie. 2019. “Bird species, a French delicacy, being eaten to death.” <https://cosmosmagazine.com/biology/bird-species-a-french-delicacy-being-eaten-to-death> (Last accessed 28 May 2019).
- Pieldner, Judit. 2013. *Ének a föld alatt* (Láng Zsolt: *Bestiárium Transylvaniae IV. A föld állatai*). [Song under the Ground. (Zsolt Láng: *Bestiarium Transylvaniae IV. The Animals of the Earth*). In *Az értelmezés ideje. Tanulmányok, kritikák* [The Time of Interpretation. Studies, Critiques], 231–238. Cluj-Napoca: Egyetemi Műhely Publishing House–Bolyai Association.
- Selyem, Zsuzsa. 2015. “Tiergarten (Az állat mint metafora, mint performatív kifejezés, mint hasonlat és mint jelző Nádas Péter *Párhuzamos történetek* című regényében)” [“Tiergarten. The Animal as Metaphor, Performative Expression, Simile and Epithet in Péter Nádas’s *Parallel Stories*”]. *Jelenkor* vol. 58, no. 7–8: 856–863.
2016. *Moszkvában esik. Egy kitelepítés története* [It’s Raining in Moscow. The Story of a Deportation]. Pécs: Jelenkor.
- Shakespeare, William. [1596]. *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*. <http://shakespeare.mit.edu/midsummer/full.html> (Last accessed 28 March 2019).
- Simon, Anne. 2018. “Animots/animaux: criação literária et zoopoética (séculos XX e XXI)” [“Animots/animaux: Literary and Zoopoetic Creation (20th and 21st Centuries)”]. In *Figuras do Animal: Literatura Cinema Banda Desenhada* [Animal Figures: Literature, Film, Comics], eds. Cristina Álvares, Ana Lúcia Curado, Isabel Cristina Mateus, and Sérgio Guimarães de Sousa, 15–28. Minho: Universidade do Minho.
- Szilágyi, Márton. 1998. “A történelem szörnyetegei. (Láng Zsolt: *Bestiárium Transylvaniae. Az ég madarai*)” [“The Monsters of History. (Zsolt Láng: *Bestiarium Transylvaniae. The Birds of the Sky*)”]. *Alföld* vol. 49, no. 5: 98–101.
- Ugron, Zsolna. 2016 [2010]. *Úrilányok Erdélyben* [By the Black River – A Transylvanian (Love) Story]. Budapest: Ulpius.



Spaces in Between in the Myth of Myrrha: A Metamorphosis into Tree

Otilia VERES

Partium Christian University (Oradea, Romania)
Department of Literatures and Languages
veresottilia@gmail.com

Abstract. Within the larger context of metamorphoses into plants in Greek and Roman mythology, the paper aims to analyse the myth of Myrrha and her metamorphosis into a tree, focusing on the triggering cause of the transformation as well as the response given to her newly-acquired form of life. Myrrha's transformation into a myrrh tree takes place as a consequence of her transgressive incestuous act of love with her father, Cinyras. Her metamorphosis occurs as a consequence of sinful passion – passion *in extremis* –, and she sacrifices her body (and human life/existence) in her escape. I will look at Ovid's version of the myth as well as Ted Hughes's adaptation of the story from his *Tales from Ovid*. My discussion of the transformation into tree starts out from the consideration that metamorphosis is the par excellence place and space of in-betweenness implying an inherent hybridity and blurred, converging subjectivities, a state of being that allows for passages, overlaps, crossings, and simultaneities. I am interested to see in what ways Myrrha's incestuous desire for her father as well as her metamorphosis into a tree can be "rooted" back to her great-grandfather Pygmalion's transgressive love for the ivory statue Galatea.

Keywords: myth, metamorphosis, Myrrha, myrrh tree, incest, Pygmalion

"Give me some third way [. . .].
Remove me
From life and from death
Into some nerveless limbo."
(Hughes 1997, 127)

The tragic story of Myrrha's transgressive incestuous love for her father, Cinyras, and her transformation into a myrrh tree is best known from Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. In postclassical times, Myrrha's story has had widespread influence in Western culture. She is mentioned in Dante's *Divine Comedy*, in Shakespeare's *Othello* as well as in Mary Shelley's short story "Mathilda." The story of Myrrha and Cinyras also features in the volume *After Ovid: New*

Metamorphoses (edited by Michael Hofmann and James Lasdun, 1994), in a poem written by American poet Frederick Seidel, and it was chosen as one of twenty-four tales from Ovid's *Metamorphoses* retold by English poet Ted Hughes in his poetical work *Tales from Ovid*, published in 1997. Mary Zimmerman's 2002 play entitled *Metamorphoses* features the story of Myrrha among other tales from Ovid's classic. More recently, in 2006, a musical performance of *Myrrha* premiered at Carnegie Hall, written and directed by composer *Kristin Kuster*, featuring three sopranos and a choral orchestra. In 2008, *The Guardian* named Myrrha's relationship with her father as depicted in Ovid as the most disturbing and overwhelming story of incestuous love (Mullan 2008).

In Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, Myrrha's story comes right after that of Pygmalion as a consequence of – and as a “punishment” for – Pygmalion's sinful deed, his “incestuous” love with “his kind,” Galatea, the woman he “fathered” (created). Pygmalion is Galatea's creator, and therefore, as Hillis Miller argues, his love for the figure is an act of transgression, of autoerotism and narcissism: “For Pygmalion, the other is not really other. Pygmalion has himself made Galatea. She is the mirror image of his desire. His relation to her is not love for another [...]. It is a reciprocity in which the same loves the same” (Miller 1990, 4).¹ The payment for his forbidden love falls not on his girl child (Paphos) but on his grandson Cinyras and his daughter, Myrrha, who fall in love and make love to each other. Cinyras is Paphos's son, and his tale follows right after Pygmalion's as if suggesting that coming generations have to pay for the parents'/fathers' transgressions. In what follows, my remarks shall focus on Ovid's version of the myth (in Frank Justus Miller's English translation) as well as on Ted Hughes' version of the tale, from his *Tales from Ovid*.

With reminiscences to King Laius and Oedipus's story, Cinyras's narrative starts with the following foreword: “Cinyras was her [Paphos's] son and, had he been without offspring, might have been counted fortunate. A horrible tale I have to tell” (Ovid 1958, 85). He “might well have been known as Fortune's darling / If only he'd stayed childless” (Hughes 1997, 113). Offspring, as Cinyras and Myrrha's tale suggests, have to atone and pay penance for their fathers' deeds. Cinyras's curse is his daughter, Myrrha's is her father. The “enormity” of their love might be traced back to the “soil that nursed it” (Hughes 1997, 113) – symbolically the parents/ancestors one descends from. With a reference to the name's etymological (and etiological) significance (myrrh tree), Myrrha's story starts with the ill-boding foreword “a new tree was not worth so great a price” (Ovid 1958, 87), also suggesting that Myrrha's transformation into a tree is a retribution that “commemorates” her transgression and at the same time sends her back into her great-grandmother, Galatea's “footing,” her sculpture state: she is bound to stay stuck in the soil (parentage) she descends from. As she could

1 For a detailed analysis, see Veres (2019).

not help embracing her father, she is predestined to forever embrace the soil she stems from. In deviance, her soil/womb is planted with the seed of her father; so, she is doomed to transform into deviation – a tree that symbolically means origins, origination, and roots. For her deviance (loving one she is forbidden to love) and for her defiance (to be/stay/ behave as human, i.e. not love someone one is forbidden to love), she is punished to live on as no longer human. She is transformed into a myrrh tree to forever cry away law's (civilization's) prohibition to mate with one's parent. Her name, "myrrh" means "bitterness" (Hebrew *mar*, Greek *smurna*, Latin *murra*); with its hanging branches, the myrrh tree resembles the weeping willow. According to Ovid, the resin of the myrrh tree was used as medicine and as a beautifying ointment. Myrrh resin is gained with the incision of the branches of the tree, as if it is "hurt." Then it produces "tears," the aromatic gum that the tree produces in order to heal its wound. It was used for its analgesic effect and for the anointing of corpses (after Jesus was taken from the cross, he was anointed with myrrh). It is a symbol of (commitment to) sacrifice and devotion (offering oneself) ("Mirha" n.p.).² The mythical character Myrrha is a casualty of forbidden love, of "*pietas perverted*" (Nagle 1983, 311).

Despite the resemblances to Oedipus's story and despite the fact that in some respects her story can be seen as even more tragic than that of Oedipus, Myrrha's myth is not among the well-known stories in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. Oedipus makes love to his mother not knowing it is his mother he makes love to, but Myrrha makes love to her father knowing it is her father she makes love to. At the beginning of her story, Cupid disowns his complicity with Myrrha's sin, "that crime of yours," denying responsibility for her sinful desire: "his weapons did not harm you" (Ovid 1958, 87), and therefore, the fact that Myrrha's desire is not caused by an external factor (Cupid) but comes from within arouses the audience's sympathy for her (Resinski 2014, 277). As Ovid suggests, her love comes from and is related to the underworld: one of the three sisters from Styx "blasted you" (Ovid 1958, 87). Hughes uses the term "possession;" she is possessed by the venom of hell, by "criminal desire" [Hughes 1997, 114–115], or "*furiosa libido*" (Brooks Otis qtd. in Nagle 1983, 301), and in the end (after committing her sin – sleeping with her father – and suffering of it) she prays to the gods: "Remove me / From life and from death / Into some nerveless limbo" (Hughes 1997, 127). She aspires for a nerveless (unfeeling) in-between state – a limbo, the porch of Hell – and then, as an answer to her prayer, she is transformed into a myrrh tree. The nerveless limbo would be the tree that, however, keeps on shedding tears, crying away her tragic fate and mourning her loss – the loss of human life and human love.

2 The Magi bring myrrh to the new-born Christ as a token of their worship and sacrifice. Christ's mother's, Mary's name (Hebrew *mar*) is also related to the word and meaning of *myrrh*: bitterness, sacrifice. Myrrh becomes the iconic image and symbol of sacrifice committed out of love ("Mirha" n.p.).

As Rebecca Resinski argues, Ovid authorizes opposing responses to Myrrha's incestuous desire. On the one hand, Orpheus, the narrator of her story, clearly condemns her at the outset of the tale, but Ovid's portrayal of Myrrha invites sympathy for her at the same time. She is a mortal caught in an impossible predicament rather than an unclean criminal, and the audience is allowed to decide how to respond: "whether to condemn or sympathize, honor or abhor" her (Resinski 2014, 273–274, 281). In both Ovid and Hughes, we see her internal debate. In despair, Myrrha tries to justify her feelings and her deed querying whether her feelings are sinful: "*if* indeed it is a crime. But I am not sure, for piety refuses to condemn such love as this. Other animals mate as they will [. . .] Happy they who have such privilege! Human civilization has made spiteful laws, and what nature allows, the jealous laws forbid;" [. . .] "so that natural love is increased by the double bond" (Ovid 1958, 87–88, emphasis added). Myrrha refers to piety – the love of God – that withholds her from not loving Cinyras and she

experiments with philosophical and relativist explanations which would disarm the force of the incest taboo. Myrrha considers the possibility that the customs which keep her father from being an acceptable erotic choice are arbitrary, neither established by nor mirrored in nature. Sounding like a Cynic philosopher, Myrrha observes that female animals mate with their sires (10.324–328), and she suggests that jealous laws prohibit what nature allows (10.330–331). Within this framework Myrrha tries to normalize her desire. (Resinski 2014, 278)

On the last two pages of his collection of essays on love entitled *On Celestial and Earthly Love* (*Az égi és a földi szerelemről*, 1991), Péter Nádas discusses Plato's *Laws*, coming to the following argument about the question of incest:

In this respect, mentioning the example of a rather extreme cultural prohibition, we should not consider incest unnatural; on the contrary, the denial of incest from ourselves should be considered unnatural. We should not consider unnatural the fact that we are in love with our beautiful and clever mothers, fathers, sisters, and brothers nor that we are in love with our daughters and sons, with whom we should not be in love according to human laws; on the contrary, we should consider it unnatural if they are good and beautiful and still we dare say that we are not in love with them. As if we said that we have no eyes and that lead had been poured into our ears from our birth. (2000, 157; my translation)

Myrrha insists on raising the question: "Is it criminal? / Is it unnatural?" (Hughes 1997, 115). In her rhetoric, nature – what would be natural – is juxtaposed

with law (human life regulated by law), and as a result of this juxtaposition the notions “normal” and “abnormal” or “deviant” emerge in her rhetoric. Myrrha argues that her love for her father is natural, i.e. accepted by nature, “innate,” instinctual, only law and human civilization condemn it unnatural and therefore forbidden (a taboo) (“Avaunt, lawless desires!” [Ovid 1958, 88]). She experiences that she is a victim of what Jonathan Bate calls “man’s self-exile from Nature” (1994, 28): “Man has distorted that licence – / Man has made new laws from his jealousy / To deprive nature of its nature” (Hughes 1997, 115). Her sexual desire to be joined with the father falls under prohibition; yet, she argues, there are nations which exercise “their deepest happiness / The bliss of their infancy as a wedding present. [. . .] It would be a crime indeed to withhold it” (Hughes 1997, 115–116). Nádas argues as follows: “There is a huge difference between declaring that something has no effect on me and declaring that something does have an effect on me but I make every effort to resist this effect for one reason or another and thereby expose myself to the anguish of the soul” (Nádas 2000, 158; my translation). Like the notions of “natural” and “normal,” the notion of crime also gets a twisted meaning in Myrrha’s understanding: the law says it is a crime to love Cinyras, she says it is a crime not to love him. Ironically, in Hughes’s adaptation, “Mighty Nature” is invoked to “Set this prohibition / Between a human father and his daughter” (1997, 117). As if with the voice of a chorus, Myrrha is warned in Hughes’s version: “Choose [any of the princes that came courting you], Myrrha, before the story twists” (1997, 114), but, like Oedipus, she cannot escape her fate.

Myrrha’s story raises questions about the nature of the relationship between father and daughter: “would I be better off as a stranger?” – Myrrha asks, adding that “because he is mine, he is not mine” (Ovid 1958, 89). Shall she leave the borders of her country like Oedipus, to avoid crime, or shall she live her desire and break the law? Her sin is excess, propinquity, and therefore, she recalls Oedipus’s fate: “Think how many ties, how many names you are confusing! Will you be the rival of your mother, the mistress of your father? Will you be called the sister of your son, the mother of your brother?” (Ovid 1958, 89).

When asked by her father what husband she desires to have, her answer, just like her sin, repeats her great-grandfather Pygmalion’s words in his prayer to Venus: “One *like* you,” is Myrrha’s answer (in the original, “*similem tibi*”) (Ovid, 1958, 90–91; emphasis added).³ “I pray to have as wife one *like* my ivory maid,” Pygmalion says to Venus (“*similis mea eburnae*,” Ovid, 1958, 84–85; emphasis added). Like Pygmalion who does not dare say he wants his ivory maid, Myrrha does not dare say she wants to have her father as a husband. Incest is bound to be repeated, but while in Pygmalion’s case incest is symbolical, in Cinyras’s

3 A similar ironical answer is given by the nurse to Cinyras when he asks her about the age of the girl (Myrrha) he takes to his bed at night: “The same as Myrrha’s” (Ovid 1958, 95).

and Myrrha's case, it is literal. Grandsons and great-granddaughters are bound to repent and repeat their ancestor's sin. Cinyras is deeply moved by his daughter's declaration of love, answering "May you always be so filial" (Ovid 1958, 91). Hearing her father's answer, in Hughes's version, Myrrha stands "like a beast at the altar, head hanging" (1997, 118). The notion of the beast anticipates the forthcoming incestuous act: in a short time, she will be or act like a beast, copulating with her father. At stake in Myrrha's myth is the question of man – what is human – and where is the boundary between human and beast? The idea of the beast at the altar associates her figure with the motif of sacrifice. Transformed into a tree, Myrrha as a human being is sacrificed on the altar of civilization and humanity.

At the beginning of her story, Orpheus announces Myrrha's deviant marginality, condemning her barbaric deed to the "barbaric east," opposing it to the "civilized west" where he and his audience belong (Resinski 2014, 276). Her deed is judged as profane, impure, and deviant. However, as Barghiesi argues, Orpheus's moralizing is misplaced (and therefore a source of irony) as his audience are presumably animals and trees, that is, beings for whom incest is no taboo (qtd. in Resinski 2014, 276). "Individual audience members may decide whether to follow Orpheus' lead in assessing Myrrha and her actions or to discount Orpheus' explicit judgement of Myrrha and form a different opinion about her" (Resinski 2014, 277). Myrrha is writhing between "the opposite onslaughts of her lust and her conscience" (Hughes 1997, 118). Her writhing and bewilderment is described as the swaying of a tree under a striking axe. Myrrha is "like a tree" before becoming a tree per se; the idea appears in both Ovid's and Hughes's versions:

just as a great tree, smitten by the axe, when all but the last blow has been struck, wavers which way to fall and threatens every side, so her mind, weakened by many blows, leans unsteadily now this way and now that, and falteringly turns in both directions; and no end nor rest for her passion can she find save death. She decides on death. She rises from her couch, resolved to hang herself. (Ovid 1958, 91)

"Her lust, consummated, had to be death; / Denied, had to be death" (Hughes 1997, 118). Myrrha grieves not giving free reign to her insufferable desire. Like Iokaste (towards her son Oedipus) and Phaedra (towards her son Hyppolitus), she grieves her precious love which was not allowed to be released and unleashed. The image of the cloven tree stands as a symbol of her defragmentation, disintegration, and decomposition: her soul dies before she would die as a human being. The simile of the split trunk of the tree functions as a trope of the trauma of mourning, loss, and renunciation. Myrrha cannot suffer any longer, deciding that suicide is the only way out, and when she is hindered to commit it, she feels she is left with "less than nothing" (Hughes 1997, 119).

Pitied and helped by her old nurse, Myrrha finally arrives in her father's incestuous bed. In yet another rhetorical repetition of Pygmalion's words, her old nurse says to the desperate Myrrha: "'have your' – she did not dare say 'father;' she said no more" (Ovid, 1958, 95),⁴ as if not uttering the word would maintain Myrrha's "virginity." She gets access to her father's bed on a night when the king's bed is "deprived of his lawful wife" (Ovid, 1958, 95), Queen Cenchreis celebrating the annual festival of Ceres, which means that for nine nights she abstains from her husband's bed. In her mother's absence, she takes her mother's place and sleeps with her father. Michèle Lowrie remarks that Myrrha's opportunity to sleep with her father comes about because her mother is celebrating ritual abstinence from sex in honour of Ceres, and she contrasts maternal abstinence with filial sexual impiety (1993, 51–52). Shawn O'Bryhim notes that Myrrha perceives their incestuous act as a marriage (2008, 190).

In Hughes, their mating is associated with "luxury:" the father welcomes "his own flesh and blood / Into the luxury / Of the royal bed" (Hughes 1997, 125). As Myrrha anticipates at the beginning of her tale, they live "their deepest happiness" (Hughes 1997, 115). In the act, they call each other "father" and "daughter," "So the real crime [...] / Let nothing of its wickedness be omitted" (Hughes 1997, 126). Myrrha leaves the king's chamber "crammed" "with his seed" (Hughes 1997, 126), "full of her father, with crime conceived within her womb" (Ovid 1958, 97). Meaningfully, Hughes's text does not name the sinful act, referring to it as "it" and "the same" (they do "it" again, then night after night "the same" [Hughes 1997, 126]).

Upon learning the identity of his lover, Cinyras takes the sword, and Myrrha hardly escapes death (though it is unclear whether he wants to do away with himself or with his daughter). She wanders for nine months, and when she can no longer bear the "burden of her womb" (Ovid 1958, 99) she prays to the gods to be left neither alive nor dead. Her metamorphosis into a tree serves the purpose, place, and space of this in-between world – a limbo –, implying an indefinite, blurred identity, a state of being that allows for passages and simultaneities:

[T]he earth closed over her legs; roots burst forth from her toes and stretched out on either side the supports of the high trunk; her bones gained strength, and, while the central pith remained the same, her blood changed to sap, her arms to long branches, her fingers to twigs, her skin to hard bark. And now the growing tree had closely bound her heavy womb, had buried her breast and was just covering her neck; but she could not endure the delay and, meeting the rising wood, she sank down and plunged her face in the bark. Though she has lost her old-time feelings with her body, still she

4 Pygmalion prays to Venus: "'I pray to have as wife,' he did not dare add 'my ivory maid,' but said, 'one *like* my ivory maid'" (Ovid 1958, 84; emphasis added).

weeps, and the warm drops trickle down from the tree. Even the tears have fame, and the myrrh which distils from the tree-trunk keeps the name of its mistress and will be remembered through all the ages. (Ovid 1958, 99)

Her metamorphosis into a tree is an “ontological exile” from communities of humans both alive and dead (Resinski 2014, 279). Her transformation into a tree is depicted as a response to her request, and it reads as a return to the “anonymous, amorphous stuff from which she came” (Resinski 2014, 279). Her metamorphosis into tree sends her back into Galatea’s statue condition: the earth becomes her footing as the earth/stone used to be her great-grandmother’s footing. Hughes’s lines read: “the earth gripped both her ankles [...] Roots forced from beneath her toenails,” suggesting that she is reclaimed by “her roots” in the earth – her ancestors, and she becomes, like Galatea, “living statuary on a tree’s foundation” (Hughes 1997, 128). Like a statue, her skin changes to rough bark and “the gnarling crust has coffined her swollen womb” (Hughes 1997, 128). Hughes’s coffin metaphor buries the child in her womb as well as the mother-to-be whose whole body is subject to the “burial” of the tree bark. Myrrha as a human is dead but her in-between tree body gives birth to the child conceived in “pietas perverted” (Nagle 1983, 311). Myrrha weeps away her human life and keeps dripping tears – as a myrrh tree: “warm drops ooze from her rind” (Hughes 1997, 128). Her “tears” might also be read as the tears crying in remembrance of her sinful passion: “To this day they [the tears of the tree] are known by her name – Myrrh” (Hughes 1997, 128). The ooze of the tree commemorates the tragic fate of the daughter who fell in love with her father. Her metamorphosis into a tree is a result of father’s and daughter’s transgression: as the father *plants* his *seed* into her, she cannot help but turn into a plant herself. Out of the seed planted in her womb a tree grows, reaching into the earth – her sinful incestuous ancestry – with its roots. The plant then bears its fruit; out of the “pregnant tree,” the “misbegotten child,” the beautiful Adonis, is born: “like a woman in agony, the tree bends itself, groans oft, and is wet with falling tears. [. . .] The tree cracked open, the bark was rent asunder, and it gave forth its living burden, a wailing baby-boy” (Ovid 1958, 101). Out of this – according to the laws – most sinful, most unnatural love and at the same time most natural love – according to Myrrha –, beauty is born: Adonis, the most beautiful boy whom even Venus cannot help falling in love with. As if nature justified the naturalness of Cinyras and Myrrha’s joining, what is born of their love is no freak, no monster but beauty itself. By being doomed to fall in love with the mortal Adonis, Venus too is punished for fulfilling Pygmalion’s wish of transforming the ivory statue into flesh and blood.

Ovid’s power and the overwhelming quality of his work stand in daring to face up to and tackle the taboo of passionate love between father and daughter. Myrrha’s story (in Ovid’s and Hughes’s versions) considers this love natural, and it says yes

to this love deemed by the law sinful and unnatural and, most importantly, by this, it redefines what is human saying passionate love for one's parent is also human – a possible, thinkable, valid feeling. Like Phaedra's story, which considers the idea of passionate love between mother and son, Myrrha faces up to – cannot help accepting – her passion for her father. Unlike Oedipus who does not know he fell in love with his own mother, Myrrha knows very well whom she loves, and after an unaccomplished suicide attempt she faces it. Like Phaedra, she embraces an emotion, a love that is culturally foul and forbidden, allowing and pleading who should it be first and foremost that one falls in love with if not one's parent (or one's child). Learning it is his mother he made love to, Oedipus blinds himself. Knowing she made love to her father, Myrrha prays to be no longer human, and she transforms into a myrrh tree forever crying away her fate. The question of the difference in their reactions – maiming and metamorphosis – remains to be the subject of further consideration. Myrrha's passion stretches the limits of what is human, and her physical metamorphosis is partly her punishment for trespassing the boundaries, but her metamorphosis also allegorizes her transgression. Her transformation is the metaphor of her crisis, and her metamorphosed form becomes the metaphor of her essence. Leonard Barkan says that the essence of metamorphosis lies in the fact that it reveals the essence of something; the essence/nature of something is to be found in its form (Barkan qtd. in Bényei 2013, 17). Myrrha's essence (deciphered from her myrrh tree form) would be her never-ending sorrow and pain in consequence of her renounced love and of her renounced human form. In a way, the child conceived from this love validates her transgression: the child lives on even in her tree body, in her non-human form, and Myrrha feels human pain upon giving birth from her tree body. Her metamorphosis is this limbo state, the "third way, neither wholly dead / Nor painfully alive" (Hughes 1997, 127). The power of Myrrha's story is that it redefines humanness in its liminality, and her tree-state is the bodily limit of her subjectivity.

Works Cited

- Bate, Jonathan. 1994. *Shakespeare and Ovid*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Bényei, Tamás. 2013. *Más alakban. A metamorfózis lehetséges poétikai és politikái*. Thienemann-előadások [In Different Shapes. The Possible Poetics and Politics of Metamorphosis. Thienemann Lectures]. Pécs: Pro Panonnia Kiadói Alapítvány.
- Hofmann, Michael, and James Lasdun, eds. 1994. *After Ovid: New Metamorphoses*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux.
- Hughes, Ted. 1997. *Tales from Ovid*. London: Faber & Faber. Print.

- Kuster, Kristin. n.y. *Myrrha*. <http://kristinkuster.com/portfolio/myrrha/> (Last accessed 20 September 2019).
- Lowrie, Michèle. 1993. "Myrrha's Second Taboo." *Classical Philology* vol. 88, no.1: 50–52.
- Miller, J. Hillis. 1990. *Versions of Pygmalion*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- "Mirha." *Katolikus lexikon* [Catholic Lexicon]. <http://lexikon.katolikus.hu/M/mirha.html> (Last accessed 20 September 2019).
- Mullan, John. 2008. "Ten of the Best Incestuous Relationships." *The Guardian*. <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2008/oct/04/13> (Last accessed 20 September 2019).
- Nagle, Betty Rose. 1983. "Byblis and Myrrha: Two Incest Narratives in the *Metamorphoses*." *The Classical Journal* vol. 78, no. 4: 301–315.
- Nádas, Péter. 2000. *Az égi és a földi szerelemről* [On Celestial and Earthly Love]. Pécs: Jelenkor.
- O'Bryhim, Shawn. 2008. "Myrrha's 'Wedding' (Ov. "Met." 10. 446–470)." *The Classical Quarterly, New Series* vol. 58, no. 1: 190–195.
- Ovid. 1958. *Metamorphoses IX–XV*. Trans. Frank Justus Miller. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, The Loeb Classical Library.
- Resinski, Rebecca. 2014. "Ovidian Ambivalence and Responses to Myrrha in Zimmerman's *Metamorphoses* and Bidart's *Desire*." *International Journal of the Classical Tradition* vol. 21, no. 3: 273–295.
- "Tales from Ovid." Theatre performance. <https://bonemarrowtheatre.com/development-odes-from-ovid/> (Last accessed 20 September 2019).
- Veres, Ottilia. 2019. "Transgression and Metamorphosis in Ted Hughes' 'Pygmalion.'" In *Cultural Encounters: New Perspectives in English and American Studies*, eds. Péter Gaál-Szabó et al., 97–107. Debrecen: Debreceni Református Hittudományi Egyetem.
- Zimmerman, Mary. 2002. *Metamorphoses* (A Play). Northwestern University Press.



Aspects of Residual Narratives as Spaces in Between Based on J. R. R. Tolkien's Fantasies

Vilma-Irén MIHÁLY

Sapientia Hungarian University of Transylvania (Cluj-Napoca, Romania)
Department of Human Sciences
mihalyvilma@uni.sapientia.ro

Abstract. The primary aim of the present paper is to define *residual narratives* based on J. R. R. Tolkien's works. Our approach is comparative and interdisciplinary since we take a close look at how the term *residual* is used in different fields, such as sociology or cultural studies, and try to render the meaning of the new literary term by comparing it to and differentiating it from other similar concepts. Thus, on the one hand, the study is theoretical, based, for example, on Raymond Williams's "residual culture" theory. On the other hand, there is the practical part of the research that analyses Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*, highlighting the main aspects of residual narratives. In the concluding part, we shall also examine to what extent these residual narratives can be regarded as spaces in between.

Keywords: residual culture, residual narrative, fantasy, Tolkien

Introduction

Tolkien's oeuvre can undoubtedly be considered an, if not *the most* important milestone in the development of modern and contemporary fantasy literature. Starting with the success of *The Hobbit* in 1937, continuing with the edition of *The Lord of the Rings* in 1954 and 1955, readers and critics are even now (re)discovering forgotten writings or new sides to the existing stories such as *The Silmarillion*, edited and published posthumously by Tolkien's son Christopher in 1977. The well-known film adaptations based on Tolkien's novels as well as several other forms of popular literature that have made their appearance, e.g. comics, have only contributed to spreading Tolkien's world.

Tolkien opened the path for high fantasy works to enter the mainstream and knock on the door of the literary canon, paving the way for authors and novels

such as J. K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* series or George R. R. Martin's *A Game of Thrones*. Thus, a first imminent question would be what the key to the success of this genre is. What are its main characteristics and its possible definitions?

Tolkien established the main features of fantasy literature with *The Lord of the Rings* (henceforth *TLOTR*). Some of these attributes can be best described using the terminology from Clute and Grant's *Encyclopedia of Fantasy* (1997). In *TLOTR*, Tolkien creates and normalizes the idea of the existence of a secondary world that plays in Middle-earth. This world undergoes a process of "thinning" (Clute and Grant 1997), which is a decline from its former status due to the labouring of Sauron's evil forces. Since the appearance of the evil causes a sense of "wrongness" (Clute and Grant 1997) in Middle-earth, there is a need for the heroes to go on a "quest" (Clute and Grant 1997). On their quest, the heroes – here the hobbits – are guided by their mentor, Gandalf, who leads them from the world they know into and through unknown lands. On their journey, the heroes realize what role they play in the world of the story, which means that they reach "recognition" and "eucatastrophe" (Clute and Grant 1997), which can lead to a cathartic experience. Apart from these basic structural elements, Tolkien also makes use of several other means such as plot devices or landscapes that can be found in succeeding fantasies (cf. James and Mendlesohn 2012, 78).

Thus, one arrives at the conclusion that fantasy can be regarded as a "fuzzy set," a definition stemming from Brian Attebery, i.e. a group of texts which share a cluster of common tropes that can also be objects or narrative techniques. At the centre, there are the tropes of the completely impossible, whereas towards the edge, in subsets, those which include only a small number of tropes or which construct those tropes in such a way as to leave doubt in the reader's mind as to whether or not what they have read is fantastical or not (cf. James and Mendlesohn 2012, 29). Another interpretation of fantasy, according to Farah Mendlesohn, distinguishes four noticeable modes of it that are defined by the way in which the fantastic enters the text and the rhetorical voices which are required to construct the different types of worlds which are born. The first mode is that of the portal quest which introduces a new world into the text. The second is the immersive one in which the text is part of the fantastic world. The third mode refers to the intrusion of the fantastic into the primary world, with the last being the liminal one, which states that magic might or might not be happening (James and Mendlesohn 2012, 29–30). The latter approach offers readers and critics the opportunity to consider fantasy on its own terms and not in those used in case of mimetic fiction, thus giving the possibility for an evaluation of the quality of fantasy works, too (James and Mendlesohn 2012, 29–30).

We could see above the current state of relevant research in the field of fantasy literature, with the main features and structural elements that have to be followed when categorizing such novels. There is no doubt to the fact that the

key to the success of these stories must partly lie precisely in the presence of the above mentioned items in the works, yet there seems to be more to the increasing interest in fantasy literature of *TLOTR* type. As a response, the present paper proposes a new way of reading these texts, namely as *residual narratives*. Thus, one of the aims of the present study is to define residual narratives based on Tolkien's works and secondly to look at some attributes of these narratives that make them function as spaces in between.

Theoretical Background

Raymond Williams introduces the term residual culture next to a dominant and an emergent layer of culture (1977). Culture appears as a complex of dynamic interrelations of "historically varied and variable elements" (1977, 121). Next to the dominant, effective, and hegemonic elements, there are the residual and emergent ones that are important in themselves and in what they tell us about the dominant as well. Residual is not to be mistaken for archaic/outdated. When we analyse the residual layers of culture, we look at the influence of old cultural practices on today's societies and can see that these have been built into the infrastructure of the dominant culture: "The residual, by definition, has been effectively formed in the past, but it is still active in the cultural process, not only and often not at all as an element of the past, but as an effective element of the present" (Williams 1977, 122).

Often the residual can have an oppositional or alternative relation to the dominant culture for there are some experiences, meanings, or values which cannot be verified in terms of the dominant layers but which are still practised based on the residue of former social and cultural organizations (Williams 1977, 122). Williams names three typical examples of residual culture within English society, i.e. organized religion, rural communities, and the institution of monarchy (1977, 122–123). In each case, besides the residual character, there is an alternative or oppositional attitude towards the dominant elements. Rural communities, for example, are engulfed by the dominant culture as idealized or exotic places of escape with a leisure function. On the other hand, they are the opposite of urban industrial capitalism (Williams 1977, 122–123).

A dominant culture cannot allow too many residual elements to function; otherwise, these would threaten to overthrow the established order. Therefore, it makes use of reinterpretations, dilutions, projections, inclusions, and exclusions in order to select and restrict residual elements (Williams 1977, 123). At this point, residuality can also be related to the character of literature, to the relations between the literary canon that belongs to the dominant culture and popular fiction which represents the residual layer of culture. According to Tony

Bennet, popular literature can be defined as a residual concept which is to be characterized by enumerating the features that distinguish it from high literature and from the ingrained peculiarities of the latter (qtd. in Bényei 2009). Within popular literature, fantasy, at least beginning from the early twentieth century, seems to have become an important manifestation of Modernism rather than an anachronistic alternative of it (Attebery 2014, 42). Such a viewpoint is possible due to the fact that fantasy is no longer regarded as pure entertainment but as a real challenge to the canonical realistic models of fiction (Attebery 2014, 42). Whereas Modernism could stand for the dominant layer within literature, fantasy could be the emergent or residual component of it: “The residual might turn out to be the emergent, or at least another face of the emergent” (Attebery 2014, 42).

Thus, the concept of *residuality* works within the field of literature similarly to that of culture and can be applied to notions on the more general level of literary currents, movements, genres, and subgenres for there are always dominant, emergent, and residual trends within each literary period. However, it can also be used successfully when dealing with narratives of fantasy literature. Maybe popular literature and fantasy can be considered residual components of the dominant literary canon because of the residual narratives that build their core. The term *residual narrative* has not been coined yet;¹ hence, in what follows, we shall try to delimitate it from analogous phenomena and name its main characteristics.

A first approach derives from the meaning of the adjective *residual* as used by Williams when talking about culture. Applying the term to literary texts, this means that residual narratives carry some old/ancient pieces of information, elements that have remained from the past and have resisted time, some essence that contains a plus which allows the remainder to get active in a new context, too. These components are sort of recycled, offering the possibility for new ways of structuring, shaping, and interpreting the narrative itself.

This first attempt to define residual narratives is rather general and allows a large variety of literary texts, especially those that make use of past stories, to be read as such. However, in what follows, we intend to narrow down these types of narratives, on the one hand, by looking at those which primarily use myths and mythical elements and, on the other hand, by dealing with texts that belong to fantasy literature. Thus, first we have to differentiate between the way Modernist texts, for example, turn to and use myths and the manner in which Tolkien and fantasy literature imitating him handles mythical themes and components.

1 Arthur W. Frank talks about the rhetoric of self-change within illness narratives differentiating between three categories with special types of changes and a fourth residual class (1993). However, he uses *residual* as a synonym for *remaining*, referring, on the one hand, to the fourth category as the remaining one next to the three already mentioned. On the other hand, residual can also denote those authors who remain reluctant or ambivalent about whether their illness has changed them or not. *Residual* as an adjective would thus describe their feelings towards their illness experience and characterize the resulting narratives as unchanged, unaltered.

There are several Modernist literary works which turn to ancient myths as a response to the fragmented reality of the age, e.g. Joyce's *Ulysses*, T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*, Hesse's *Steppenwolf*, Garcia Marquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, etc. While original and great in different ways apart, each of these twentieth-century works shares a similar method of working with myths. Their poetics of mythologizing is primarily based on the interpretation of contemporary culture with the help of mythological tools (e.g. Joyce). At the same time, mythologizing can be used as a method to control, arrange, and give form and significance to deeds and events that build up the history of the period (e.g. T. S. Eliot) (Abrudan 2003, 45–46). Mythologizing remains an important artistic procedure in novels after World War II as well. These novels do not necessarily show the reader a universal model of our world, but by operating with mythical or biblical episodes they represent direct parallels to certain situations highlighting their symbolical significance (e.g. Nossack). Using the prefigurative technique (cf. White 1971), new, more modern and complex motifs appear in these novels which in their turn expand the line of structural possibilities (Abrudan 2003, 51).

The common aim of Modernist texts when turning to myths is thus to cope with reality; yet, paradoxically, by the universal validity asserted by the narratives, they actually reject the world existing outside the works (Hiley 2004, 842). They build closed entities which can be seen as secondary semiological systems (cf. Barthes 1972). The myths they use are the primary system (e.g. Homer's *Odyssey*), which loses its meaning and significance because another, secondary system (e.g. Joyce's *Ulysses*) is imposed upon it. By engulfing pre-existent sources or structures, textual authority is achieved (Hiley 2004, 843), yet the cosmic model established is based on the exclusion of certain texts by preferring others instead. This underlines Barthes's theory, according to which myths naturalize their concept, which brings them close to ideologies (cf. Hiley 2004, 843) and highlights their constructed character.

In many aspects, Tolkien's works are similar to the above mentioned Modernist texts. Though belonging to the genre of high fantasy, to the realm of the imaginary, Tolkien's works do handle reality: "[...] his work articulates some of the deepest and most specific concerns of the twentieth century – concerns such as industrialized warfare, the temptations of power, the origins of evil, the failure of good intentions and righteous causes" (Shippey 2001, n.p.). His works also construct a Secondary World, which can be interpreted using Barthes's theory as in the case of Modernist literature. By relating the Secondary World to the Primary World using different myths, authority is established, which intends to make the created natural and universal. However, next to the similarities, there are significant differences between Modernist writers and Tolkien, precisely in the way they use myths and the mythical method.

It is well known that Tolkien was influenced by and drew inspiration from a great number of various mythologies, starting from the Greco-Roman and Norse gods and goddesses to the world of the Anglo-Saxon *Beowulf* and the Finnish *Kalevala*, not to mention Christian works such as the *Bible*. His aim was to create a mythology of grandeur similar to that of the above mentioned for England (cf. Day 2017, 1–15). While Tolkien’s novels can surely be read as inter- and hypertexts using Genette’s terminology,² in his case, we are not dealing with the rewriting of classical myths as, for example, the various versions of Phaedra throughout literary history, where the authors take the basic myth and present it according to the prevailing trend of their age, changing some items but sticking to the main events of the story line. Tolkien made use of mythemes³ or monomyths⁴ to create his own mythopoesis. The latter term was coined by the author himself in his poem “Mythopoeia” published in 1931. The word literally means “myth-making” as in ancient times, but since Tolkien’s use of it the term has come to denote a narrative genre in which the author creates a fictional mythology integrating traditional themes and archetypes⁵ from ancient mythologies. The purpose of these “artificial mythologies” (Dundes 1984, 1), apart from lending credibility and depth to the fictional world, would be to bring some sort of mythology to the readers of modern times who seem to have forgotten about the real importance and meaning of myths, namely: how to live a human life no matter of the circumstances (Johnson n.y.). In the rapidly changing society of the mid-twentieth century, today even more so, the mythologies of the past, i.e. of Zeus and the gods from Olympus, for example, seem to be outdated. People no longer believe or see the importance of such stories, regarding them as pure fiction or tales meant for children. Thus, myths take on a new shape or put on a mask (cf. Eliade 1957) because the world will no longer accept them otherwise. The mask they use comes in form of mythopoetic works which in their turn can be regarded as residual narratives. On the surface, they carry all the elements that are necessary to construct a similar world to the one presented in ancient myths – mythemes, monomyths, archetypes, motifs, symbols, characters, time and places etc. – and apply these in a new context, in a

2 Gérard Genette described five subtypes of transtextuality, namely: inter-, para-, meta-, hyper-, and architextuality. Intertextuality refers to the use of direct quotes from or allusions to other literary works. Hypertextuality denotes the relation between a text B and a preceding text A, which is the hypotext. Text B is derived from text A, while the derivation can happen via transformation or imitation (1992).

3 A term introduced and used by structuralist Claude Lévi-Strauss to denote a set of items which share one functional characteristic (cf. Cuddon 1998, 526).

4 Joseph Campbell borrowed the word from Joyce’s *Finnegan’s Wake* and started to use it as a term for a mythological archetype or a mytheme which reoccurs in different cultures all over the world. Campbell refers to the hero’s journey as the utmost narrative archetype, differentiating seventeen stages of the monomyth (cf. Campbell 2004). In the terminology of Claude Lévi-Strauss, the seventeen stages would correspond to the individual myhtemes that are then assembled into the structure of the monomyth.

5 Greek “original pattern”, a prototype, a paradigm (Cuddon 1998, 54–55).

new manner so as to build up another world. Residuality adds an extra ingredient to mythopoetic narratives; it emphasizes the active traits of the old components in the new context. Thus, the main difference between the way Modernist texts and Tolkien's works handle myths lies in the residual character of the Tolkienian narrative. Though one can trace most mythical sources Tolkien uses throughout his novels, these are concealed in the texts and are at times hardly detectable. The aim is not to flaunt the sources, the old myths, as T. S. Eliot or Ezra Pound did (cf. Hiley 2004, 851) in order to offer a symbolic reading to decipher or to reflect reality, but to construct something new based on these ancient building blocks that one can take refuge in. What remains of these foundation stones is the essence, the residue that allows new meanings to emerge. In what follows, we shall try to show the multiple layers of residuality in Tolkien's texts.

Aspects of Tolkien's Residual Narratives

The outer shell of the Tolkienian novels follows the above mentioned characteristics of residual narratives as defined generally. Since there are numerous studies and comparative researches⁶ that analyse and discuss the relations between the different mythologies and Tolkien's world of Middle-earth, we are going to look at only a couple of such aspects in order to prove the existence of residual elements on this level of the narratives based mainly on *TLOTR*.

As far as locations are concerned, Tolkien created an alternative mythical world. Middle-earth is at the centre of the spatial structure of *TLOTR*. The name itself is not Tolkien's creation, it can be found in Norse mythology as well as in Old English, among other sources:

Middle-earth is [...] not my own invention. It is a modernization or alteration [...] of an old word for the inhabited world of Men, the *oikoumene*: middle because thought of vaguely as set amidst the encircling Seas and (in the northern-imagination) between ice of the North and the fire of the South. O. English *middan-geard*, mediaeval E. *midden-erd*, *middle-erd*. (Tolkien 1995, 211)

The Tolkienian *Middle-earth* becomes the land of men located between Heaven and Hell. Thus, the structure of space in *TLOTR* does not bear the characteristics

6 It is virtually impossible to list all relevant references or academic societies, journals dealing with and dedicated to Tolkien's works. Therefore, we have mentioned here the ones that have in some way been consulted to serve for the purposes of the present paper: Drout's *J. R. R. Tolkien Encyclopedia* (2007), Lobdell's *Tolkien Compass* (2003), Fritsch's studies upon mythological aspects of the Tolkienian world (2009, 2011), Solopova (2009).

typical of our everyday spatial perception. It is the product of a mythical way of thinking that is specific to all the creations of the myths (cf. Mihály 2012, 201):

When myth separates right and left, above and below, when it separates the different regions of the heavens—east and west, north and south—it is not concerned with locations and places in the sense of empirical-physical space, nor with points and directions in the sense of geometrical space. [...] The east is at once the source of light as well as the source and origin of life; the west is the place of decline, of dread, of the realm of death. (Cassirer 2013, 326)

In *TLOTR*, however, Middle-earth is situated between the world of angels and that of the evil, yet on the horizontal level and not as usually thought of on the vertical one. To the west of Middle-earth, there lies “The Blessed Realm,” also called “The Undying Lands,” where the demi-gods, high elves, and the spirits of the dead dwell. While the west – as we could see in the quotation above – is most frequently associated with negative images, here it gets a positive connotation. It is the home of the elves/angels, it is blessed and undying, a land where one longs to belong to.

Hence, as far as space and places are concerned, the narrative can be regarded as residual from a double point of view – on the one hand, due to the recycled use of already existing concrete elements such as the name Middle-earth taken from Old English and Norse mythology. On the other hand, the narrative becomes residual due to the way it uses mythical space structures. The idea of the structure is the old one: each location has a different value from the one in the physical world, but at the same time it becomes renewed and unique within the novel.

Time frames in *TLOTR* move on a wide scale and are almost similar to the *in illo tempore* of ancient myths used for undetermined time in the past. Thus, Sauron creates the One Ring that would have the power to rule over the other rings and those who wear them thousands of years before the events of the novel, as we learn in the Prologue. The ring is found over two thousand years later, and after several turns gets into the possession of the hobbit Frodo Baggins, who, advised by Gandalf, sets off to destroy it (Tolkien 1968). Dating the events way back in time into an undetermined past is yet another proof of the author following the traditions of ancient myths and great epics, with a possible residual character as temporal elements gain a specific meaning within each novel apart.

A prolific aspect for us to analyse from the perspective of residual narratives is the set of characters and the journey of the hero(es). Several main characters share common traits with a number of known, mainly Norse and Greco-Roman mythical heroes, but there are similarities to Arthurian and Biblical protagonists, resemblances to fairy tale or historic figures, too.

The Norse god Odin, for example, seems to have inspired Tolkien in the construction of many of his protagonists. Since Odin is considered as a complex

and ambivalent figure in Norse mythology, being the Almighty, god of wisdom, poetry and love, king and magician, he could easily become the model for Manwë, the King of the Valar and Morgoth the Dark Enemy or the wizards Gandalf the Grey and Saruman the White at the same time. Certain features of Odin can be even traced in Sauron's description too (Day 2017, 30–31).

Furthermore, behind Tolkien's half-elven twins, the immortal Elrond and the mortal Elros, we suspect the Greek divine twins Castor, the immortal, and Pollux, the mortal. Similarly, Isildur and Anárion, the founders of Gondor, can be compared to the founders of Rome, Romulus and Remus (Day 2017, 13). Within the theme of the "return of the king," we find remnants of tales about King Arthur and the mentor figure, Merlin the Wizard, that are embodied in the actions of Aragorn and Gandalf (Day 2017, 13). Ingwë, the Lord of the First Kindred of the Elves can be, on the one hand, depicted as Moses for he was chosen by the Valar to lead the elves out of Middle-earth to Elvenhome. On the other hand, Ingeld, a Northern heroic warrior, also served as a model for the construction of this character (Day 2017, 36–37). Some of Tolkien's heroines were inspired by fairy tale figures. Arwen Undómiel, Galadriel of Lórien, and Varda Elentári, the three greatest queens of the Tolkienian world are to be found in "Snow White and the Seven Dwarves" (Day 2017, 13). The historic King Theodoric the Goth (5th c.) provided inspiration for Tolkien's King Théoden of Rohan, while Charlemagne's rise to Emperor of the Holy Roman Empire can be linked to Aragorn's becoming High King in *TLOTR* (Day 2017, 13–14).

We shall conclude that Tolkien makes use of and combines a great variety of sources in drawing his characters in a way specific to residual narratives on the surface. He takes previously existing, known elements or features and mixes, recycles them so that when activated in their new context the old not only gets alive but gives birth to something totally new.

Tolkien does not only rely on different mythical figures to draw his characters but also makes use of old mythical structural patterns when constructing them. Several known theories, such as Propp's functions performed by the heroes of the story (2009) as well as Todorov (1966) and Bremond's (1966) models, can be successfully applied to an in-depth character analysis in *TLOTR*. However, in what follows, we shall look at Campbell's monomyth with its seventeen stages in the case of Frodo, the protagonist in *TLOTR*.

In *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (2004), after having analysed several religions and myths from all over the world, Campbell describes the universal phases of the hero's journey, which in his opinion, despite the differences, can be found in most ancient mythical stories: A. *Departure* with five phases, namely *The Call to Adventure*, *Refusal of the Call*, *Supernatural Aid*, *The Crossing of the First Threshold*, *The Belly of the Whale*; B. *Initiation* with six stages, i.e. *The Road of Trials*, *The Meeting with the Goddess*, *Woman as the Temptress*,

Atonement with the Father, Apotheosis, The Ultimate Boon; C. Return with six phases, i.e. *The Refusal of the Return, The Magic Flight, Rescue from Without, The Crossing of the Return Threshold, Master of the Two Worlds, Freedom to Live* (1–221). Though a modern myth, the stages mentioned and elaborated by Campbell are discernible in Frodo's journey as well.

There are several important characters and anti-heroes in *TLOTR*, yet the quest for the ring starts and ends with Frodo, and thus the hero's journey is actually that of Frodo's. Frodo, a hero to become, receives Gandalf's message in form of an urge to set out and destroy the one ring – this can be regarded as the call to adventure. Yet, at first, he does not want to take on the challenge for he feels he is not courageous enough to go on such an adventure and tries to convince Gandalf to destroy the ring himself – this corresponds to the refusal of the call. While still in the Shire, Frodo is helped by the High Elves when fleeing the Black Riders – which fits Campbell's supernatural aid. The literal crossing of the threshold corresponds to Frodo's stepping out of the Shire into the Old Forest, whereas there is a figurative move too – from not being aware of the ring's significance and power to becoming conscious of its force and thus arriving at the land of myths (cf. Kesti 2007, 38). The last stage of the first section, captured in the belly of the whale, in Frodo's case occurs when being kept underground in a grave by Barrow-wight. This stage also stands for a symbolic rebirth of the hero.

Once set off on his journey, escaping death, and being reborn, the hero undergoes several trials – the road of trials at Campbell. Frodo's trials begin when he starts from Tom Bombadil's land and end when he arrives at Mount Doom. On his way, he receives constant help from the elves and from Bilbo's gifts. Another character that helps Frodo is Galadriel – the goddess in Campbell's language –, who, by letting Frodo look into her mirror, gives him insight into the ring's power. Frodo is also tempted to offer the ring to Galadriel, who rejects him, and thus he can continue his mission and abide the call of destiny – atonement to the Father at Campbell. The moment of apotheosis is reached by Frodo when he puts on the ring, becoming divine precisely by what he feared and desired. The ultimate boon in Campbell's terms is represented in *TLOTR* in the moment of the ring's and Sauron's destruction. Once the evil dies, peace and harmony take its place.

The last section of the hero's journey consists of the phases of returning home. However, Frodo does not want to return to the Shire but to Valinor, the place of wonders and immortality – this corresponds to the refusal of return at Campbell. The two Campbellian stages of the magic flight and the rescue from without appear in *TLOTR* when Frodo is found on the hill surrounded by lava and gets help from Gandalf and the Great Eagles in order to flee the land of Mordor. When the ring is destroyed, evil forces diminish instantly, and the good can live without fear – this stands for Campbell's freedom to live. Frodo crosses the return threshold when he arrives home to the Shire, i.e. returns from the dark lands into the light. The

return is not easy for the hero: Frodo suffers because of the acquired wounds every year on the same day these occurred. Frodo is respected in both worlds although he is more acclaimed outside the Shire than at home, though he is admired there as well. After having fulfilled his duties, Frodo leaves home to go to Valinor. As already mentioned, this moment corresponds to the refusal of return, yet, because Tolkien puts this stage last within the sequence, he does not follow Campbell's pattern in a very significant instance. Usually at the end of the return section, there stands the moment of arriving home and living in freedom and peace, yet Tolkien opts for a different outcome as he lets Frodo find happiness away from home, in Valinor. Another major difference would be the fact that usually the hero's journey implies that at the end the hero receives/finds something, whereas here the task is to destroy the ring. Yet, the object of destruction represents evil; so, in the end, evil is defeated and good prevails. Thus, we can conclude that once again Tolkien makes use of old elements on the structural level of character construction and applies them in a new context, combining and mixing the order of the events so that the narrative becomes residual in this respect too.

Besides the visible similarities and differences between various ancient myths and the Tolkienian world on the surface – names, places, time – and on structural level the hero's journey, there is proof of residuality on a deeper layer of the narrative as well, i.e. on the level of the language. This is connected to Tolkien's perception of the existing relations between myths and language: "It would be more near the truth to say that languages, especially modern European languages, are a disease of mythology. But Language cannot, all the same, be dismissed. The incarnate mind, the tongue, and the tale are in our world coeval" (Tolkien 1947, 7–8). Whereas thought, language, and stories are all considered to be ancient, myths seem to be prior to language as if the latter had evolved from the former and not vice versa. Tolkien speaks of a "mythical grammar" (Tolkien 1947, 8) in which each part of speech has an additional meaning, e.g. adjectives like *light*, *heavy*, *grey*, *yellow*, *still*, and *swift* appear in new and unusual combinations that make images of "heavy things light and able to fly, turn grey lead into yellow gold, and the still rock into a swift water" (Tolkien 1947, 8) look credible. While the primary sense of these words is preserved, they get further meanings through the new way of usage in a new context, contributing to the creation of a new story: "But in such 'fantasy,' as it is called, new form is made; Faerie begins; Man becomes a sub creator" (Tolkien 1947, 8). In this way, the language of the Tolkienian novels is yet another means through which the residual narrative is constructed. Closely connected to myths, language does not only represent or symbolically interpret the beauties and terrors of the world but becomes a tool of creation since mythologies are sub-creations themselves (Tolkien 1947, 8).

Thus, at the very base of the Tolkienian world, there stands the belief in the power of words and language that can make things more luminous by the mere

change of the setting: “It was in fairy stories that I first divined the potency of words, and the wonder of the things, such as stone, and wood, and iron, tree and grass, house and fire, bread and wine” (Tolkien 1947, 20). Tolkien combines simple words with such imagination and skilful art that the result is an exceptional piece of high fantasy literature. Within Tolkien’s formula, imagination refers to the mental power of image making, whereas art to the achievement of the expression, which gives the inner consistency of reality (Tolkien 1947, 15–16). Art establishes the connection between imagination and the final outcome, i.e. the sub-creation. From this perspective, Tolkien’s novels can again be regarded as residual narratives since they take the core or prototype of creation and produce sub-creations based on and making use of the primordial model through language and myths so that the old is preserved, transformed, and recycled into something totally new.

Conclusions – Residual Narratives as Spaces in Between

In conclusion, we can say that *residual narratives* can be defined as stories which contain mythical elements, items that mostly stem from ancient or older primary or sub-created secondary worlds that with the help of imagination/fantasy and art are recycled and put into a new context which then they actively shape, just the way in which the residual layers of culture/literature influence the dominant ones. It is possible for these elements and items to vary from the smallest unit, e.g. words and language, to larger ones such as the structural pattern of a story. Thus, residual narratives preserve and carry something essential, pure either on the level of language, theme or that of structure that has survived over time and which gets (re)activated, often hidden behind a mask or taking on a totally new form but at the same time generating new meanings within the narrative.

As we could see above, Tolkien’s fantasy novels can be regarded as residual narratives on several levels. On the surface, we could find numerous similarities between ancient mythical stories and the world created by Tolkien, e.g. the origin and sources for the name Middle-earth, time frames, or the resemblances between the characters and mythical figures such as Odin and Gandalf or Sauron. There were examples of residuality on structural level, too. We followed the hero’s journey in Frodo’s case and could again trace the analogous steps and the differences between Campbell’s model and the Tolkienian protagonist’s journey. We then looked at the phenomenon on the level of language and found that the way the words are used and combined could be regarded as residual, turning the text itself into a residual narrative.

Based on these conclusions, we can establish a further characteristic of residual narratives, namely that they function as spaces in between. In a first instance, we refer to the in-between-ness on textual level, meaning that these

narratives are – as proven through examples in the paper – a bridge between some ancient story/world and the contemporary text/milieu. Basically, they create a common textual ground where the old and the new are present at the same time and their coexistence is fruitful. Secondly, this type of narrative makes up spaces in between in temporal respect as well since they link previously created texts to modern ones, suspending the time-gap. Such an interpretation brings the phenomenon close to Williams’s concept of culture, where the dominant, residual, and emergent layers meet and are all active in the present, dismissing temporal linearity. Thus Tolkien’s residual narratives as spaces in between also resemble Bhabha’s third space since it is no longer of importance which culture or, in this case, source-text-element is original, more important, or prior to the other because “all forms of culture are continually in a process of hybridity” (Rutherford 1990, 211). At the meeting point of the different elements – here old and new –, it is not essential to identify the components and look at what has been created from them, but it is the hybridity in which they coexist which “enables other positions to emerge” (Rutherford 1990, 211). We have to look at the Tolkienian creation from a different perspective, namely as residual narratives that are characterized by hybridity. Tolkien’s Secondary World can be regarded as a third space in Bhabha’s terminology, which displaces its constituting, stories setting up “new structures of authority [...] which are inadequately understood through received wisdom” (Rutherford 1990, 211). This reading is possible due to the residuality of the narrative, which works on several levels, allowing the past to be present and active in the *now*.

Finally, some elements of these residual narratives can also be compared to those of Pleșu’s intermediary world or space between the Supreme Entity and the earthly world; his space in between is inhabited by angels moving up and down on Jacob’s ladder (2003). This offers insight into Tolkien’s world from yet another viewpoint. We leave the horizontal level and turn to the vertical, where Tolkien connects primary reality with the secondary world that he creates in such a way that transcendental and universal truths are revealed in a unique, residual manner.

Works Cited

- Abrudan, Elena. 2003. *Structuri mitice în proza contemporană* [Mythical Structures in Contemporary Prose]. Cluj-Napoca: Casa Cărții de Știință.
- Attebery, Brian. 2014. *Stories about Stories: Fantasy and the Remaking of Myths*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Barthes, Roland. 1972. *Mythologies*. Trans. Annette Lavers. New York: The Noonday Press.

- Bényei, Tamás. 2009. "Kategóriaváltások: a krimi elolvashatatlansága" ["Category Changes: The Illegibility of Crime Books"]. *Alföld* vol. 60, no. 5: 45–59.
- Bremond, Claude. 1966. "The Logic of Narrative Possibilities." Trans. Elaine D. Cancalon. *New Literary History* vol. 11, no. 3, *On Narrative and Narratives: II* (Spring 1980): 387–411.
- Campbell, Joseph. 2004. *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*. Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press.
- Cassirer, Ernst. 2013. *The Warburg Years (1919–1933) Essays on Language, Art, Myth, and Technology*. Trans. S. G. Lofts. New Heaven and London: Yale University Press.
- Clute, John and John Grant. 1997. *The Encyclopedia of Fantasy*. London: Orbit Book.
- Cuddon, J. A. 1998. *Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory*. London: Penguin Books.
- Day, David. 2017. *The Heroes of Tolkien*. London: Cassell Illustrated, Octopus Publishing House.
- Dundes, Alan, ed. 1984. *Sacred Narrative. Readings in the Theory of Myth*. Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press.
- Drout, Michael D. C., ed. 2007. *J.R.R. Tolkien Encyclopedia. Scholarship and Critical Assessment*. New York, London: Routledge.
- Eliade, Mircea. 1957. *The Sacred and the Profane. The Nature of Religion*. Trans. Willard. R. Trask. New York: A Harvest Book.
- Frank, Arthur W. 1993. "The Rhetoric of Self-Change: Illness Experience as Narrative." *The Sociological Quarterly* vol. 34, no. 1: 39–52. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/4121557> (Last accessed 15 March 2019).
- Fritsch, V. H. 2009. *One Ring to Bind Them All: The Mythological Appeal in J.R.R. Tolkien's "The Lord of the Rings."* Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul (UFRGS), Instituto de Letras, Porto Alegre. <https://www.lume.ufrgs.br/bitstream/handle/10183/22050/000738621.pdf> (Last accessed 19 March 2019).
- Fritsch, V. H. and Maggio, S. S. 2011. "There and Back Again: Tolkien's The Lord of the Rings in the Modern Fiction." *Revista Recorte* (electronic magazine) vol. 8, no. 2. <https://dialnet.unirioja.es/descarga/articulo/3872123.pdf> (Last accessed 20 May 2019).
- Genette, Gérard. 1992. *The Architext. An Introduction*. Trans. Jane E. Lewin. Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press.
- Hiley, Margaret. 2004. "Stolen Language, Cosmic Models: Myths and Mythology in Tolkien." *MFS Modern Fiction Studies* vol. 50, no. 4 (Winter): 838–860.
- James, Edward and Farah Mendlesohn, eds. 2012. *The Cambridge Companion to Fantasy Literature*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

- Johnson, Clint. n.y. "Narrative Archetypes." <http://www.clintjohnsonwrites.com/narrative-archetypes.html> (Last accessed 10 July 2019).
- Kesti, Tutta. 2007. *Heroes of Middle-Earth: J. Campbell's Monomyth in J.R.R. Tolkien's The Lord of the Rings (1954–1955)*. A Pro Gradu Thesis in English. Department of Languages, University of Jyväskylä. https://jyx.jyu.fi/bitstream/handle/123456789/7305/URN_NBN_fi_jyu-2007550.pdf (Last accessed 10 July 2019).
- Lobdell, Jared, ed. 2003. *A Tolkien Compass*. Chicago and La Salle, Illinois: Open Court.
- Mihály, Vilma-Irén. 2012. "Mythical Spaces – The Aleph as Seen by Borges and Coelho." *Acta Universitatis Sapientiae, Philologica* vol. 4, no. 1: 200–208.
- Pleşu, Andrei. 2003. *Despre Îngeri [About Angels]*. Bucharest: Humanitas.
- Propp, Vladimir. 2009. *Morphology of the Folktale*. Trans. Laurence Scott. University of Austin: Texas Press.
- Rutherford, Jonathan. 1990. "The Third Space. Interview with Homi Bhabha." *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference*, 207–221. London: Lawrence and Wishart.
- Todorov, Tzvetan. 1971. "The 2 Principles of Narrative Diacritics." Trans. Philip E. Lewis. *Diacritics* vol. 1, no. 1 (Autumn): 37–44.
- Shippey, Tom. 2001. Interview with Tom Shippey conducted by Houghton Mifflin. <http://www.theonering.com/news/books/interview-with-tom-shippey-author-of-j-r-r-tolkien-author-of-the-century> (Last accessed 14 September 2019).
- Solopova, Elizabeth. 2009. *Languages, Myths and History: An Introduction to the Linguistic and Literary Background of J. R. R. Tolkien's Fiction*. Oxford: North Landing Books.
- Tolkien, J. R. R. 1931. "Mythopoeia." <http://home.agh.edu.pl/~evermind/jrrtolkien/mythopoeia.htm> (Last accessed 5 July 2019).
1947. "On Fairy Stories." <http://brainstorm-services.com/wcu-2004/fairystories-tolkien.pdf> (Last accessed 5 July 2019).
1968. *The Lord of the Rings*. (TLOTR). Vol I. London: George Allen and Unwin.
- 1995 [1981]. *The Letters of J. R. R. Tolkien*. Ed. Humphrey Carpenter. London: Harper Collins.
- White, John. 1971. *Mythology in the Modern Novel. A Study of Prefigurative Techniques*. Princeton University Press.
- Williams, Raymond. 1977. *Marxism and Literature*. Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press.



The Practical Past as a Field of Metahistorical Approach. Some Remarks on the Contemporary Situation of Historical Theory

Tamás KISANTAL

University of Pécs (Hungary)

Department of Modern Literature and Literary Theory

kisantal.tamas@pte.hu

Abstract. The narrative theory of history that studies historical works from the viewpoint of their narrative, rhetorical devices, and ideological strategies highly emphasized the necessity of renewing historiography. In his early essays, the trend's founding father, Hayden White, positioned history between art and science or fiction and reality and defined the role of historical theory as a kind of “critical historiography” that is both a criticism of actual historical works and a prescriptive theoretical approach with which the contemporary historical discipline can reform itself. This renewal basically meant a formal reorganization with which the historical works and the historical discipline itself could come closer to literature by using narrative methods and rhetorical devices of recent literary works and films. However, after the 1990s, White and his followers had to face some radical problems that compelled them to rethink the role of recent historiography and their theoretical positions as well. Firstly, the so-called “new” historiography did not actually come into existence, or at least not in a way they suggested. Secondly, new forms of “unofficial” history, from varieties of public history through conspiracy theories to contemporary historical fictions, forced to reconceptualize the task of historical theory and its approach to the social and ideological functions of “official” history. Analysing some recently published works of this trend (above all, Hayden White's concept of “modernist event” and his distinction between two forms of the past, theoretical and practical), my essay tries to define the situation of historical theory among the forms of contemporary historical experience.

Keywords: theory of history, public history, conspiracy theories, practical past

Introduction: Historical Theory as Critique of Historiography

Modern academic historiography has regarded itself as both science and art since its establishment in the nineteenth century. It is a science because its aim is to represent the past realities objectively and an art as well since this representation can be accomplished only with narrative tools of language. While the main methodological guiding principle for historiography was defined as purging its language from rhetoric and producing an objective, scientific approach, the implicit task of the historian was to retell the story of the past events as they actually happened. Thus, according to the classical view of historical discipline, the historian is a chronicler of past events, and his or her main task is to study the past objectively and to communicate impartially its true, real story for the present.

One does not need too much explanation that this approach has become quite old-fashioned since theoretical viewpoints have asserted almost the opposite for decades. The founding father of modern historical theory, Hayden White, in his masterpiece, *Metahistory*, which was later considered a book that made the “paradigm shift” in the field of history possible, emphasized provocatively that historical texts are some kind of fictions due to their formal, narrative aspects. In White’s view, the past is only a chaotic mass of facts and events for us, and so historians create an intelligible but necessarily fictional story from that chaos by framing it with some culturally prearranged narrative patterns. These narrative plot structures are connected to some specific philosophical explanatory methods and ideological implications, and thus history cannot be a science in the strict sense, but it is situated somewhere among science, art, philosophy, and politics; it is all but at the same time none of them entirely (White 1973).

Thus, from the beginning, this theoretical approach tried to challenge the traditional position of historical discipline by questioning its scientific character. It had a twofold stake in challenging the traditional, objectivist view of history: firstly, to introduce a critical, self-reflexive perspective into academic historiography, to elaborate the methodology and analytical tools of this “metahistorical” view and, secondly, to encourage the development and renewal of historiography. However, after the 1990s and the new millennium, several new historical or quasi-historical directions appeared, which have transformed some connections between historical theory and historiography. The theory had to face up to the fact that historiography did not change radically, and the role of theory remained marginal in the historical discipline. At the same time, both theory and academic history had to recognize that some new competitors appeared, mostly from the popular culture and the political area, which demanded to rethink the contemporary role and possibilities of historiography.

In my essay, I aim to analyse this situation closer and show a significant approach by which a contemporary historical theory can continue its “metahistorical” perspective and analytical methods and rethink its point of view as well. Firstly, I will sketch briefly some important basic preconceptions of the historical theory about the function of the narrative form in history and the task of theoretical historiography. Secondly, I will examine the historical field and discourse after the new millennium, comparing some new or unofficial historical explanatory methods and narratives with the academic historiography. Finally, by analysing Hayden White’s last book and his distinction between two approaches to the past, I will draw some conclusions about the possible task of the contemporary theory of history and its relation to the tendency’s original aims.

Theory and Practice in New Historiography

In another famous early essay, entitled *The Burden of History*, White analysed the cultural situation of history in the twentieth century and expounded that the greatest challenge of historiography is mainly a formal problem. When the modern academic historical discipline was established in the nineteenth century, it borrowed some basic narrative and representative strategies from the contemporary realist novel (e.g. omniscient narrator, metonymic prose style, using reality effects, etc.). It was modern in the nineteenth century but, according to White, in the century of Proust, Joyce, or the *nouveau roman*, the realist style of historiography became obsolete, so it could not represent the contemporary view of reality or perspective of history. According to White:

when historians claim that history is a combination of science and art, they generally mean that it is a combination of *late nineteenth-century* social science and *mid-nineteenth century* art. [...] If this is the case, then artists and scientists alike are justified in criticizing historians, *not because they study the past*, but because they are studying it with *bad science and bad art* (White 1966, 127; emphasis in the original).

Thus, White’s theses had both descriptive and prescriptive aspects. They were descriptive analysing the narrative strategies and ideological implications of given historical works and were prescriptive as well since he emphasized the necessity of renewing the representational, narrative methods of historiography. This kind of narrative philosophy of history was flourishing especially from the mid-70s to the end of the 80s, and White with his followers (Dominick LaCapra, Hans Kellner, Frank Ankersmit, Keith Jenkins, etc.) underlined both aspects of the theory. Consequently, the theory had become the “bad conscience” of

historical discipline by continuously analysing and criticizing certain works of historiography and trying to encourage historians to write new, more modern and groundbreaking works. They continuously pointed out that the historical discipline had to abandon the naïve idea of objectivity and reshape its own position in the cultural and social fields. This reshaping could only be accomplished with new, formally innovative and more experimental texts that accept the “semi-fictional character” of historiography. Therefore, theorists of history usually tried to define the new trend of history and historiography with the rhetorical device of underlining the “postness” of our historical culture. They emphasized that our culture has “stepped beyond” the traditional view of history, and one no longer can believe in “the great metanarratives of the nineteenth century;” thus, we have to “rethink” our traditional views of the past and the representations of these views. The practical consequence of this rethinking process would be, and has to be, the change of historiography’s prose style and narrative methods, and so one of the main tasks of historians is to write some “new,” “unconventional” historical works (see Berkhofer 1997, Jenkins 1991, Fay 2002). But in the academic field of history the separateness between theory and practice increased, theorists mostly just read and examined texts of historians but did not carry out actual research, while historians continued writing traditional, so-called “realist” works and mostly did not care about theoretical questions.

However, to legitimize itself, the theory had to find some “modern” or “postmodern” historical works demonstrating these very recommended directions and new representative methods. The theory attempted to apply two strategies to show that a new, both formally and epistemologically progressive historiography had already existed. The first tactic is to find some such works from recent historiography and to point out that there are some actual revolutionary efforts to reshape the discipline. But almost all essays analysing the contemporary “modern” or “postmodern” historiography mention the same four or five books as instances of the groundbreaking, formally innovative wave of history, such as *Dead Certainties* by Simon Schama or the microhistorical works of Carlo Ginzburg and Natalie Zemon Davis (Schama 1991, Ginzburg 1980, Davis 1983). It is worth mentioning that sometimes theorists interpreted these works radically differently than the authors themselves. For example, while Dutch philosopher of history, Frank Ankersmit regarded the field of microhistory as an example par excellence of postmodernist historiography, microhistorians intensively denied their so-called “postmodernity;” in fact, Carlo Ginzburg was one of the most radical critics of Hayden White’s approach (Ankersmit 1994, 162–181; Ginzburg 1992).

The second strategy is to acknowledge the unchangeable conservatism of the discipline and try to find the cases of “new historiography” in other areas of culture, notably in the fields of art. For example, Robert Rosenstone, who started his career as a “traditional” historian and moved later towards the direction of theory and

“experimental” historiography, pointed out a similar fragmentation in historical discourse and also emphasized the lack (or at least rareness) of groundbreaking, formally innovative actual historical works. According to the author, the cause of this phenomenon is independent of whether the actual historian is conservative, traditionalist, or reformist but indeed ensued from the nature of historical discourse and the expectations of the discipline *and* the society from historiography. If a given historian wants to move up the academic ladder, and, of course, everybody wants, he or she has to write so-called “traditional” works corresponding to the scientific and rhetoric rules of the discourse. Thus, the “real,” innovative historical books paradoxically do not originate in the field of historiography but come from literature, film, or graphic novels. In one of his essays, Rosenstone lists some contemporary documentary films as examples of new historiography that are innovative both formally, due to their uncommon narrative strategies and self-reflexive characteristics, and thematically, since they prefer to represent minorities and formerly oppressed, silenced subjects of the past (Rosenstone 1995).¹ In another text, among others, he mentions some graphic novels (Art Siegelman’s *Maus* and Marjane Satrapi’s *Persepolis*) and two of his own semi-historical, semi-fictional books (a fictional biography of Isaac Babel, *King of Odessa* [2003] and a personal historical account of three generations of his own family, *The Man Who Swam into History* [2005]) illustrating the new, experimental historiography (Rosenstone 2007).

Similar conclusions are formulated by the Canadian literary theorist, Linda Hutcheon from another direction. Analysing the main tendencies of the novel in the second half of the twentieth century, Hutcheon identifies a trend or movement, which she calls historiographical metafiction. While there are many different works that can be classified into this category, from García Márquez through John Fowles, Thomas Pynchon, and Umberto Eco to Julian Barnes, Christoph Ransmayr, and Lawrence Norfolk, they are comparable with each other due to their reflexive historicity. Hutcheon explains the metahistorical dimensions of these books from two directions: on the one hand, from the contemporary, mostly poststructuralist, theories of language, culture, and society and, on the other, from the historical criticism of Hayden White and his followers. Her book is about the history of literature; so, she emphasized only implicitly that these novels, as historiographical metafictions, can be interpreted as history also since they represent more progressive and contemporary visions of history than recent academic historical works themselves (Hutcheon 1988).

Consequently, historical theory has to (and tries to) face up a situation when its recommended approaches or stylistic and narrative strategies have mostly been represented not by works of historiography but films, literary texts, or graphic novels. But there is another challenge with which both theory and academic

1 His examples are mostly independent documentary films, e.g. Jill Godmillow’s *Far from Poland* (1984), Ross Gibson’s *Camera Natura* (1986), or Rea Tajiri’s *History and Memory* (1991).

historiography have had to deal with for the last decades – namely, some new approaches to the past that have been generally called as instances of “public history,” gaining ground and becoming more and more popular.

Public History as Fashion and Challenge

Nowadays, some historians look at the cultural position of history anxiously as being very fragile and unstable. In the 1980s and 90s, the historical discipline saw the critical theory of White and his followers as one of its most dangerous challenges, but currently the real competitor of academic history has come from another cultural field, namely from popular culture and political ideologies. The main opponent of history can be called “public history,” and this umbrella term covers the far-reaching varieties in which contemporary popular historical attitudes or interests can appear: e.g. historical novels, films, videogames, popular historical magazines, historical reenactments, conspiracy theories, etc. Of course, most of these tendencies are not new; for example, the genre of the historical novel was born in parallel with historiography, and a lot of different fields and strategies of historical representation have developed since the end of the eighteenth century. As Stephen Bann analysed thoroughly in his book, *Clothing of Clio*, a special historical attitude (or, as he calls it, historical mindedness) came into existence in the nineteenth century that appeared in lots of areas of Western culture from historiography through historical novels, plays, and operas to museums and antiquarianism (Bann 1984). But nowadays a relatively new trend of historical mindedness seems to emerge that approaches history via media of popular culture and from the perspective of populist political and consumer attitudes.

The common feature of these tendencies is their present-orientedness since the past becomes subordinate to the interests and ideologies of the present. It is not a new phenomenon since many historians and theorists pointed out that the historical fashions and issues in the nineteenth century were operated mostly by attitudes and political interests of the nation-state. A good and thoroughly analysed example of that was the phenomenon of “the invention of tradition” guided by political intentions to create common identity to the nation (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983). But while historical attitudes of the nineteenth century were driven by mostly nationalist interests, in our contemporary culture, besides nationalism, a strong consumer and market-oriented attitude is operating.² In other words,

2 Of course, I am well aware that the problem is more difficult, and the changing role of nationalism in the globalized world and the connections between nationalism and public history should be analysed in a more detailed way. But because the aim of my essay is different, here I was just able to signify the moving direction of the historical forms and practices and their nature as commodity in the marketing system.

varieties of public history are working as commodities, and they have values and prices in the marketing circulation; therefore, these historical approaches are specialized predominantly in popular, fashionable, and easy-to-sell topics and trends (in more detail, see de Groot 2009). One can mention relatively many but limited numbers of fashionable historical topics whose cultural circulations are determined mostly by the trends and rules of our consumer society. For example, shortly after the American television network, *History Channel* started broadcasting in 1995, it got the nickname “Hitler Channel” in popular slang because it transmitted so many documentaries on Hitler and WW2. The main problem with public history is that it simplifies the past, blurs its unfamiliarity, and reframes history to a familiar, easy-to-consume object. David Harlan identified one of the most spectacular problems with popular history as “while real history reconstructs the past as a foreign country, a place where they do things differently, popular history ... reconstructs the past as a theatre of the present, a costume drama filled with people you already know, people you can relate to, people, like Bob and Jane next door” (Harlan 2007, 120).

Some instances in public history are relatively “innocent,” for example, reenactments or renaissance fairs that can be accused only due to their simplifying attitudes or, as in the case of historical reenactments, because they try to familiarize the past from our present-oriented perspective. But some phenomena can be explicitly harmful and dangerous, for example, the alternative, conspiracy-based, historical explanations from which the most ill-famed is the Holocaust denial. Strategies of Holocaust denial can throw light upon some attitudes of direct political versions of public history. The most spectacular characteristic of Holocaust deniers’ tactic is to imitate the institutional structure and rhetoric of sciences showing itself as an exact copy of historical discourse with their books, publishing houses, “official” institutes and journals (Institute for Historical Review and its periodical, *Journal of Historical Review*), conferences, and “experts” of topics whose names sound as much authentic in this discourse as famous historians in academic historiography (David Irving, Robert Faurisson, etc.). Thus, the Holocaust denial wants to show itself as an instance of historiography with radical but considerable alternative explanation of history. The deniers call their viewpoint as revisionism, claiming that it is “simply” a corrected, revisited version of history, although maybe more radical than the “traditional” view of history. However, the explanatory logic of Holocaust denial is not similar to the interpretive ways of historiography but follows the special logic of a conspiracy theory. This very popular kind of historical explanation works with a strategy that Umberto Eco called overinterpretation, which creates arbitrary connections among facts of a given event with the help of an already existing and generally ideological (mostly extremist) preconception. The other important aspect of a conspiracy theory is its implicit philosophy of history representing a basically

meaningful and understandable world where the transparency of history was confused by an evil force that has created “official” (and, according to the conspiracists, necessarily false) interpretations of past events (see Eco 1992, Keeley 1999). The conspiracy-theory-based quasi-historical narratives appear almost in all fields of our culture from popular novels and films (e.g. *The Da Vinci Code* and its continuations and rip-offs) through alternative explanations of recent past events (e.g. 9/11) and politically supported, paranoid enemy making to some literary works that show and ironically debunk the fictional logic of conspiracy (Danilo Kiš, Umberto Eco, see Boym 1999).

The Holocaust denial as a conspiracy-based explanatory method works with two strategies. On the one hand, it tries to show the uncertain elements of official historical works, which were mostly caused by various but explainable factors (differences between the testimonies of traumatized survivors, the lack of actual order to Final Solution from Hitler, etc.). On the other, by questioning the accepted explanations, it tries to interpret the events with a far-right ideologically framed narrative (“the Holocaust was a fictional global conspiracy of the Jews who use this intentionally generated universal remorse for their political aims”). Thus, here the very recipe of conspiracy theories works too: a secret conspiracy tried to confuse the clear explanation of history creating a “fiction” about the mass murdering, but the “real,” unofficial historians reveal the “true” story (in more detail, see Kisantal 2017).

Moreover, some academic historians emphasized that the fragmentation of history, the emergence of popular forms and alternative historical explanations are closely connected to the “anything goes” spirit of postmodernity. As the British historian, Debora Lipstadt, writes in her famous book on the Holocaust denial:

the deniers do not work in vacuum. Part of their success can be traced to an intellectual climate that made its mark in the scholarly work during the past two decades. [...] Various scholars began to argue that texts had no fixed meaning. [...] It became more difficult to talk about the objective truth of a text, legal concept, or even an event. In academic circles some scholars spoke of relative truths, rejecting the notion that there was one version of the world that was necessarily right while another was wrong. (Lipstadt 1993, 17–18)

Although the author does not mention Hayden White (she cites the literary critic Stanley Fish and the philosophers Richard Rorty and Hilary Putnam), one can easily connect this kind of viewpoint with White’s relativist conception of history. If all historical works are fictions, and there is no external point from which any historical narratives could be seen as more legitimate than other, then, for example, conspiracy-based historical explanations could also be considered as

authorized competitors of academic historiography. Thus, according to the critics of popular histories and contemporary conspiracy-based historical explanations, theoretical relativism could be dangerous since it challenges the authority of institutional historiography. If a historical narrative written by a professionally trained historian is only one possible story among the other narratives circulating in culture, then believing in historical truth cannot be possible anymore, and simpler and more spectacular popular histories become widely accepted.

In the 1990s, a great dispute about the representation of the Holocaust took place in which critics of White argued that the relativist perspective of his theory allows legitimizing far-right-wing representations of the Final Solution or the Holocaust denial. White tried to defend his standpoint by introducing a special kind of event called as “modernist” that determines the representational strategies. According to the author, the modernist event is a peculiar phenomenon, typically recent or contemporary that is special in its scope and traumatizing effects. The Holocaust was the paradigmatic modernist event, but there were other incidents of this kind as well (wars and historical catastrophes in the twentieth century) continuously affecting our contemporary situation. In White’s opinion, a modernist event determines its representational strategies as far as it cannot or, more precisely, is not allowed to be narrated by the classic, realist devices but only by modernist or postmodern narrative and rhetorical procedures (White 1992, White 1999). It seems that White had to restrict the radicalism of his theory since by introducing the concept of modernist event he emphasized that historical events themselves or, more precisely, *some kind of events* can determine the strategies of representation. To understand correctly the significance of the modernist event and the late White’s viewpoint in the connection between past events and representational methods, one needs to analyse in more detail the central distinction introduced in his last book, namely the difference between the historical and practical past.

The Practical Past

The basic distinction that White presents in his last book, *Practical Past*, is connected both to the earlier mentioned prescriptive character of theory and to the position of history in our culture. He distinguishes two possible views of the past, called historical and practical pasts. Both terms were borrowed from a British philosopher, Michael Oakeshott, who in his essay from 1967, *The Emergence of the History of Thought*, contrasted these two versions of the past. While the historical past is the research field and construction of historiography, an objective, scientific account for the past, the practical past is history viewed from the perspective of our present, a past which all of us carry around with us and which creates our present

identity. These are, of course, only ideal types of our possible attitudes to history, and, in Oakeshott's terminology, practical past is mostly a negative category, a quasi-mythical vision of history serving mainly present interests (Oakeshott 2004 [1967]). However, according to White, the connections between the two versions of the past are much more difficult. Whereas the historical past cannot be an objective representation that is independent of interests and ideologies of a given historian, the practical past is not even a simple mythical or present-oriented viewpoint, but it can also present a relevant attitude to the history. Neither of these two past versions equals to the real past as it actually happened since while the historical past is an abstract creation of historians, the practical past approaches our history from primarily an ethical viewpoint, trying to answer our present questions and problems with the help of past examples. As he states:

The historical past is a theoretically motivated construction, existing only in the books and articles published by professional historians; it is constructed as an end in itself, possesses little or no value for understanding and explaining the present, and provides no guidelines for acting in the present of foreseeing the future. [...] We call upon the practical past of memory, dream, fantasy, experience, and imagination when confronted with the question: "What ought I (or we) do?" The historical past cannot help us here, because the most it can tell us is what other people in *other* times, places, and circumstances did in their situation at *that* time and place. This information contains no warrant for deducing what we, in our situation, in our time and our place, *should* do in order to conform to the standard set by that categorical imperative which licenses our belief in the possibility of morality itself. (White 2014, 9–10)

Thus, while the historical past is construed by the *scientific*, the practical is interpreted by the *moral* discourse. The practical past can manifest itself as collective memory, heritage, and other versions of history. White sketches the historical situation when, in the nineteenth century, history, establishing itself as a new discipline, made itself independent of the practical past. Following the analyses of Reinhart Koselleck in his book *Futures Past* (Koselleck 1990), White pointed out that history at first separated itself from the earlier, rhetorical-based historiography and also from the philosophy of history since both of them were closely connected to the practical dimension of the past. The new academic historiography referred to itself as a strict, objective science, and condemned practical past as a mythical attitude with which a given period tries to reframe the past and to connect that with its own interests.

However, in White's opinion, the practical past has (or can have) a dimension which is as significant as the historical past or, in any cases, can represent more

relevant attitudes by its ethical character. White analysed two contemporary historical novels, Toni Morrison's *Beloved* (1987) and W. G. Sebald's *Austerlitz* (2001), to point out the historical relevance of the literary texts' representation. After all, some novels can show versions of or approaches to the past, presenting our historical attitudes and being able to reshape them as well. They show fictional accounts of the past but with their literary devices, and especially with the ethical and political attitudes represented by these strategies, they can reshape and restructure our practical past visions. It is no accident that both analysed novels have strong moral stakes representing two socially and culturally challenging periods of the past. Sebald's novel on searching for identity after the great cataclysm of the Second World War and the Holocaust can fit well into the category of the modernist event. The protagonist's, Austerlitz's quest for finding his identity among buildings, fragments of memory, and half-narrated stories of the past metaphorically represents our special attitude to our history after the war and the Holocaust. However, with Morrison's work, White steps further in reshaping and widening the concept of modernist event to a more general category of practical past since the topic of *Beloved*, the nineteenth-century slavery is not a modernist event in itself but is *modernized*, made more contemporary by the novel. This modernization can be accomplished only by fictional devices with which the novel was able to withdraw from the historical past and instead represented the ethical character of the practical past. At the end of the essay, White analyses one of Morrison's statements in her "Foreword" to the fourth edition of the novel. Morrison describes that she had to invent her protagonist's, Margaret Gardner's thoughts and "plumb them for a *subtext that was historically true in essence, but not strictly factual* in order to relate her history to contemporary issues about freedom, responsibility, and women's 'place'" (quotation and emphases by White 2014, 22). In White's view, the emphasized part of sentence means "a subtext that was true in its *historical essence* but not strictly factual." He continues as follows:

Here we come to the real problem that confronts us in trying to theorize the relation between the historical past and its practical counterpart. For our interest in the practical past must take us beyond "the facts" as conventionally understood in historical thinking. Indeed, it must take us beyond the idea that a fact, whatever else it may be, is identifiable by its logical opposition to "fiction," where fiction is understood to be an imaginary thing or product of the imagination (White 2014, 23; emphases in the original).

In other words, according to White, with the act of fictionalization, Morrison could paradoxically remain faithful to the past, however, not to the historical but

the practical past. Consequently, these novels can represent an authentic, genuine vision of the past, not despite their fictional character but precisely by that. Thus, this authenticity is not understood as a strict factual correspondence to the historical past but as an ethical attitude to the past and to our present at the same time.

Conclusions: Theory and the Practical Past

The hardly hidden aim of Hayden White's last book is to turn over the hierarchy between the two versions of the past and give back the value to the practical past that it had possessed before the academic historiography was established in the nineteenth century. One might admit that White's arguments can be relevant to the great literary texts, films or artworks, in other words, to the masterpieces of art. However, what is the matter with the earlier mentioned problem, with the routinized patterns? Undoubtedly, White restricted his approach only to the so-called "great works," but that does not mean that this viewpoint could not be applicable to other versions of contemporary popular history too. David Harlan argues that one of the tasks of recent historical theory is mapping the contemporary historical discourses, media, and practices and revealing the connections among them, pointing out latent and manifest ideologies and prejudices. As he emphasized, historical novels, films, or reenactments are not substitutes for historiography; they are not necessarily challenges of, it but public and academic histories are different forms of representing the past; they can be influenced by each other and together can shape our practical attitudes to the past and the present. As he summarizes the present situation and the task of contemporary historiography:

A new and in ways a more vibrant history is being produced outside the walls of academy, by novelists, memoirists, autobiographers, comic book authors, filmmakers, curators, and the like. [...]

What we need now is a map of our rapidly expanding area of responsibility. Such a map would, first and most obviously, identify the major forms of historical representation, both established and emerging, and explain the advantages, limitations, responsibilities peculiar to each one. Second, it would, hopefully, describe the codes and conventions that govern representation and evaluation in each of the realms – thereby reminding us of what we already know but too often forget: that the criteria for evaluating any representation of the past must be both media-specific and genre-specific. [...]

Finally, such a map would help us understand the relationships *between* a culture's various modes of historical representation. (Harlan 2009, 181–182)

Thus, one of the main tasks of a theoretical historiography is to study and analyse the contemporary fields of historical discourse from academic historiography through historical films and novels to reenactments, conspiracy theories, and so on. One needs to deal not only with “serious,” “scientific” approaches to the past and not just with “great works” but also with instances of popular culture, to interpret the deeper connections among them and the possible approaches to the practical past versions. As I shortly analysed earlier, for example, the extreme positions as the conspiracy theories and the Holocaust denial also need to be studied since without understanding their explanatory methods and visions of the past we could not fight effectively against them. Not only historical works of the academic field have some special narrative strategies, ways of explanation, and ideological implications, but popular histories also possess their own approaches to the past. They can discuss with present problems or challenge our habitual ideas, as the works of Morrison, Sebald, and other significant writers, film directors, etc. do, can reinforce our present identity with examples of the past, as most versions of public history do, or can serve extremist political tasks as well.

Actually, it is not a new project but just continues the inquiry of *Metahistory* in which, with parallel analyses of historians (Michelet, Ranke, Tocqueville, Burckhardt) and philosophers of history (Marx, Hegel, Nietzsche, Croce), White outlined the main narrative, rhetorical and ideological tendencies and directions that determined the historical discourse of the century. Or Stephen Bann’s earlier mentioned book set the task of studying the historical mindedness in nineteenth-century England and France with simultaneous analyses of historical works, novels, memoirs, or museums and house interiors. Thus, the theory of history can also be a historiography, and maybe today one has to analyse not only historical works and philosophies but also conspiracy theories, popular series, novels, films, or even videogames to sketch some characteristics of contemporary historical imagination and some attitudes to the practical past.

Works Cited

- Ankersmit, Frank. 1994. *History and Tropology. The Rise and Fall of Metaphor*. Berkley: University of California Press.
- Bann, Stephen. 1984. *The Clothing of Clío: A Study of the Representation of History in Nineteenth-Century Britain and France*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Berkhofer, Robert F. 1997. *Beyond the Great Story: History as Text and Discourse*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press.

- Boym, Svetlana. 1999. "Conspiracy Theories and Literary Ethics: Umberto Eco, Danilo Kiš and the Protocols of Zion." *Comparative Literature* vol. 51, no 2: 97–122.
- Davis, Natalie Zemon. 1983. *The Return of Martin Guerre*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press.
- de Groot, Jerome. 2009. *Consuming History. Historians and Heritage in Contemporary Popular Culture*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Eco, Umberto. 1992. "Interpretation and History." In *Interpretation and Overinterpretation*, 23–44. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Fay, Brian. 2002. "Unconventional History." *History and Theory* vol. 41, no. 4: 1–6.
- Ginzburg, Carlo. 1980. *The Cheese and the Worms. The Cosmos of a Sixteenth-Century Miller*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.
1992. "Just One Witness." In *Probing the Limits of Representation: Nazism and the Final Solution*, ed. Saul Friedländer, 82–97. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press.
- Harlan, David. 2007. "Historical Fiction and the Future of Academic Historiography." In *Manifestos for History*, eds. Keith Jenkins, Sue Morgan, and Alun Munslow, 108–130. London: Routledge.
2009. "'The Burden of History' Forty Years Later." In *Re-Figuring Hayden White*, eds. Frank Ankersmit, Ewa Domańska, and Hans Kellner, 169–189. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Hobsbawm, Erich and Terence Ranger, eds. 1983. *The Invention of Tradition*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Hutcheon, Linda. 1988. *A Poetics of Postmodernism*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Jenkins, Keith. 1991. *Re-Thinking History*. London: Routledge.
- Keeley, Brian L. 1999. "Of Conspiracy Theories." *The Journal of Philosophy* vol. 96, no. 3: 109–126.
- Kisantal, Tamás. 2017. "Ami történt megtörtént... A holokauszttagadás diszkurzív összetevői" ["What happened, happened... Discursive Aspects of the Holocaust Denial"]. In *Az élet tanítómesterei. Írások a történelem ábrázolásáról*. [Teachers of Life. Essays on the Representation of History], 63–89. Pécs: Kronosz.
- Koselleck, Reinhart. 1990. *Futures Past: On the Semantics of Historical Time*. Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, England: The MIT Press.
- Lipstadt, Deborah. 1993. *Denying the Holocaust: The Growing Assault on Truth and Memory*. London: Penguin.
- Oakeshott, Michael. 2004 [1967]. "The Emergence of the History of Thought." In *What Is History? and Other Essays*, 345–372. Thorverton: Imprint Academic.

- Rosenstone, Robert A. 1995. "Film and the Beginning of Postmodern History." In *Visions of the Past. The Challenge of Film to Our Idea of History*, 198–225. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
2007. "Space for the Bird to Fly." In *Manifestos for History*, eds. Keith Jenkins, Sue Morgan and Alun Munslow, 11–18. London: Routledge.
- Schama, Simon 1991. *Dead Certainties: Unwarranted Speculations*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf Inc.
- White, Hayden. 1966. "The Burden of History." *History and Theory* vol. 5, no. 2: 111–134.
1973. *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.
1992. "Historical Emplotment and the Problem of Truth." In *Probing the Limits of Representation: Nazism and the Final Solution*, ed. Saul Friedländer, 37–53. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press.
1999. "The Modernist Event." In *Figural Realism. Studies in the Mimesis Effect*, 66–87. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.
2014. "The Practical Past." In *The Practical Past*, 3–24. Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press.

Acta Universitatis Sapientiae

The scientific journal of Sapientia Hungarian University of Transylvania
(Cluj-Napoca, Romania) publishes original papers and
surveys in several areas of sciences written in English.

Information about each series can be found at

<http://www.acta.sapientia.ro>.

Editor-in-Chief

László DÁVID

Main Editorial Board

Zoltán KÁSA

András KELEMEN

Ágnes PETHŐ

Laura NISTOR

Emőd VERESS

Acta Universitatis Sapientiae Philologica

Executive Editor

Judit PIELDNER (Sapientia Hungarian University of Transylvania, Romania)
pieldnerjudit@uni.sapientia.ro

Editorial Board

Zoltán ABÁDI-NAGY (University of Debrecen, Hungary)

Zsuzsanna AJTONY (Sapientia Hungarian University of Transylvania, Romania)

Attila IMRE (Sapientia Hungarian University of Transylvania, Romania)

Daniela IONESCU (University of Bucharest, Romania)

Daniel Z. KADAR (Dalian University of Foreign Languages, China/Research Institute for
Linguistics, Hungarian Academy of Sciences, Hungary)

Boróka PROHÁSZKA-RÁD (Sapientia Hungarian University of Transylvania, Romania)

Krisztina-Mária SÁROSI-MÁRDIROSZ (Sapientia Hungarian University
of Transylvania, Romania)

Zsuzsa TAPODI (Sapientia Hungarian University of Transylvania, Romania)

Issue Editors

Judit PIELDNER (Sapientia Hungarian University of Transylvania, Romania)

Boróka PROHÁSZKA-RÁD (Sapientia Hungarian University of Transylvania, Romania)



Sapientia University



Scientia Publishing House

ISSN 2067-5151

<http://www.acta.sapientia.ro>

Instructions for authors

Acta Universitatis Sapientiae, Philologica publishes original, previously unpublished articles in the wide field of philological studies, and it is published in 3 issues a year.

All papers are to be submitted in English, in A4 Word format, to be peer reviewed. Submissions are to be made to the following e-mail address:

acta-philologica1@acta.sapientia.ro.

Authors are also requested to submit the following information: academic affiliation, contact e-mail address. Articles should be between 6000 and 8000 words long. Detailed information regarding the general style and referencing format can be found at the address: <http://www.acta.sapientia.ro/acta-philo/philologica-main.htm>

Submitted papers should not be considered for publication by other journals. The author is responsible for obtaining, if needed, the permission for publication of peer authors or other institutional authorities. The Editorial Board disclaims any responsibility.

Each author is entitled to one issue containing his/her paper free of charge.

No reprints are available.

Contact address and subscription:

Acta Universitatis Sapientiae, Philologica
Sapientia Hungarian University of Transylvania
RO 400112 Cluj-Napoca, Romania, str. Matei Corvin nr. 4.
E-mail: acta-philologica1@acta.sapientia.ro