ALL that SEX...

From Romantic Emotions to Perverse Movements in Philosophy and Aesthetics

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Gustave Courbet, *L'Origine du monde* (1866)

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And, when night begins to fall
From the black oaks, darkening,
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Estetyka *i Krytyka* 37 (2/2015)

Mateusz M. Kłagisz
(Jagiellonian University)

TEMPORAL, MYSTIC AND RELIGIOUS LOVE: THE POETRY OF THE TALIBAN

ABSTRACT

Mina, *Mohabbat* and *ishq* are three Pashto words used to name two kinds of love. The first is more human while the second is divine or mystical. In this paper I have tried to analyse the poetry of the Taliban, paying special attention to the question of the aforementioned kinds of love: human, divine and religous. I decided to do that because until now most of the researchers working on the Taliban's songs have focussed more on their political, propaganda and religious message, with very little work dedicated to its 'human' character. This is why I have presented several poems selected from the collection *Poetry of the Taliban* by Alex Strick van Linschoten and Felix Kuehn (Gurgaon 2012) and enhanced my study with some comments.

KEYWORDS

poetry, Taliban, human love, divine love, rerligious love

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> *Saqi*! I desire intoxication, but don't bring me more wine;
> Your bottle is the murderer of love.[1]

The word *saqi*[2] was used to refer to a handsome young boy who filled cups with wine during a feast or in a wine bar. While his youth and beauty was admired by the Persian and Pashto poets of the classical period, in mystical poetry he became a symbol of the all-embracing Absolute. Thus, if we take these two lines out of their context, and analyse only their semantic, or mystic, dimension, we might say that these words were written by a classical poet such as Khushhal Khan Khattak (1613–89) who said:

> Roses, wine — a friend to share!
> Spring sans wine I will not bear,
> Abstinence I do abhor.
> Cup on cup, my Saqi, pour.
> (…)
> Saqi, fill and fill again.[3]

In fact, these two lines are a sample of a poem entitled *Wound* composed by a Taliban poet, Lutfullah Latun Tokhi. One might ask how it is possible that the author writes about intoxication. After all, the Taliban have banned the production, import, transport and sale of all alcohol. To understand the paradox in these two lines, we should take a wider view of the poetry of Afghanistan as a whole.

In this article I would like to discuss the phenomenon of sung/chanted poetry composed by the Taliban in the Pashto language, paying special attention to the question of two kinds of love: temporal-mystic and religious. I have decided to do this because, until now, most of the researchers working on the Taliban's songs have focussed more on their political, propaganda and religious message, while very little work has been dedicated to its 'human' character. Below, I will present several

[1] A. Strick van Linschoten, F. Kuehn, *Poetry of the Taliban*, Gurgaon 2012, p. 126.

[2] In this text I consistently use a simplified transcription of Persian and Pashto.

[3] E. Howell, O. Caroe, *The Poems of Khushhal Khan Khatak*, Peshawar 1963, p. 61.

poems selected from the collection *Poetry of the Taliban*,[4] and enhance my study with some comments. Here I must explain that this book consists only of the English translations of certain selected poems; it contains no original Pashto poems. This means that even if we cannot ignore the thesis proposed by its authors, this collection might still be used to present the nature of this new literary phenomenon. Collections of a few original Pashto poems together with English translations and philological comments have been published by Wali Shaaker[5] and by Mikhail Pelevin and Matthias Weinreich.[6]

Everyone has heard of the Taliban, a religious-political group that gained power in Afghanistan between 1995 and 2001. From 2001 to 2014 they waged a cruel war against American/NATO troops, but now the Afghan government of Abdul Qani and Abdullah Abdullah must cope with this problem alone. The main aim of the Taliban is to create a just political system based on the principles of Islam as in the times of the Prophet Muhammad. This return to the roots seems the simplest (and according to them the only possible) remedy against the ongoing disintegration and *Kalashnikovisation* of the country. The paradox is that the Taliban, who consider themselves the only true Muslims who can stop these processes, are simultaneously their prime mover.

Traditionally, the media presents the Taliban as extremists and fanatically religious warriors blindly devoted to their faith, in long beards and traditional clothes, rejecting scientific progress, restricting women's rights, and being responsible for the persecution of such religious minorities as the Shi'a Hazara. Their interpretation of *shari'a* is strict but, in fact, does not exclude a local interpretation based on the *Pash-*

[4] For more about this issue: F. Kuehn, C. Große, Die Poesie der Krieger, [in:] *Zenith. Zeitschrift für den Orient* [no. 4], 2009, pp. 26–9; W. Shaaker, Poetry: Why it Matters to Afghan? *Program for Culture and Conflict Studies: Understanding Afghan Culture, Occasional Paper Series* [no. 4], 2009; T.H. Johnson, A. Waheed, Analyzing Taliban taranas (chants): an effective Afghan propaganda artifact, [in:] *Small Wars & Insurgencies* [vol. 22, no. 1], 2011, pp. 3–31; M. Pelevin, M. Weinreich, The Songs of the Taliban: Continuity of Form and Thought in an Ever-Changing Environment, [in:] *Iran and the Caucasus* [vol. 16, no. 1], 2012, pp. 45–70.

[5] Shaaker, pp. 14–21.

[6] Pelevin and Weinreich, pp. 45–70.

tunwali, the code of honour of the Pashtuns. All of these factors have contributed to the word *talib* rapidly becoming a synonym for cultural backwardness, fanaticism and unreasonable cruelty. The Taliban's refusal to turn Osama bin Laden over to the Americans, who finally decided to launch Operation Enduring Freedom in 2001, caused some of us to use their name as a simple equivalent of the word 'terrorist'.

One of the first prohibitions announced by the Taliban in the mid-1990s concerned the presentation of living beings, including drawings, paintings and photographs. The general belief that the Taliban reject any kind of aesthetic values was strengthened when, at the beginning of the millennium, their government decided to destroy all pre-Islamic exhibits and monuments in Afghanistan. It is therefore more interesting that in 2001 a German photographer, Thomas Dworzak, recovered, in a dusty photographic studio in Kandahar, some pictures of the Taliban with *kohl*, a kind of blacking, applied to their eyes. Colourful, stylised, even gender reversal pictures present a completely different and surprising face of the Taliban, people who have officially declared that presentation of man or animal is a great sin. In the introduction to his album, the photographer wrote: 'Man erklärte mir, dass, nachdem das Fotografieren für Ausweise wieder erlaubt worden war, die Taliban manchmal fragten, ob sie auch ein etwas schmeichelnderes und vom Fotografen retuschiertes Portrait haben könnten. Aufgenommen wurde es in einem Hinterzimmer des Studios und dann mit der ganzen Fantasie des Fotografen bearbeitet'.[7]

These photographs and their poetry show us that the Taliban world view is not as simple as we think. Specifically, their ban on music does not include all music. They allow the use of some instruments, such as the *daf* and *da'ira* frame drum, and do not prohibit unaccompanied folk songs.[8] I believe that this is key to understanding the phenomenon of Taliban poetry: it arises from the folk literary tradition that uses monophonic but melodic intonation and creates a trance-like feeling in its listeners.[9]

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[7] T. Dworzak, *Taliban*, Freiburg im Breisgau 2002, p. 11 (non-numbered page).

[8] Strick van Linschoten and Kuehn, p. 36. Cf. Pelevin and Weinreich, pp. 46–7; J. Baily, *«Can you stop the birds singing?» The Censorship of Music in Afghanistan*, Copenhagen 2001, p. 35.

[9] Pelevin and Weinreich, p. 46.

Here we can ask if the Taliban are soldiers completely lacking emotions and the need to express their feelings. The answer must be negative. As Benedicte Grima writes, Afghanistani aesthetics are closely and intimately bound up with emotions,[10] and this can be seen in their poetic lines as well. The Taliban's *tarana,* also called *da talibano tarana* (Taliban chants) or *jihadi tarana* (*Jihad* chants), are different chants full of such emotions as sorrow, desperation, pride and hope. There are often modelled upon various verse forms: the *roba'i*,[11] *ghazal*,[12] *charbayta*,[13] and others.[14]

The *tarana* confirm Louis Dupree's words: 'Most literate or non-literate Afghans, be they Persian-, Pashto-, or Turkic-speaking, consider themselves poets. Poetry, essentially a spoken, not a written, art, gives non-literates the same general opportunities for expression as literates in a society'.[15] James Darmesteter observed: 'Whenever three Afghans meet, there is a song between them'.[16] Of course, these *tarana* often incorporate a great deal of propaganda, as they intend to convince Afghans of their world view, but still, this is only half of the story. When one of the Taliban poets, Qatin, sings:

(…)
…We have the proper *shari'a* and believe in it at all times,
Shari'a is my light and I am light of heart in its light …
(…)[17]

[10] B. Grima, *The Performance of Emotion Among Paxtun Women. «The Misfortunes Which Have Befallen Me»*, Austin 1992, p. 6 ff.

[11] The *roba'i* is a quatrain based on the rhyme: aaba.

[12] The *ghazal* is a poem usually dedicated to themes of love, based on the rhyme: aa-ba-ca-da(-…).

[13] The *charbayta* is a poem, similar to the *ghazal*, with a refrain (AA), based on the model: AA-bbbb-AA-cccc-AA(-…). On metrics in Pashto poetry see: D.N. MacKenzie, Pashto verse, [in:] *Bulletin of School of Oriental and African Studies* [vol. 21, no. 2], 1958, pp. 319–33; on *tarana* metrics see: Pelevin and Weinreich, pp. 53–5.

[14] A. Widmark, *Voices at the Borders, Prose on the Margins. Exploring the Contemporary Pashto Short Story in a Context of War and Crisis*, Uppsala 2011, p. 48.

[15] L. Dupree, *Afghanistan*, Princeton 1980, p. 75.

[16] J. Darmesteter, *Afghan Life in Afghan Songs*, [in:] Selected Essays of James Darmesteter, Boston-New York 1895, p. 112.

[17] Strick van Linschoten and Kuehn, p. 139.

he refers to Sufism, the mystical dimension of Islam; *shari'a* can be understood as one of the elements necessary to knowing the Truth leading to the Absolute. In this way, the word *talib* recovers its original meaning (synonymous with *murid*) attested in Pashto writings: 'disciple in spiritual matters'.

Before addressing the heart of this topic, we must ask about the roots of this poetry and its place within modern Afghan literature. Surely, this interesting literary phenomenon must be understood through the lens of the tragic events that began with the Soviet invasion (1979–88), and continued during the civil wars (1988–92, 1992–2001). It is somehow related to a long tradition of fighting poetry represented by the aforementioned Khushhal Khan Khattak and of a spiritual tradition represented by Rahman Baba (1650–1715). Seen in this light, poetry of the Taliban must be understood as being rooted in, *inter alia*, a Pashtun heritage of both oral and written cultures.[18]

The cruel conflict, which lasted forty years, caused the destruction of Afghanistan as a country and of the Afghans as a society. Alevtina S. Gerasimova writes that today's Afghanistan is a true literary desert. Most Afghan poets and writers live abroad; those who came back after 2001 are relatively few.[19] On the other hand, as Faisal Devji states, the war caused an extraordinary aesthetic consciousness of poetry.[20] When we discuss Afghan literature, we must remember Louis Dupree's words: 'Afghanistan, (…) has a literary *culture*, but a non-literary *society*'.[21] The literacy rate, which today is less than 30%, gives only a few Afghans access to their own great literature. Even so, many illiterate people have a greater or lesser acquaintance with the classical Persian (especially Abdul-Qadir Bidel, 1642–1720) and/or Pashto (e.g. Rahman Baba) poets, because their poems still circulate in oral transmission.

Since Pashto poetry has been influenced by Persian (and Urdu) poetry for a long time, it is natural that the Persian conception of love,

[18] Ibid., p. 31; cf. Pelevin and Weinreich, pp. 51–3.

[19] A. S. Gerisomova, *Литература Афганистана XXI века: Новые достижения* (part 1): http://afghanistan.ru/doc/19564.html; cf. (part 2) http://afghanistan.ru/doc/19678.html and (part 3) http://afghanistan.ru/doc/20105.html [27.12.2014].

[20] Strick van Linschoten and Kuehn, p. 14.

[21] Dupree, p. 74.

encompassing everything and everyone in the universe, must be found in the Taliban's *tarana* as well. This all-embracing affection can be the lifeblood of changes:

(…)
Make this pleasant world beautiful,
So it changes to a paradise with a drop.
Make the world colourful with love.
(…)[22]

Two opposing forms of love — towards a fellow human being, and towards God — formed (and still form) the emotional relations between the lover and his beloved, sometimes more subtle, sometimes more physical or erotic, as in this excerpt of one of the poems composed by Khushhal Khan Khattak:

(…)
She the rose, her grace bestowing
On the thorn that waits her pleasure.
I the fountain, faintly glowing.
Mirror of a garden's treasure,
Lover, loved, together knowing
Rapture passing dream or measure.[23]

Importantly, over the centuries the poets have created a kind of dictionary containing a rich vocabulary regarding love. The amorous *rendezvous* cited above, depicted by Khushhal Khan Khattak, takes place, probably at night, in a *baγ* — a garden and a metaphorical paradise, a place full of flowers, specifically roses, another poetical symbol of love in its twofold human and divine dimensions. As we will see, the Taliban composers follow some paths trodden by the previous generations of (non)anonymous poets.

22 Strick van Linschoten and Kuehn, p. 87.
23 Howell and Caroe, p. 21.

Temporal and Mystic Love

I am Majnun and you are my Layli,
You are my flower and I am your bee.[24]

What is human love (Pashto *mina* or *mohabbat*)? At its simplest, it is a basic form of an affection intertwined with attraction and attachment that can appear between two people, friends, family or a couple. The Afghans use different ways to express their feelings. One of these is through poems and songs: *wataniyya* (about homeland), *tura* (patriotism), *matamuna* (bravery) or *diyya* (self-appraisal). These are popular throughout the country, but among Afghans, the Pashtuns especially have a great passion for them.[25] The best example are *landay*, couplets usually sung by the women to speak not only about their sorrow or fears, but also about bravery. We may say that poetry represented by folk songs and ballads is a sort of repository of feelings, and simultaneously acts as a kind of a safety valve, helping people to control their tensions, emotions, and, above all, (un)happy love.

In the poem by Abdul Shukur Rasheed cited below, entitled *Freedom*, a conventional love story taken from Persian poetry, the story of the perfect lovers, Laila and Majnun, appears:

What is the good of Majnun alive when Laila dies?
What is the good of a hollowed-out body when someone's heart dies?
The heart is a lamp inside a muddy frame;
May it not pass that this lamp stops shining.
If the bird has flown the cage, the cage deserves to be broken;
If the heart dies, the hollow chest should die first.
The permanence of a living thing is never possible;
When the heart dies; the body has to die and it will die.
Freedom is the heart of each nation's body;
Without it, both the nation and eternity die.[26]

24 Widmark, p. 47.

25 Cf. Pelevin and Weinreich, p. 55 ff.

26 Strick van Linschoten and Kuehn, p. 80.

The story of Laila and Majnun was based by a Persian poet, Nizami Ganjavi (12th–13th century AD) on the semi-historical Arabic story of Qays ben al-Molawwah ben Mozahem, adapted to Pashto classic poetry by Sikandar Khan Khattak (17th century AD), son of Khushhal Khan Khattak. The plot of Laila and Majnun's love story is simple and tragic. A youth named Qays meets Laila and falls in love with her at once. Unfortunately, her father forbids all contact between them. Separated from his beloved, Qays becomes obsessed with her. That is why others call him *majnun,* 'possessed/madman'. Since he cannot eat or sleep, the only think he can do is think about her and compose love songs for her. Since they cannot be together, Qays-Majnun roams in the desert among the wild beasts. Meanwhile, Laila's father decides to betroth her against her will. She guards her virginity by resisting her husband's advances, and arranges secret meetings with her lover. Interestingly, when they meet, they have no physical contact. Latter, when Laila's husband dies, Qays-Majnun is so focussed on his ideal picture of her that he runs away to the desert. His beloved dies of grief. Heartbroken, Qays-Majnun goes to her grave, where he immediately dies. Finally, they can be together. Importantly, the love that existed between Laila and Majnun is usually considered pure, since it was never physically consummated.

The reference to Laila and Majnun's love appears in other *tarana*, e.g. in *New Year* by Farah Emtiaz, where the persona emphasises not the affection but the sweet memory of it:

O New Year, bring happiness with you!
Bring the fragrance of flowers.
Once again, spread spring in my life,
Once again, bring bouquets of red flowers with you.
Make my life full of colour;
Bring the colourfulness of the colours with you.
The sweetness of Laila and Majnun's memory,
Bring some of these things with you.
Light the spaces and bring colourfulness,
Bring red flowers and growth with you.
Perfume the air and turn it to spring,
Bring the restfulness of Farah with you.[27]

[27] Ibid., p. 83.

In this *tarana*, the persona looks at a human life through the prism of repetition resulting from the cosmic cyclicality of the seasons. In Afghanistan the new year, called *Naw Ruz*, begins on the first day of spring, 21 March, but in Emtiaz's song it not only represents the revival of nature after the winter, but can also be equated with the reunion of two sundered lovers. The new year brings happiness and colourfulness to nature and to the lovers. Their affection is represented by red flowers: roses, or tulips if we take into consideration the *Mila-yi gul-i surkh* 'Festival of Red Flower(s)', that is celebrated in Mazar-i Sharif for the first forty days after *Naw Ruz*, when the tulips grow in the plains surrounding that sacred city.

Emtiaz seems to say that we can, like Laila and Majnun, fall madly in love, because the new year and spring are the best time to do that. But still, his invocation of this ideal couple might suggest that we are dealing here with the kind of love that must be understood as perfect and even unrealistic. Moreover, there are also certain social, cultural and religious restrictions related to the prenuptial contacts between the youths, or to a(n) (arranged) marriage which is an expensive burden for the bridegroom. This shows that poetic fantasy and reality do not go hand in hand.

That is why separation, also an important motif in Persian and Pashto poetry, might be perceived as the parting of two lovers, each of whom already have spouses. The reasons may be different, but the separation is always shown as destroying and at the same time enhancing the feelings without which love cannot be present in a human life:

> The village seems strange; this is separation
> as if my beloved has left it.
> The grief of separation is so cruel that it is not scared of anyone;
> When the soul does not leave the body it shakes.
> Like a flower withering in the autumn,
> Autumn has now come to my love.
> I remain alone with my shaggy head of hair
> Uncomprehending; my heart has been sad for a long time.
> In a flash, it put a hole in my entire world;
> Each affair is like an arrow.
> Oh Faqir! Better be sad.
> Who told you that love is easy?[28]

[28] Ibid., p. 80.

This time the persona, represented by Shaheb Faqir, depicts a picture opposite that of Farah Emtiaz's *New Year*. Instead of a reunion, we read in Faqir's *Soul* about a separation represented by the autumn. Once again, we are dealing here with the motif of repetition resulting from the cosmic cyclical nature of the seasons: the spring needs the autumn, the autumn cannot exist without the spring. We can extend this metaphor to love and say that it needs separation to be strengthened. Surprisingly, the persona does not complain about his grief upon parting, but accepts it, asking himself philosophically 'Who told you that love is easy?'; in fact, he repeats a simple line of Hafiz, a Persian classic poet. I believe that this single line reveals the essence of love in the Iranian world: a passion enmeshed with sorrow can make us stronger. This includes the ability to destroy us completely, but first of all, since love is an all-embracing affection, it must be difficult to experience. Emtiaz seems to be reminding us that it is not love in itself, but all the trouble it causes, that creates us.

Although in this poem we find no reference to it, it is worth mentioning that the moon also plays a significant role in amorous poetry. It serves the lovers as an intermediary. Even if they are separated, they can look at the moon, because their gazes meet there.

As we will see in Abdullah's poem entitled *Learn!*, the lovers not only can be represented by human beings, but can also be personified by the flower and the nightingale. The eternal love of the nightingale for the flower is an allegory of an unequal passion intertwined with sorrow and desire:

> Learn to speak with a melody like the nightingale,
> Learn the silent dialogue of the flower with the nightingale.
> Cover your head, come out of the blossom,
> Learn to blow like a breeze through the air.
> How long will you live like a bird?
> Learn to fly free like an eagle.
> Speed up, make the caravan go fast, the destination is close.
> Learn to project your voice like a bell.
> Leave comfort and take up hardship, O zealous Afghan!
> Learn to cry for the homeland's pain and grief.[29]

[29] Ibid., p. 84.

In all of the poems cited above we can find various poetic motifs: the pure love between Laila and Majnun, the coming of the spring as reunion, the coming of the autumn as separation, and finally the dialogue between the rose and the nightingale. All hark back to a local poetic tradition. We should not forget that in the Iranian world love and other kinds of emotions are expressed by using diverse literary stereotypes elaborated by previous generations of poets. Being a good poet requires not only talent for recitation and literary skills, but also a wide knowledge of the poetic patterns handed down from parents to offspring. The presence of these metaphors denotes that the poetry of the Taliban is ingrained in the Afghan culture, even though the Taliban are most frequently regarded as people lacking cultural roots and reluctant to countenance any cultural and entertainment-related activities that might be contrary to the *Qur'an*. The subject matter of these four poems can be staggering, especially if we are knowledgeable in the Taliban ideology, but we must remember that we are dealing here with the poetic realisation of certain ideas. This poetic conception of the essence of human love does not lend itself to simple evaluation and must always be perceived through the lens of the literary foundations of the Pashtun culture.

In this paragraph we have defined the idea of temporal love, but in fact we may call it mystical love: Pashto *ishq*. As an affection that appears between a human being and God, here it consists of simultaneous fascination and fear. Quoting Rudolf Otto, we might say that human-divine love is *mysterium tremendum et fascinans*. Interestingly, the poetic language of the Afghans uses metaphors and pictures to express relations between the human and the Absolute that have been adopted from the language of temporal love; in mystical poetry, simple relations of submissiveness and dependence between a human being and God have been replaced by relations between *ma'shuq* 'beloved' and *ashiq* 'lover'. The important thing is that these relations always take an asymmetrical form. A human being is the subject of God, and this is reflected in the feelings existing between them.

Religious love

I want to be burned together with such a moth.
For a little pain and pity for sympathy,
If they exist in a heart, I want to be sacrificed for that.[30]

Since the Taliban movement has based its political philosophy on religion, it is no wonder that some sacred elements have been also implemented into their poetry, which is the basic tool of propaganda. Their *tarana* are mainly of a religious character: the poets praise the Prophet, honour *mujahidin*-warriors, commemorate *shahidan*-martyrs, and promote *jihad*. Nevertheless, among all these religious motifs we can also find some references to religious love.

Just as in the case of temporal and mystic love, in religious love as well the beloved, God, is described as beautiful or someone who possesses beauty, and for this reason becomes an object of adoration, though, in this case, the adoration has nothing to do with passion, but rather with deep and strong faith:

O owner of beauty and beauties,
I have a request for you,
I raise both my hands towards you.
I pray with humility,
I want to be kept away from disgrace,
I want this world from you.
(…)
May I be sacrificed for you, my God.
Fulfil this wish of my mine, O my God.
(…)
Make this pleasant world beautiful,
So it changes to a paradise with a drop.
Make the world colourful with love.
(…)[31]

[30] Ibid., p. 107.
[31] Ibid., pp. 86–7.

The thirty-eight-stanza poem entitled *Prayer*, written by Shirinzoy, is the longest presented in *Poetry of the Taliban*. It has all the features of a prayer, a kind of emotionally engaged creed expressed by someone who trusts the Absolute. Shirinzoy based its structure on the monotonous repetitiveness of some simple literary elements. The poet turns towards God with several requests to, *inter alia*, lighten his fate and to punish sinners. Contrary to temporal passion that makes us *majnun*, pure love coming from God can improve the world and save its beauty, because He has created the universe with love. It seems that the most important wish of the poet is hope for a better future.

Importantly, at the beginning, the persona defines the relations between him and God. The poet places himself lower than his beloved, or God, whom he perceives as inaccessible. We can distinguish here between physical and intellectual inaccessibility. God is like the rose adored by the nightingale or the flame of the candle that burns the moth. This motif of self-destruction recurs in other Taliban poems such as Abdul Basir Ebrat's *Discomforting Path*, where we read 'I am happy in fire just like the butterfly',[32] and in Mullah Abdul Wali Halimyar's *Martyr Friend* 'The youth who got love's inspiration from a butterfly'[33] and symbolises the relations of the *ma'shuq* and *ashiq*. This apparent divine inaccessibility causes the persona to prepare to devote himself to God or even to sacrifice his life, knowing that his *shahadat* (martyrdom) will be accepted by Him. Moreover, it implies that Shirinzoy places absolute hope and trust in the Absolute.

This motif of confidence appears also in Azizurrahman's *tarana* entitled *Collapse* and in Bismillah Sahar's *My God*. For both of these poets, the most important thing in their relations with God is a conviction that every human being is simply a cripple. Therefore they ask Allah to forget about their weaknesses:

O God, keep me from hell's fire;
I am a poor creature, don't look at my sins.
I am the guilty and you are too kind;
I have nobody besides you.
You gave me the right way as an inheritance,
But I am weak in front of Satan.

[32] Ibid., p. 58.
[33] Ibid., p. 59.

Strengthen me in my fight with Satan;
I will go to the grave under your protection.
I ask for your forgiveness;
I stand in front of you with bound hands and bare head.
I, Aziz, won't count on anyone else,
Even if this world collapses around me.[34]

O God, I cry out loud for you,
I beg your forgiveness of my mistakes.
In order to reach this destination, you created me,
A destination that I am surprised to go to.
It is a pity that from the courtyard of this transient world view
I am leaving with the carpet of a lifetime of my sins.
My, Sahar's, sins are less than your blessing.
If you forgive me, I will be very proud.[35]

They seem to build these two *tarana* on the *Basmala* phrase '*bismillahi-r-rahmani-r-rahimi*' 'In the name of God, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful'. Indeed, as we can read in the *Qur'an* (e.g. 7.156) Allah is gracious and merciful to all of His creations, although, just as in the anonymous poem *Human*, He can be disappointed with them:

The blood of Adam's heart,
As it changed to love.
Look at the power of Allah,
Humans were created by him.
Time passes,
People don't know it.
Angels have brought to this world
This nice human.
Human love and humans
Were created by the Lord of the universe.
He is surprised by this world,
The grandchild of Adam, human.[36]

[34] Ibid., pp. 91–2.
[35] Ibid., p. 51.
[36] Ibid., p. 104.

But, to return to Azizurrahman's and Bismillah Sahar's poems: these are, in fact, a sort of a prayer as well. Once again, the persona defines the relations between himself and God. He places himself lower than his beloved, whose feelings towards a human being are pure and sincere. But this time, God's love not only saves the beauty of the world, but helps the human being to live piously, to keep the religious commandments of *shari'a*. Divine love becomes something more that its human equivalent, because it can save a human being and ensure his next life in paradise, while temporal passion can be even highly destructive. On the other hand, when Azizurrahman says 'I, Aziz, won't count on anyone else, / Even if this world collapses around me', he, just like Shirinzoy, emphasises his trust in God, the trust that one might have in someone one really and sincerely loves.

All the aforementioned elements describing the relations between the lover and his beloved, between the lover and his God-beloved, i.e. a separation, self-destruction, trust, confidence, etc., can be found in Zahid's *Love of God*:

Don't talk of leaving the fortresses with me;
I don't care for death, don't talk about the knife.
I've come out to sacrifice myself to God;
I am pleased to burn, don't talk about fire.
I am the sign of morning, I attack the heart of darkness;
I go up in brightness, don't talk of dark nights.
Until the very end, I wage jihad with the enemy;
Don't talk of compromise and schemes to me.
I determine my own fate by fighting of fortresses;
Don't talk of the decisions of my rivals to me.
It doesn't matter if it is cut, let it be;
Don't talk of bowing down to others to me.
I will raise the flag of Islam with my blood;
I devote myself, don't talk of injuries.
I've come out against colonialism with my sword;
Don't talk of returning until I succeed.
As long as an Islamic government is not installed,
Don't talk to me about laying down arms.
Spring will come, the buds of freedom will smile,
Autumn will pass, don't talk of the falling of the leaves.

Today or tomorrow, Zahid says, the morning will come,
So don't talk of the gloom and the darkness.[37]

The amazing reliance of the persona can arise only from strong feelings of Zahid towards God. Love, an all-embracing affection, becomes the main point of his life. The possibility of immersion in these feelings becomes the main aim of his existence. Zahid emphasises this, calling himself the moth that would like to burn in the fire, i.e. God's love. Once again, I would add that the Taliban poets, in this case as well, use diverse literary metaphors elaborated by previous generations. As I have already mentioned, being a good poet requires not only talent for recitation and literary skills, but also a wide knowledge of the poetic patterns handed down from parents to offspring. The presence of these metaphors regarding temporal, mystic or religious love shows that poetry of the Taliban is deeply ingrained in the Afghan culture.

Conclusions

Malalai wants a red spot by her lover's blood
So as to embarrass the rose in the heart of the garden.[38]

The tree of my lover's beauty cannot be irrigated with just a few drops,
O tears, flow, because it wants this flow from me.[39]

A British poet, Daljit Nagra, in reviewing Strick van Linschoten and Kuehn's book for *The Guardian*, wrote: 'My initial feeling when faced with a title that includes the words "Taliban" and "poetry" is that it is oxymoronic'.[40] No wonder, if we remember the crimes of the Taliban from the late 1990s.

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[37] Ibid., pp. 144–5.

[38] Ibid., p. 71.

[39] Ibid., p. 56.

[40] D. Nagra, Poetry of the Taliban — review. A revelatory collection from Afghanistan, [in:] *The Guardian*: http://www.theguardian.com/books/2012/may/25/poetry-of-the-taliban-review [27.01.2015]. Cf. M. Pelevin, Poetry of the Taliban. Translated by Mirwais Rahmany, Hamid Stanikzai; Ed. and introduced by Alex Strick van Linschoten, Felix Kuehn; Preface by Faisal Devji, London: "Hurst

John Baily adds that 'the texts (in Pashto) are of a religious nature, with frequent mention of the Taliban themselves, and of their *shahids* (martyrs) killed in fighting with anti-Taliban forces. There is heavy use of electronic devices such as delay and reverberation, much favoured in the secular music of the region but which here could refer to the echoing acoustics of religious buildings, and there are sometimes two singers together, singing closely in unison. In terms of performance, the singing uses the melodic modes of Pashtun regional music, is nicely in tune, strongly rhythmic, and many items have the two-part song structure that is typical of the region. But without musical instruments it is not considered to be "music"'.[41]

At the end I must add something I probably should have said at the beginning of my paper. The main aim of my paper was to present the poetry of the Taliban, paying special attention to the question of two kinds of love, human-divine and religiously involved. To do that I was inspired by the book by Strick van Linschoten and Kuehn. Their work has received some positive reviews, from Anna Badkhen,[42] for example, but has aroused controversy as well. One of a group of former commanders fighting in Afghanistan, Richard Kemp, said: 'What we need to remember is that these are fascist, murdering thugs who suppress women and kill people without mercy if they do not agree with them, and of course are killing our soldiers (…). It doesn't do anything but give the oxygen of publicity to an extremist group which is the enemy of this country'.[43] Despite all the controversies surrounding this poetic phenomenon, I deeply believe that studying poetry of the Taliban can help us to understand better their world view; however, it does not mean that we must accept it.

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and Co. Ltd.", 2012, 247 pp., [in:] *Iran and the Caucasus* [vol. 17, no. 4], 2013, pp. 443–8.

[41] Baily, *Can you stop*, p. 43.

[42] A. Badkhen, Purple Darkness: Poetry from the Taliban, [in:] *New Republic*: http://www.newrepublic.com/book/review/purple-darkness-poetry-the-taliban [27.01.2015].

[43] J. Borger, Taliban poetry book denounced by former British commander, [in:] *The Guardian*: http://www.theguardian.com/books/2012/may/04/taliban-poetry-book-denounced-british [27.01.2015].

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MASCULINE-FEMININE FANTASIES: THE PHANTASMAGORIAS OF HANS BELLMER

ABSTRACT

In 2013, the publishing house Word/Image Territory [Słowo/ obraz terytoria] reissued the book *Bellmer, or The Anatomy of Physical Unconsciousness and Love*. On one of its final pages is Hans Bellmer's dedication, addressed to a surrealist painter. It reads as follows: 'When everything that a man is not joins him, then he finally seems to be himself'. This inscription is the focal point of this paper. The discussion will concern the aspect of Bellmer's work referring to the masculine-feminine fantasies, blurring of genders and the search for one's identity. It seems that the artist, who snatched a doll from a child's embraces and exalted it to the rank of a work of art, only to apply to it ball joints and a defragmented body so that its parts could be assembled freely, then locked this Pygmalion of his in erotic photographs or drawings, must have sought alienation. His efforts gave rise to phantasmagorias evident in each of his works. Experiencing the works of Bellmer raises a question which is complementary to the title of the paper: How much Hans is there in Bellmer?

KEYWORDS

Hans Bellmer, sculpture, body, intimacy, love, dolls, woman-child, BJD, surrealism, transgression, anatomy of picture, I-Other, stratification, animality, phantasmagoria

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Hans Bellmer, an artist undoubtedly considered one of the 'titans of Surrealism', is mainly associated with a series of sculptural installations involving life-sized, incomplete, rickety and extremely girlish BJD dolls, often with duplicate body parts.[1] Bellmer made them in the 1930s. It seems that, just as he influenced them (indeed, he was their creator and so-called 'father'), he was seduced by them as well. This delusion must have had remarkable power which enticed him to further creation. Later in his working life, the artist gave up sculpture; however, he never parted with his dolls, but depicted them in other ways, presenting them in photographs, drawings and graphics [Illustration 1]. Besides these new forms, Bellmer created extremely erotic illustrations (e.g. for Bataille's works).

It is from the period of his full creativity that his dedication, addressed to the surrealist painter, Leonor Fini, originates: 'When everything that a man is not joins him, then he finally seems to be himself'.[2] The analysis of this quotation, based on the artistic activities of Bellmer, is the main objective of this paper. Probably Sigmund Freud would find him slightly weird. Undoubtedly, these words of his are insane. But to reach their core, one must start at the source, which means taking a closer look at the author of the quotation.

Bellmer was born in 1902 in Katowice. Today, searching for traces of his presence there, we find the school he attended (now Adam Mickiewicz High School), a black plaque with some words by John Lebenstein and a small cafe, the Bellmer Cafe. The austerity and strict discipline enforced by his tenacious father, an engineer, resulted in Bellmer being divided into two extremes: man as a master powerful enough to shape submissive matter, i.e. woman. In addition, Bellmer sees yet another form of female inertia, namely Earth, the mother of us all. Af-

[1] BJD is an acronym for a ball-jointed doll. It refers to a doll, fully articulated (yet not a theatrical doll), with ball joints and a body divided into parts. By stringing or pulling an elastic cord or a rubber band through all moving parts and tightening them appropriately, one can easily make the doll pose. Bellmer saw such a doll for the first time in Berlin's Kaiser-Friedrich-Museum (now the Bode Museum); it was made at the beginning of the sixteenth century and was no bigger than the contemporary Barbie.

[2] K. A. Jeleński, *Bellmer albo Anatomia nieświadomości fizycznej i miłości*, Gdańsk 2013, p. 55.

ter all, he happened to live through both World Wars.[3] 'Like everyone, I was born with a very clear need for comfort, for unlimited paradisal freedom. These limits were determined, for me, in the form of father, and a little later, in the form of a gendarme. Behind the warm and cozy presence of mother lurked the hostile authority of father, the enemy possessing arbitrary outer power', recalled Bellmer.[4]

The father's plan for his son's life was not fulfilled. Bellmer had other plans. While in Berlin, he became fascinated by the 'degenerate' artists George Grosz and Otto Dix. The artists were considered 'fallen' since their 'sick and degenerate' aesthetics attacked Germany. The Germans perceived the Aryan race as the model of beauty. Instead of portraying strong, healthy and beautiful 'superhumans', both Grosz and Dix preferred to mutilate and deform their heroes. Bellmer used the skills acquired at the local Technical University in a way his father would not approve. Finally, in 1924, he dropped out of the university to lead the life of an artist. The following years were like constantly overlapping unconscious images. A series of coincidences and absurd events was confirmed when, in 1933, the artist began a construction which permanently etched itself into his biography.[5] But before this artistic conception materialised, the artist's mother gave him a chest containing his childhood treasures. The gift evoked strong emotions in him, instantly giving rise to free childish desires, not yet appeased by the consciousness of his own body.[6]

In the meantime, Bellmer married. His wife, Margaret, was older than him. Accentuating this fact was the presence of a very young cousin, Ursula, who had moved from Kassel to Berlin to attend a local school and to whom the couple let a room. The girl became the object of Bellmer's erotic dreams,[7] perhaps fuelled by the indisposition of his wife (who ultimately died of tuberculosis).[8]

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[3] L. Brogowski, D.Senczyszyn, Hans Bellmer, (in:) *Gry Lalki. Hans Bellmer Katowice 1902 — Paryż 1975,* ed. A. Przywara, A. Szymczyk, Gdańsk 1998, pp. 100–2.

[4] Jeleński*, Bellmer,* pp. 6–7.

[5] Brogowski et al., *Gry Lalki*., pp. 102 and 106.

[6] R. Passeron*, Encyklopedia surrealizmu,* transl. K. Janicka, Warsaw 1993, p. 155.

[7] Jeleński, *Bellmer,* pp. 10 and 13.

[8] H. Bellmer, *Mała anatomia nieświadomości fizycznej albo anatomia obrazu,* transl. J. A. Kłoczowski, Lublin 1994, p. 63.

On one occasion the artist attended a performance of *The Tales of Hoffmann*, the famous opera by Jacques Offenbach, based on *Piaskun,* a novel by E. T. A. Hoffmann. One of the heroines was the charming Olympia, a mechanical doll. The artist 'knew' other 'living dolls' as well: the Dadaistic puppets of Emmy Hemmings, the wax figures of Lotte Pritzel or the life-sized doll made by Hermine Moos which resembled Oscar Kokoschka's beloved.[9]

The artist was also deeply impressed by the Isenheim altarpiece by Matthias Grünewald from Musée Unterlinden in Colmar. The Christ portrayed there is dead, disfigured and mutilated. Despite the grotesqueness of a body so depicted, it appears beautiful. Did this beauty lure Bellmer?[10]

There exists in Germany a cult of the perfect body. The year 1933 marks the rise to power of Adolf Hitler. At the same time Bellmer begins work on his *chef d'oeuvre*, the embodiment of his dreams of girls with large eyes that skitter away. This work would be a kind of counterweight and contemplation of body imperfections. It would be about 140 cm tall and would be given the life of a doll…[11]

Bellmer never officially joined the Surrealists. However, his doll was enthusiastically embraced in Surrealist circles. After all, the doll reflected some sexual ambiguity. It combined innocence and consciousness, man and woman – whom it made either passive or destructive.[12]

But let us return to Bellmer's dedication, already mentioned: 'When everything that a man is not joins him, then he finally seems to be himself'.[13] Hans addresses it to a certain Leonor Fini. However, she does not appear to have influenced Bellmer's life in any way. Izabela Rzysko sees in these words an ideal reflection of the relationship between this talented painter and Konstanty Aleksander Jeleński, nicknamed Kot: 'they were a perfect fit for each other, a finite being'. There was one more important man in the artist's life: Stanislao Lepri.[14]

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[9] B. Krafft, *Traumwelt der Puppen,* Munich 1991, pp. 35 and 36.

[10] S. Taylor, *Hans Bellmer: The Anatomy of Anxiety,* Cambridge 2000, p. 51.

[11] Jeleński, *Bellmer,* p. 105.

[12] A. Taborska, *Spiskowcy wyobraźni,* Gdańsk 2013, p. 54.

[13] Jeleński, *Bellmer,* p. 55.

[14] *Mniej są bliźniacze dwie połówki jabłka, niźli tych dwoje.* [accessed 9 January 2015]. Available on the Internet: <http://przestrzenkultury.blogspot.com/2011/11/mniej-sa-blizniacze-dwiepoowki-jabka.html>.

If one could say about Fini that she lived for what she created, i.e. she became united with her painting, then Kot was the master of word. His work read as if painted with the individual words of each sentence. It was pure craft, unique among its kind. Jeleński was also an art and literary critic and the most zealous reader of Miłosz and Gombrowicz. In fact, as Kłoczkowski put it, he was somebody who understood these writers from within. He wrote for the emigration monthly *Culture*; however, he never wrote a masterpiece.[15]

Stanislao Lepri was an Italian diplomat who became a painter under the influence of Fini. Lepri's paintings were metaphysical. They showed a world beyond reality: fairy-tale-like, yet sinister. The artist had a close relationship with Lepri until 1941. Eleven years later this charismatic duo was joined by Jeleński. Henceforth the three formed a fairly loose relationship, breaking all boundaries. All three were also associated with the Surrealists.[16]

Undoubtedly, Bellmer's dedication to Fini could have been related to her intimacy with Kot. To his last note, dedicated to this couple, Rzysko gave a very appropriate title, a sentence borrowed from Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*: 'An apple cleft in two is not more twin than these two creatures'.[17] These words seem confirmed in Jeleński's confidences, in letters to his friend, Jozef Czapski, in which he wrote about Leonor as a kind of phenomenon.[18] But doesn't this inscription hide something more universal? Its essence can be also applied to our lives. Perhaps it is about what an important part in our lives is played

[15] *Kot Jeleński — w zabawie i w bólu*. [accessed 9 January 2015]. Available on the Internet: <http://wyborcza.pl/1,76842,5044285.html>.

[16] P. Kłoczkowski, 'Rozmowy z Janem Lebensteinem o Kocie Jeleńskim', *Zeszyty literackie*, No. 32, Paris 1990, p. 122.

[17] *Mniej są bliźniacze dwie połówki jabłka, niźli tych dwoje.* [accessed 9 January 2015]. Available on the Internet: <http://przestrzenkultury.blogspot.com/2011/11/mniej-sa-blizniacze-dwiepoowki-jabka.html>.

[18] An example of his correspondence included in issue no. 34 of *Zeszyty literackie* from 1991 includes the following words: 'Everything which is better in my nature is strangely connected with Leonor. Maybe also everything which is more difficult. Everything that is not superficial within me I owe to her. I feel for her great admiration and boundless tenderness. I know that to being so free, so completely honest and open, free of lies and at the same time so rich and with such impulsive reactions, such a need and ease of creation, it is worth "devoting" my own life'.

by love, regardless of age, enormous and mad, without rules and barriers… This is what enables us to come close to another person, and redefines what it really means to be oneself.[19]

For the last two months of 2014, Leica Gallery Warsaw hosted a permanent exhibition of works by Paweł Jaszczuk, 'Kinky City' (in parallel with an exhibition of photographs by Nobuyoshi Araki). The artistic project is an extension of the earlier 'Shibari'. The photographer immortalised 'the night life of Japan'. Apparently, this is when people become more open and do not pretend anybody… Although the photographs by Jaszczuk appear to be liberated, however, they are incredibly light in their approach to the topic of human sexuality. Perhaps an average audience would find these pictures slightly primitive (dolls that look like anime characters, women in manga disguise, bodies tied with ropes or masturbating in the middle of a club). Nevertheless, Hal Foster and Rosalind Krauss believe that primitivism reaches far beyond art; it is a liberation of our dormant instincts and our escape into nature.[20] Therefore, 'Kinky City' is about each of us, a story about the time when we can truly get rid of our all-day costume and feel ourselves. Jaszczuk's photographs express something similar to what is expressed by Bellmer's dolls:

> This is a game for the initiated. Fantasy of the inner 'self', the second identity. Denying the everyday 'self', the 'other one' becomes released from what was imposed on them, from the conventions and purpose. Liberating oneself, one sets free what is hidden; what is worrying; what is forbidden: addiction, fulfilment, utopia (…) Normality disappears in the magic of the soporific fetish. The sexual underground seems to emerge liberated from the oppression of the system – a paradox – bodily pain – the reward for the suffering of the mind… Is this destruction? Escape? Liberation?[21]

Taking a closer look at the trunks of Bellmer's dolls, one notices that they usually consist of duplicated parts, often those down the waist. This may offer a deliberate connection: the artist wants to show

[19] Taborska, *Spiskowcy,* p. 55.

[20] H. Foster, R. Krauss, Y-A. Bois, B. D. Buchloh, *Art since 1900. Modernism, antimodernism, postmodernism*, London 2004, p. 64.

[21] *Lounge* [accessed 9 January 2015]. Available on the Internet: http://issuu.com/loungemagazyn/docs/67.grudzien_14>.

that it is highly possible that we will not find ourselves in ourselves. Bodies like this have to seek themselves in another person… The artist shows the importance of this connection for women. His robust dolls were not a reflection of the artist's creative provocativeness but were created out of fear of the enemy, the one holding arbitrary outer power. This enemy was his father. The attacker deprives a man of something which must be regained; this means creating a bond with a person who will help him to regain himself. On the other hand, following the surreal way of thinking, woman needs man, because her own activity is only destructive.[22] The link between Bellmer and the Surrealists is the Marquis de Sade and his interpretation of what woman is: nothing but a slave of man and the instrument of his fascination. Every fight she initiates against her partner is doomed to fail. Woman is inherently weak and inferior to man.[23]

As Bellmer observed, we treat our own physical matter as a kind of coherent whole, a three-dimensional solid, covered with a layer called skin. This trunk is nothing but meat. It is a body constrained by cords, the same as those in a photograph of Bellmer's meaningfully entitled 'Keep in a cool place'.[24] However, the photograph hides something else. The cords go very firmly around the trunk, tying it tightly, as though from fear that the whole may fall to pieces. The strange anatomical divisions which appear on the body seek to break down the bodily symmetry we have assumed. A similar motif can be observed in works of others, e.g. Man Ray or Nobuyoshi Araki. Emily Craig[25] has stated that what we look for in a body, e.g. when cutting open the abdomen of a deceased person, is tight structures, with distinct shapes, but what we find is an 'indistinct mass of tangled intestines'. We do not accept being a shapeless mass because we do not want to lose control over our own bodies.[26]

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[22] Taborska, *Spiskowcy,* p. 54.

[23] J. Łojek, *Wiek Markiza de Sade,* Lublin 1975, p. 56.

[24] Taylor, *Hans Bellmer: Anatomy,* p. 186.

[25] Dr. Emily Craig, American forensic anthropologist and one of the world's most important specialists in this field, was a student of Dr. Bass, who founded an innovative facility (the so-called Body Farm) in the early 1970s, where the process of decay of the human body in a natural environment was studied in detail.

[26] E. Craig, *Tajemnice wydarte zmarłym*, transl. H. Pustuła, Cracow 2010, p. 37.

Meanwhile, the mind is not capable of explaining what it sees. What happens to the constrained body? What are these strange bulges? The body is passive, susceptible to our treatment, but it remains vigilant; it keeps watching us. While trying to liberate itself from the constraints, it starts to live. It hides some kind of secret which consciousness cannot reach. It ceases to be a unity. These strange bulges, wrinkles, and uneven skin texture are like infinite possibilities of transformation. Bellmer perfectly depicted the metamorphosis of the human anatomy using the extraordinarily movable BJD doll. A famous German art critic said that the doll is an unusually poignant design and one of the most compelling sculptures of our time. He saw a monster in the doll's face, which in an instant can change from girlish to degenerate.[27]

The artist approaches human corporality in a shamelessly innovative manner. It is not enough to strip the body in order to make it an interesting object of exploration. Lebenstein notes that the carnal sphere of our lives is nothing short of boring. Everyone has own approach to it, because we all unquestionably have similar needs.[28] Bellmer talks without much embarrassment about the most intimate issues and serves them up in the form of art. However, he also reveals something else: the existence of the unconsciousness, different from that of Freud, i.e. physical unconsciousness: 'the positioning of arm and legs in which the dreaming body thinks that it is different than it really is, this kind of torpor which the shrinking limbs find to their liking; these strange states of absence, in which sometimes, in the dark, the body forgets how its legs or one of the arms have been arranged – all this brings to mind the existence of an unknown physical world, associated only with the body'.[29]

Between the inside and the outside lies a certain reality. When the consciousness is asleep it is possible to look into the bottom of it, to penetrate deeply the physical human sensitivity which is asleep. It is not just a compact mass that Bellmer sees in the body, endowed with a certain indifference and severity, surrounded on all sides with the

[27] C. Klingsoehr-Leroy, *Surrealizm,* transl. J. Wesołowska, Cologne 2005, p. 28.

[28] Kłoczkowski, 'Rozmowy', p. 119.

[29] M. Sporoń, 'Hans Bellmer — Okres śląski', (in:) *Gry Lalki. Hans Bellmer Katowice 1902 — Paryż 1975,* ed. A. Przywara, A. Szymczyk, Gdańsk 1998, p. 115.

coat of the skin. The body is rather a complex structure, with thousands of hidden possibilities for metamorphosis and transformation.[30]

There is this immediate reality, e.g. physical anatomy (skin, glands, internal organs, tangle of veins, etc.), and there is another intermediate reality, e.g. the anatomy of love. The body leads the dialogue. Sometimes it simply takes some impossible forms, arranging itself in a particular way, enabling the contents that evoke these convulsive reflexes – reaction to touch, taste or smell – to become material. This materialisation is associated with manifestation. Bellmer realized that 'the body can be compared to a sentence which encourages us to disassemble it and with an endless series of anagrams compose its true contents anew'.[31] Only when we break the word into individual letters, arranging and assembling them back quite accidentally as a new word, will we achieve this free flow of language, free of any rules imposed from above. The same applies to the body treated as an anagram. Bellmer constantly disassembles the doll, and thus redesigns it again and again, an endless number of times. This doll, like Bellmer, always offers something new to be discovered, like one's own body. This exploration remains forever different and unique.[32]

The anatomy of desire is also given to us indirectly. By desiring one part of a body we automatically start thinking about another: a particular limb articulates itself in our conception. Plato placed the desires of the soul in the stomach. According to Bellmer, desire is a property of the body, but it is concentrated in the abdomen as well. This is the part of the body which articulates its other components. It is the abdomen, not the head, that is the central part of Bellmer's doll. We can look inside her abdomen through the navel and elucidate in it the third reality mentioned by Bellmer: the anatomy of the image.[33]

Only an overview of a larger piece enables us to perceive details we are not able to discern in individual segments. The body is not homogeneous, as consciousness constantly tries to convince us. The anatomy of image requires traversing the unconsciousness slumbering in our carnality. Bellmer presents us with a doll which has e.g. one abdomen,

[30] Jeleński, *Bellmer,* pp. 43–4.

[31] Jeleński, 'Hans Bellmer czyli ból przemieszczony'*, Zeszyty literackie*, No. 34, Paris 1991, p. 87.

[32] Ibid., pp. 86–7.

[33] Taylor, *Hans Bellmer: Anatomy,* p. 24.

around which are located two pelvises. From the lower grow two movable hip joints, and from them the legs. From the upper pelvis also grow two hip joints, and, higher, there is the head. At first glance, the work seems coherent. After taking a closer look, however, we can see that the upper curves of the doll are duplications of the pelvis and hip joints which should be located in the lower parts of the body.[34]

In this presentation, the artist finds the simultaneity of what our body experiences and puts it as follows: 'one should imagine a kind of axis of reversibility between the actual and the possible outbreak of excitement; an axis which could be run by metric human anatomy and which, given the opposite symmetry, such as the breasts and buttocks or mouth and sex, would pass horizontally, at the height of the navel'.[35]

From the outside, the human body does not seem to require deeper reflection; it just exists, and it would be difficult not to notice it. It is much harder to see what is happening inside. Completely imperceptible is the quaint landscape, displayed through the body, in which, e.g. the whole digestive tract with its different organs turns into Józef Mehoffer's *Strange Garden.* In *Little Anatomy of the Physical Unconscious, or the Anatomy of the Image*, Bellmer put it as follows: 'we would like to imagine a large screen, stretched between Me and the outside world, on which the unconsciousness projects the image of its dominant excitement. The consciousness will be able to see it, and objectively read only when "the other party" – the outside world – also projects the same picture on the screen simultaneously, and these two corresponding images overlap'.[36]

The last issue that should be addressed is the fact that this inscription could serve as a punchline to Bellmer's work. At this point it should be mentioned that Bellmer's dedication to Fini was written in 1957. At that time the artist was already a mature man and his *Little Anatomy* had just been published. The wrongdoings he had experienced in his childhood may have influenced his later sexuality – he had been a toy in the hands of his father. He would spend his lifetime trying to free himself from this grip, in both a literal and a metaphorical sense. Bellmer's dedication may have something to do with division,

34 Jeleński, *Bellmer,* pp. 46–7.

35 Ibid., p. 17.

36 H. Bellmer, *Mała Anatomia…,* transl. I. Kłoczowski, Lublin 1994, pp. 69–70.

a kind of reduction, something that we were deprived of and lost in adolescence, at the very instant that we began to be aware of our bodies. Then we ceased to be animal. If this wildness becomes a part of us again, then, as Bellmer emphasises, we might be ourselves again. It is possible that we will be ourselves, because we will just be our animal selves, uncontrolled by our mind. As Bataille says, a man returning to his nature will remain detached from it (thus constant detachment is a domain of returns).[37] Basically we are all hostages and slaves of our bodies and senses.[38] Meanwhile, the artist's phantasmagorias come to light, e.g. in the erotic drawings, in which everything is very phallic: a female torso and buttocks are arranged in the shape of a penis. In another case legs become phallic, or a penis is visible in the bowels.

As Hal Foster observes, the multiple phallic symbols which restlessly swarm in his works is an attempt to hide anxiety about this part of the body, thus the fear of castration.[39] *Rape* by René Magritte is an image depicting a faceless woman. Her elongated head and neck bear resemblance to a phallus. In contrast, the facial features, which should fill the image with personality, were converted into a woman's breasts and vagina.[40] Bellmer saw that the duality of the world's appearances shocks us, which forces us to reexamine the concept of identity. The head which we perceive, is, in this case, 'a third image', which hides in itself two others: anxiety (penis) and desire (female torso). The penis and the female torso are identical, and both elements simultaneously constitute the head. Bellmer attempts to isolate the unconscious parts in the image captured by our memory, to show their irrational identity.[41] With his sadistic photos, another Surrealist, Jacques-André Boiffard, also provoked the search for something less obvious. Once a woman's finger turned into a male member, another time a woman's head into a tight leather mask. Similarly, when photographing the neck and jaw of Lee Miller, Man Ray tilted her in such a way that she resembled a penis.

It must be noted that Bellmer's works depict only female characters. In the case of dolls which have a common part – an abdomen from

[37] G. Bataille, *Historia erotyzmu,* transl. I. Kania, Cracow 1992, p. 76.

[38] Craig, *Tajemnice,* p. 170.

[39] H. Foster, *Prosthetic Gods*, Cambridge 2004, p. 230.

[40] Bellmer, *Mała Anatomia,* pp. 61–3.

[41] Ibid., pp. 63–4.

which grow two pelvises, and from the pelvises legs – one can say that this is a clumsy, masturbatory combination, as if it wants to express that this is not what looking for oneself is about. The masculine-feminine fantasies in Bellmer's illustrations somehow say that only through contact with others can we experience who we really are, as if with his creations the artist wants to say that he could only be himself provided he had two elements, male and female, in him. This is similar to the Jungian concept of discovering the opposite sex in oneself, the identification of something else – something alien.[42] One could say, like Rimbaud: 'I am someone else!'[43]

Among synonyms of the word 'difference', one can find *specificity*, *strangeness*, *heterogeneity* or *contradiction*. It is not without reason that the dolls looking at us from the photographs are often decorated in a bleak *noir* style. A light body against a dark background evokes contrast, another word synonymous with the word 'difference'. This expression, in turn, is the basic concept of the philosophy of dialogue, in which a man always heads toward something or someone (a stranger). Who or what is this stranger? Perhaps a representation of someone or something physically absent. As pointed out by Michał Paweł Markowski, otherness is nothing but a model of identity, which can be decided upon and made our own.[44] Foster, in turn, observes that by manipulating his dolls sadistically, Bellmer somehow masochistically identifies himself with them.[45] So are the works of the artist deprived of certain items or doubly endowed? Are they not re-presentations of the absent?

Bellmer had a predilection for emphasising specific segments of the photographs by 'blushing' them, e.g. when portraying four legs, he arranged them in a way so that he could accentuate the cavity between the thighs. This space automatically brings to mind the female vagina and the question of what the organ is doing in this place. This gives the impression of something else, something out of place, yet completing the whole. There is an irresistible temptation here to link this

[42] C.G. Jung, *Syzygia: anima i animus*, (in:) *Archetypy i symbole: pisma wybrane,*transl. J. Prokopiuk, Warsaw 1993, p. 76.

[43] J. Ziarkowska, *Ucieczka do głębi*, Wroclaw 2010, p. 271.

[44] M.P. Markowski, Inność i tożsamość, (in:) *Pragnienie i bałwochwalstwo. Felietony metafizyczne*, Cracow 2004, p. 160.

[45] Foster, *Prosthetic*, p. 233.

with the prosthetic limbs. The artist's dolls were made of various heterogeneous materials. Initially, these were wood and metal, and the doll looked like a mechanical creature; not entirely happy with this, the artist commented: 'a number of broomsticks tied together makes it a half-ectoplasmic, half-mechanical puppet'.[46] Later dolls were enriched with a coating of plaster and papier-mache. Still, they remained combinations of different materials and even Bellmer did not attempt to hide the join marks on their bodies.

In addition, the artist had a peculiar liking: everything had a rounded shape. A common theme of his work was an abdominal joint treated as a mirror reflecting identical symmetrical body parts. The doll's breasts, however, which in fact turn out to be buttocks, or the moving spherical hip joints of the pelvis, are another gimmick, used every so often, of swapping the locations of different parts of the doll's body. These examples raise the question of whether such prostheses are only an addition or whether they supplement the missing parts of the doll. It seems that the artist deliberately resorts to such a reduction, and requires the same of the recipient, which is also the main motto of 'the mother of modern BJDs' from the Volks company: be creative. Each Dollfie is a BJD, but not every BJD is a Dollfie. If it were not for the material used by the artist to make his dolls, they would also be Dollfies. Because BJDs consist of fragmented segments, we are forced to interact with them. Our consciousness begins to move towards something different from itself. We can replace individual parts or combine elements from dolls (not necessarily from a single doll), thereby forming a hybrid.

Isn't the deformity of Bellmer's works derived from the scarcity of our consciousness? We tend to hold a false belief that our body is solid, with a distinctive shape, but can it be said that it ends or begins somewhere? All we can see is successive layers, a tangle of skin, muscles or veins. We also believe that dismantling is destruction, but it can also be the unveiling of this other which Bellmer sought. Moreover, as was noted by Hegel: to be able to start to look for one's self, first one needs to lose it. Yoshiki Tajiri claims that what Bellmer does to the female body is degeneration.[47] After all, thanks to ball joints and split body

[46] Jeleński, *Bellmer,* p. 105.

[47] Y. Tajiri, *Samuel Beckett and the Prosthetic Body,* New York 2007, p. 30.

parts, Bellmer's BJD can disconnect itself. However, as emphasised by Hegel, we are also torn apart internally. Thus, disconnection itself is not yet degeneration. The latter occurs when we begin to realise that, however we abuse our nature, we are not able to get rid of the limitations our own body places on us. Bellmer's doll can have two torsos and two pairs of legs, and this, in turn, begins to be another body, not congruent to reality.

Tajiri strongly emphasises that Bellmer, like no-one else, could make use of the distribution principle of the defragmented body. Various parts of the dolls can be moved, connected with each other, and possibly replaced.[48] Such an approach to the female body did not pose a problem for the surrealists, who had the overwhelming desire for 'convulsive beauty'. In some works of Max Ernst the heroines are deprived of heads, or their legs are locked in an exhibition showcase. Man Ray also deprived models of heads, hands or legs. In his photographs, Pierre Molinier often multiplied e.g. women's legs or turned the lower part of the body back to front.

Masculine-feminine fantasies are Bellmer's fantasies, the elements constantly intertwined in his works, being in a way a decomposition of the subject.[49] It also seems that through the use of such tricks the artist desired to present himself as somebody else. That is: through alienation, to seek himself. This brings to mind the Hegelian concept of getting to know oneself through the spirit: 'Spirit is at war with itself; it has to overcome itself as its most formidable obstacle. That development which in the sphere of Nature is a peaceful growth, is in that of spirit a severe, a mighty conflict with itself. What spirit really strives for is the realisation of its own vision, and is proud and well satisfied in this alienation from it'.[50] Therefore, I believe that the artist's dedication to Fini, created at a time when he was already a mature and fully developed artist, is the perfect punchline to his artistic achievements: so I am someone, but still not myself…

48 Ibid., pp. 77–8.

49 Ziarkowska, *Ucieczka*, p. 270.

50 G. W. F. Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*, transl. J. Sibree, Mineola 2004, p. 55.

Illustration 1 *I don't believe that you are not alive*, A.KOOT.

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'THE MOST EXCITING THING IS NOT-DOING-IT', OR ANDY WARHOL'S 'PHILOSOPHY OF LOVE' ON THE BASIS OF *BLOW JOB* AND *MY HUSTLER*

ABSTRACT

The aim of this article is to identify characteristics of Andy Warhol's 'philosophy of love', the elements of which were described in *The Philosophy of Andy Warhol (From A to B and Back Again)*, and an analysis in this context of Warhol's films *Blow Job* (1963) and *My Hustler* (1965). Warhol's films are treated as an opportunity to discuss his attitude to love and sex, as they contain the key elements of his unusual 'philosophy of love'. The artist's biography is referenced, as are the concept of 'impersonal narcissism', put forth by Leo Bersani and Adam Phillips, Slavoj Žižek's theories on the role of fantasy in a relationship, and some reflections of Susan Sontag and Esther Perel.

KEYWORDS

philosophy of love, love and sex, Andy Warhol, *Blow Job*, *My Hustler*

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Introduction

The figure of Andy Warhol, the world's leading representative of pop art, was special, as were his views on love, sex, and the relationship between them. Surprisingly little research on the artist's unusual 'philosophy of love' has been carried out to date, perhaps reflecting an uncritical acceptance of Warhol's provocative statements such as 'Yeah, I'm still a virgin'[1], as well as of the artist's alleged celibacy and asexuality, about which he created a legend, turning them into a shield to protect his privacy. People from the artist's milieu, however, deny that Warhol did not maintain sexual relationships or that he led a life of celibacy. Victor Bockris, author of a comprehensive biography of Warhol, cites detailed testimony — albeit some of it anonymous — from the artist's sexual partners, which clearly proves that certainly Warhol did not die a virgin[2]. Of course, there is no shortage of studies of Warhol's life, including his sexual life, a recent example being John Wilcock's *The Autobiography and Sex Life of Andy Warhol* (2010). However, few have tried to thoroughly understand the artist's 'philosophy of love' and track its components in his artistic output, including in his films.

In this article I will analyse two films by Andy Warhol in the context of his specific 'philosophy of love': *Blow Job* (1963) and *My Hustler* (1965), in which we can see most fully Warhol's complex attitude to love and sex. An analysis of these films will identify the key elements of the Warholian 'philosophy of love', expressed more directly in *The Philosophy of Andy Warhol (From A to B and Back Again)* (1975).

The problem with reading Warhol's philosophy literally is that *The Philosophy of Andy Warhol* is also an artistic creation, and therefore only one of the elements in the artist's philosophical universe. I would like to avoid the mistake of analysing Warhol's 'philosophy of love' based only on one text treated as an infallible oracle; rather, I wish to confront his words (from the book) with his actions (his other artistic works and private life), and confirm or refute the concepts set forth in *The Philosophy*.

While commenting on the content of *The Philosophy* and dealing with various aspects of love and sex, it is impossible to ignore War-

[1] J. D. Dillenberger, *The Religious Art of Andy Warhol*, New York 1998, p. 35.

[2] V. Bockris, *The Life and Death of Andy Warhol*, Bantam Books, 1989.

hol's biography. We can observe that some elements of the biography seem to confirm his written words, while other elements contradict those words. One thing is certain: the picture of Warhol's 'philosophy of love' would not be complete without at least some brief insight into the artist's private life and the choices he made. Even if we assume that the celibacy and asexuality Warhol declared is factual, by simply noting these issues, we put the matter of sex in the spotlight. Sex and, perhaps less obviously, love were very important issues in the life and work of Warhol, which may seem paradoxical, given the fact that he had neither a family nor a steady partner during most of his adult life; he also seemed not to attach himself to other people (he coolly assessed most people through the prism of their predisposition to be a star and believed in their 'interchangeability'). Nevertheless, I understand 'sex' (or more generally: 'eroticism') as seen by Esther Perel, that is, as the life force driving action, as the source of creativity and a playing field for the imagination[3]. In further analysis of Warhol's 'philosophy of love', Perel's theories will serve as helpful commentary.

In addition to Perel, I will reference philosophical concepts and ideas relevant to my discussion: the 'impersonal narcissism' taken from Leo Bersani and Adam Phillips' *Intimacies*[4]; Susan Sontag's views on the relationship between love and sex in modern society, outlined, *inter alia*, in an interview conducted by Jonathan Cott[5]; elements of Slavoj Žižek's theories on the role of fantasy in a romantic relationship[6].

'Everybody has a different idea of love'

These words come from the book *The Philosophy of Andy Warhol (From A to B and Back Again)*, in which Warhol devoted a great deal of space to the idea of love. The book contains three chapters with love in the title: *Love: Puberty*, *Love: Prime* and *Love: Senility*, and the word

[3] E. Perel, *Sexuality, Eroticism and Creativity, with Esther Perel*, viewed 18 December 2014, http://bigthink.com/videos/why-sex-and-eroticism-are-different-with-esther-perel.

[4] L. Bersani & A. Phillips, *Intimacies*, The University of Chicago Press, 2008.

[5] S. Sontag & J. Cott, *Myśl to forma odczuwania. Susan Sontag w rozmowie z Jonathanem Cottem*, transl. D. Żukowski, Kraków 2014.

[6] S. Fiennes (director), *The Pervert's Guide to Cinema* [film], 2006.

'love' appears 116 times in the book. This may indicate that the subject was quite important for the artist. Here are some things Warhol says about love and sex in his book:

> I don't really know if I was ever capable of love, but after the 60s I never thought in terms of 'love' again. However, I became what you might call fascinated by certain people. One person in the 60s fascinated me more than anybody I had ever known. And the fascination I experienced was probably very close to a certain kind of love.[7] (emphasis mine — J.Ł.)

> The most exciting thing is not-doing-it. If you fall in love with someone and never do it, it's much more exciting.[8]

> Fantasy love is much better than reality love. Never doing it is very exciting. The most exciting attractions are between two opposites that never meet.[9] (emphasis mine — J.Ł.)

On the basis of the above words, we are able to argue that the person uttering them has a very specific, very unusual attitude to issues of love and sex (or wants the readers to think so). Love seems in the above quotations to be something hard to define, especially after the turbulent 60s, when all values (including 'sanctification' of the idea of love) were questioned. Love began to be treated fairly easily and without obligation; it was pushed from the pedestal and placed on an equal footing with other elements of contemporary reality. It became 'free'[10]. 'Love' is replaced here by 'fascination', or by something less loaded with centuries-old traditions of courtship and seduction; something that is perhaps not as binding for both parties involved in a sexual relationship.

When we look at Warhol's biography, we find in it some elements that confirm this aspect of his attitude to love. On one hand, Warhol felt the need for continuous contact with other people, to establish relationships based on the exchange of ideas (he often talked with people close

[7] A. Warhol, *The Philosophy of Andy Warhol (From A to B and Back Again)*, Harvest, San Diego, New York, London 1987, p. 27.

[8] Warhol, *The Philosophy,* p. 41.

[9] Warhol, *The Philosophy,* p. 44.

[10] J.R. Petersen, *Stulecie seksu. Historia rewolucji seksualnej 1900–1999 według „Playboya"*, transl. A. Jankowski, Poznań 2002.

to him for a long time, usually on the phone), but on the other hand he treated people as instruments for his own purposes (stories about how Warhol did not pay actors for their work on his films, deluding them with the mirage of their future fame, are widespread). But Warhol's love of talk is a complex matter. He liked to talk, but did not always need people for this activity (as indicated by his famous 'marriage with a tape recorder'), and sometimes the exchange of ideas was for him just a game based on a specific code, 'the language in which understatement reigns, and also irony, distance, absurd, and above all — extreme verbal minimalism'[11]. When giving interviews, Warhol did not give controversial views, did not try to shock, did not want to offend anyone. 'When asked for an opinion on a topic, he invariably replies that it is "great"'[12]. In a word, he did not facilitate the tasks of the interviewers (or modern interpreters of his words and works of art).

According to Bockris, Warhol did not like to be touched or to bestow any physical tenderness on others, which created a barrier between him and other people. Also, during sex, if you believe the artist's biographer's interviewees, he remained distant and seemed absent — as if he was watching the scene from the sidelines, without participating or being involved in it[13]. He was innocent about sex, a bit like a kid in a toy store, fascinated and charmed, touching his dream toy and examining, with some degree of shame and disbelief, how it works. The child does not get the toy, just as Warhol remains forever at the point of unfulfilled desire. After all, this is just 'the most exciting thing'! Sex is not the most important thing, and certainly is not the core of a love relationship. These views, on one hand, may seem very romantic, idealistic, praising a 'platonic' kind of love; on the other hand, they separate love from sex, giving primacy to sex with no commitment, sex as a biological need, keeping real commitment in a potential state. We can clearly see that Warhol's 'philosophy of love' is based on paradoxes.

The last of the above-mentioned quotes from *The Philosophy* seems to me to be the most memorable in the context of his films. Warhol contended that 'fantasy love is much better than reality love', which leads me to consider the category of love in terms of fantasy and reality. Imaginary love,

[11] K. Goldsmith, *Będę twoim lustrem. Wywiady z Warholem*, transl. M. Zawada, Warszawa 2006, p. 7.

[12] Goldsmith, *Będę twoim lustrem*, p. 7.

[13] Bockris, *The Life.*

not belonging to reality, potential love, love as a dreamed-up toy from the store, unfulfilled love — this is the centrepiece of Warhol's films. 'Never doing it is very exciting', he says. The problem, which, in my opinion, tormented the artist throughout his life, and which is reflected in his work, is the inability to present the thing he really wanted to show; the impossibility of creating a complete representation, the impossibility of grasping the core of selfhood of a person representing the 'strange', 'different' 'philosophy of love', inability to take possession of the toy from the store and to play with it without embarrassment in front of others. I think that this inability is not just about Warhol's homosexuality but, more broadly, about how to talk about non-normative sexual behaviour and non-normative understandings of love without falling into the trap of the banality of clichéd 'free love' slogans of the 60s. The question is: how to express one's sexual identity and one's 'philosophy of love' in a situation where it is not recognised and accepted by the outside world and its cultural norms? Warhol's strategy to cope with this situation consisted of several elements: to pose as an asexual person, an innocent child and virgin; to play language/convention games with art lovers, film viewers, and audiences, as well as with the people carrying out interviews and their readers; and, more importantly, to control the rules, and to escape into the realm of fantasy, where everything can have its representation.

In addition, Warhol gives the word 'fantasy' in *The Philosophy* a slightly different meaning. He talks about notions that we have about the person we fall in love with, and that often they do not correspond to reality, which can be a source of problems, for example during sex. In the artist's own words:

> People's fantasies are what give them problems. If you didn't have fantasies you wouldn't have problems because you'd just take whatever was there. But then you wouldn't have romance, because romance is finding your fantasy in people who don't have it. A friend of mine always says, 'Women love me for the man I'm not.'[14]

According to Warhol, one source of disappointment and suffering in love is the inevitable clash of fantasy and reality. Here we touch the wide, and recently very trendy, topic of imaginary ideas about romance

[14] Warhol, *The Philosophy,* p. 55.

partners and their inadequacy in reality, that is, the role of fantasy and phantasm in a love relationship. Slavoj Žižek, in the famous film *The Pervert's Guide to Cinema* (2006), says:

> All too often, when we love somebody, we don't accept him or her as what the person effectively is. We accept him or her insofar as this person fits the coordinates of our fantasy. We misidentify, wrongly identify him or her, which is why, when we discover that we were wrong, love can quickly turn into violence.[15]

Warhol noticed this thirty years before Žižek and, consciously or not, warned us against too serious an approach to sex and proposed a playful attitude to the subject, in order to be able to enjoy lovemaking (i.e. he wrote, of course half-jokingly, half-seriously, about the necessity to introduce some courses in primary schools about love and beauty). Making these topics less serious, treating them as a mundane thing, would save us many disappointments in our love lives. Warhol knows that reality cannot beat the imagination. In the end, sex will always be 'more exciting on the screen and between the pages than between the sheets anyway'[16]. In addition, many of our anxieties regarding sex stem from the failure to meet cultural norms that often stand in opposition to our real needs. Sex is a kind of great demand that the world places on us. Warhol writes that he cannot meet the demands of cultural norms and he does not feel good about it, as if he did not meet someone's top-down expectations. His recipe for this problem is distancing. Now, let's have a look at how it works in his films.

'Movies could show you (…) how it really is between people'[17]

In the early 60s Warhol gave up painting for some time and devoted himself to filmmaking. Today, some of his films are classics of American underground cinema. Nevertheless, their most important asset and a major attraction for researchers and fans seem to be Warhol's authorship. The

[15] Fiennes, *The Pervert's Guide.*

[16] Warhol, *The Philosophy,* p. 44.

[17] Warhol, *The Philosophy,* p. 48.

huge interest that accompanied screenings of Warhol's films (i.e. *Chelsea Girls*, 1966) was also (or primarily) generated by a desire to see the life of the artist and his entourage on the big screen. In Warhol's films, however, we can find much more than a record of the times in which they were made. His film work is a game with classic cinema — primarily with traditional narrative structure, without which a good movie, it was commonly believed, could not exist. Warhol's experimental cinema undermined this thesis, arguing that the pleasure of our association with the film can also be derived from the specific game between the author and the audience; from not meeting the expectations of the viewer; from testing the viewer's patience; and from a game with convention, i.e., an unusual presentation of love relationships, romance and sex on the screen.

Let us now focus on one of the most interesting and most famous of Warhol's early film experiments, *Blow Job*, an etude from 1963, and see what it tells us about the artist's 'philosophy of love'. During the entire film, which runs a little over thirty minutes, the camera focusses on the face of the young man who is the recipient of the sexual act referred to in the title. We see nothing else. The camera remains on the man, who leans against the wall, sometimes tilts his head back, leans from side to side, raises his hands in moments of ecstasy, and, after reaching climax, lights a cigarette. We do not see, of course, the sexual act itself; we can only observe the young man's face. A commentator on Warhol's films, Stephen Koch, notes that, '(…) the fellated penis is the focus of attention; it's excluded from the frame'[18]. The viewers expect this exclusion but are nevertheless frustrated by it. We are left with the same face, which, moreover, is often hidden in shadow; it is difficult to read anything from it. It looks as if the face is intentionally hidden from us, or as if the director knew what we would try to see, what we would seek, and gently mocked our expectations… or wanted to draw our attention to the essence of 'no-looking'.

Let us quote a memorable phrase from *The Philosophy*, which is interesting in the context of *Blow Job.* Warhol says:

> People should fall in love with their eyes closed. Just close your eyes. Don't look.[19]

[18] S. Koch, *Stargazer: The Life, World and Films of Andy Warhol*, Marion Boyars Publishers Ltd, 2000, p. 50.

[19] Warhol, *The Philosophy,* p. 50.

To persuade someone to fall in love with eyes closed may seem at first glance bizarre, but Warhol seems to indicate something deeper, namely the problem of seeing according to convention and judging by it. Warhol calls for non-judging by appearances, or, more broadly, for non-judging in general; he speaks of an immersion in pleasure of 'no-looking', 'not seeing', 'not noticing', in the sense that he wants to change the perspective, turning expectations upside down. The artistic technique of this movie also serves this purpose: lighting the face so that we do not see the emotions on it, the exclusion of unnecessary elements from the frame, the lack of narrative construction, the lack of a clear climax[20]. Warhol shows us clearly that there is another way; he wants to go against the grain. Sometimes you have to close your eyes and distance yourself, in order to start to see and to fall in love. This is one of the ways, in addition to the above-mentioned 'making the topic less serious', to challenge cultural norms and social expectations about sex.

The very act of sex is something that we do not witness in the film, something that we, the viewers, have to fill in with our own imaginations. As we remember, 'fantasy love is much better than reality love', and 'the most exciting attractions are between two opposites that never meet'. An interpretation in this spirit of the scene from *Blow Job*, which in fact we did not witness, confirms this element of Warhol's 'philosophy of love'. The idea of two opposites, two contradictions that never meet but are next to each other, and their inability to meet generates sensual pleasure and is attractive for us. Contradiction, which causes tension, is embodied in the fact that we have the act of fellatio in front of our eyes (and certainly we are aware that it is taking place), but at the same time we do not see it; contradiction is also embodied in the fact that we look at the man who experiences pleasure, but at the same time do not read anything particular from his face. Finally, the signals sent from the screen are contradictory: some of them demand: 'Look!' (in the spirit of voyeurism, as Koch reads them), and others say: 'Do NOT look!'.

It seems that turning to filmmaking and the opportunities associated with the medium of film allowed Warhol to express his attitude towards love and sex in a way fuller than ever before. Warhol had loved movies since childhood and the world of popular Hollywood stars was

[20] D. Crimp, *"Our Kind of Movie": The Films of Andy Warhol*, Cambridge 2012.

very close to his imagination and sensitivity. His childhood heroes were characters from movies and comics: Dick Tracy, Superman, Batman, Popeye[21]. Cinema offers fantastic opportunities for building tension between what is visible and invisible, and also allows the director to hide behind the camera and to create a sense of distance. It was ideally suited for the expression of Warhol's 'philosophy of love'.

Let's see what the artist himself had to say about the importance of cinema:

> Movies bring in another whole dimension. That screen magnetism is something secret — if you could only figure out what it is and how to make it, you'd have a really good product to sell. But you can't even tell if someone has it until you actually see them up there on the screen.[22] (emphasis mine — J.Ł.)

Films, thanks to screen magnetism, have the ability to express inexpressible things; that is why they are so valuable for Warhol.

I am the queen of the beach!

My Hustler, a film from 1965, by Andy Warhol and Chuck Wein, one of the collaborators in the Factory, is important for at least two reasons. Firstly, it is Warhol's first sound feature film, in which an attentive viewer will find the key elements of the artist's 'philosophy of love' with no problem. Secondly, it is the film most widely recognised by commentators (Michael Moon places it next to *Midnight Cowboy*, John Schlesinger's 1969 film, in some respects), and by the (not very large at the time) audience[23].

My Hustler is a film with a very simple construction and storyline. In the first part of the film, three friends – the old owner of a beach house; his neighbour, an experienced hustler; and another neighbour, a young woman – enjoy themselves by watching the owner's newest 'pickup', a beautiful young blond man who, as we can guess, is a rent-

[21] M. Moon, *A Small Boy and Others: Imitation and Initiation in American Culture from Henry James to Andy Warhol*, Durham and London 1998.

[22] Warhol, *The Philosophy,* p. 63.

[23] Moon, *A Small Boy*, pp. 117–132.

ed hustler. We hear the talk between the three friends, who are betting which of them will be able to seduce the hustler first. Most frequently, the frame is filled with the blond man lying in the sand. He becomes the object of gazes and desire, while we hear the whole exchange of ideas between the neighbours off-screen. The second part of the film is a long scene in the bathroom, filmed without cuts, during which the two men, the experienced hustler and the blond man, perform a detailed hygienic procedure: they brush their teeth, comb their hair, apply some perfume on their skin, etc. The dark-haired hero tries to seduce the blond one in a kind of 'dance in front of the mirror'. According to Koch, 'the action is tense with its obvious little truth, that this sequence is about two men's bodies, that they have become, in this situation, sexual objects (…)'[24]. The signals sent by the two bodies are interpreted by the viewer primarily as an 'orgasmic promise of happiness' ('orgasmic *promesse de bonheur*')[25]. Lust and beauty are never alone, but come together in dialogue, As well, here two bodies are needed to create tension[26].

Here, love as known from Plato's concept and from Leo Bersani and Adam Phillips' *Intimacies* comes to mind. Plato's love is called 'back-love' — that is, the love when the lover and beloved see in each other both the other person and themselves, as well as unconsciously looking for elusive pieces of lost, divine ideals from the past. Lust and beauty are linked: people in love desire each other, but they are also searching for a lost ideal of beauty, the elements their souls once experienced. In this sense, love for another person is always so-called 'self-love'. This is also associated with impersonal narcissism, which challenges modern theories of love that is unique, oblatory, exceptional; it betrays the fact that, for example, we are looking for some constant features in our successive romance partners, and that love is always narcissistic, lined with a hint of selfishness, striving to meet one's own needs. We are looking in a partner for images of ourselves, our reflections, but also something that we have lost. Here, modernist faith in human individualism and uniqueness of love has been shaken. A romantic feeling that happens only once in a lifetime, and narratives created around this belief, are myths[27].

24 Koch, *Stargazer*, pp. 83–84.

25 Koch, *Stargazer*, p. 85.

26 W. Koestenbaum, *Andy Warhol*, New York 2001, p. 139.

27 Bersani & Phillips, *Intimacies*, 2008.

Warhol's films, including *My Hustler*, focus attention on the fact that alternatives, or assumptions other than those in force, are possible in the realm of love and sex. There is no need to base them on romantic love; you can try to create your own rules. Warhol, in his films, in my opinion, would like to draw attention to the existence of a type of sensitivity which does not have to comply with any guidelines or submit to cultural norms, but which also wants to be noticed. All of the activities that Warhol undertook aimed to present the 'not shown' and 'unnoticed'. The scene in the bathroom from *My Hustler* is something like this; it makes the young man an object of interest; he is placed in the centre of attention. Warhol points out that it is possible to do this without trying to fit it into existing romantic narratives.

One of the elements of Warhol's 'philosophy of love' is to draw attention to the possible separation of love and sex, which we have already briefly mentioned. Love and sex are not inseparable and, moreover, very often have nothing in common. Susan Sontag describes the complex relationship of these two elements:

> We ask everything of love. We ask it to be anarchic. We ask it to be the glue that holds the family together, that allows society to be orderly and allows all kinds of material processes to be transmitted from one generation to another. But I think that the connection between love and sex is very mysterious. Part of the modern ideology of love is to assume that love and sex always go together. They can, I suppose, but I think rather to the detriment of either one or the other. And probably the greatest problem for human beings is that they just don't. And why do people want to be in love? That's really interesting. Partly, they want to be in love the way you want to go on a roller coaster again — even knowing you're going to have your heart broken. What fascinates me about love is what it has to do with all the cultural expectations and the values that have been put into it. I've always been amazed by the people who say, "I fell in love, I was madly, passionately in love, and I had this affair. And then a lot of stuff is described and you ask, 'How long did it last?' And the person will say, 'A week, I just couldn't stand him or her'.[28]

Sontag observes a problem which is also important for Warhol: attaching too much importance to the issue of love, which is supposed to be the cure for all ills, and mythologising its status. We expect a lot

28 Sontag & Cott, *Myśl*, pp. 106–107.

from love, often unnecessarily and unjustifiably. As we already know, the problem of the difficult relationship between love and sex and the inability to meet the expectations derived from imposed ideas and cultural norms were the subject of the artist's reflections in his works. In *My Hustler*, sex and desire are discussed by the characters and are an interesting starting point for play, fun and competition. We do not know how the bet will finish; we only know that the game is going on.

Here we touch one of the most important points of Warhol's 'philosophy of love'. Sex, or eroticism, should, after being freed from the conventions, be reborn as a life force, as a game associated with creativity, spontaneity, vitality. According to Esther Perel, a well-known psychotherapist dealing with human romantic relationships, sex at some point ceased to be associated with these aspects, which is a big mistake. Erotica's original strength and creative power should be restored[29]. There is a deep connection between eroticism and creativity. Stepping out of the scheme, 'the demolition' of the established order, looking from a different perspective, drawing from imagination and fantasy, are all extremely important issues in love and sex life. Perel talks about them as follows:

> (…) when you are creative you often are erotic. You feel alive. You feel radiant. You feel vibrant. Sometimes you feel very confident. (…) That's why for all of history we used to call it the erotic arts. (…) So creativity is about going outside of the boundaries. It's about being non-linear. It's about expansiveness. It's about connecting dots that are not necessarily so obvious to connect and then to create a whole new reality with it.[30]

Susan Sontag also emphasises the aspect of fun and frolic in the art of love, saying:

> And I think that, for many people, love signifies a return to values that are represented by childhood and that seem censored by the dried-up, mechanized, adult kinds of coercions of work and rules and responsibilities and impersonality. I mean, love is sensuality and play and irresponsibility and hedonism and being silly (…).[31] (emphasis mine — J.Ł.)

29 Perel, *Sexuality*.

30 Perel, *Sexuality*.

31 Sontag & Cott, *Myśl*, p. 106.

It seems that Andy Warhol in his 'philosophy of love' also focusses on these aspects. Love is a matter which should be treated less seriously; and the aspect of humor and fun and games needs to be appreciated. Erotica means creativity and going off the beaten track.

Conclusion

In his 'philosophy of love' Andy Warhol wanted to go beyond conventions and provide an alternative version of romantic sensitivity, where the first priority is the freedom to make one's own decisions. He convinces us in his work that love and sex cannot be labelled or categorised. Warhol was a person full of contradictions: on one hand, he provoked viewers with erotic depictions in films, on the other, he described himself as a virgin. His ambivalent attitude to the issue of sex and love, and especially the relationship between them, can be tracked in his life and work, especially in the films. On-screen games with the audience in *Blow Job* and *My Hustler* were intended to undermine existing theories about the sanctity of love and sex relationships, and also to question the cultural norms and draw attention to their incompatibility with the modern world. The classification of Warhol's 'philosophy of love' as demanding homoerotic images only would be a simplification; rather, I think that it is connected with the need to present a non-normative understanding of love and sex in general.

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LOVE AS SUBVERSION: THE LONG AFTERLIFE OF THE ROMANTIC IDEAL

ABSTRACT

The aim of this paper is to confront two opposite views on the romantic idea of love and its role in contemporary Western societies. According to one of the analysed perspectives, represented most fully by Anthony Giddens, the romantic idea of love is seen as a dangerous delusion, bound to be abandoned in the rapidly changing societies of today. According to the other view, proposed by Pierre Bourdieu, romantic love is still the only means to escape the power of symbolic domination. In conclusion, both accounts are analysed in terms of their underlying mythologies: Victorian in case of Giddens, Romantic in case of Bourdieu. Notions of 'ontological security' and the 'unity of the loving dyad' are shown to be the cornerstones of powerful mythological systems encompassing our aims and modes of expression.

KEYWORDS

Anthony Giddens, Pierre Bourdieu, romantic love, intimacy, ontological security, masculine domination

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The aim of this paper is to confront two opposite views on the romantic idea of love and its role and place in contemporary Western societies. According to one of the analysed perspectives, proposed by Anthony Giddens, the romantic idea of love is seen as a dangerous delusion bound to be abandoned in today's rapidly changing societies. According to the other view, represented by Pierre Bourdieu in his work on masculine domination, romantic love is considered the only means to escape the power of ubiquitous symbolic violence.

The structure of the article is as follows. In the first section I flesh out the notion of romance and trace the origins of the romantic idea of love. In two subsequent sections I address the claims made by Giddens and Bourdieu. The fourth section offers a short outline of what may be called 'the labour conception of love', which is used as a framework for further comparison of the two views. In conclusion, both conceptions are analysed in terms of their underlying mythologies: Victorian in the case of Giddens, Romantic in the case of Bourdieu.

The origin of romance

We should start by clarifying the meaning of 'romantic love'. The term will be used in the sense proposed by Krystyna Starczewska, who has defined it as a 'disposition for action motivated by the urge to achieve a state of absolute unity of will between the loving subject and the loved object'.[1] According to Starczewska, this disposition is always accompanied by a strong tendency to sanctify both the object of love and the romance itself. Therefore, the idea of romance is geared towards transcending the mundane world and its grimy necessities and obligations. This conception of romance is built on a well-known thesis formulated by Max Weber in his work on the sociology of religion, according to which romance should be perceived as a thoroughly modern invention that has emerged with the development of the bourgeois society.

According to Weber, the process of modernisation is coextensive with the progress of rationalisation, bureaucratisation and 'disenchantment with the world'; it leads to a breakdown of traditional social bonds and progressive instrumentalisation of all human relationships. Erot-

[1] K. Starczewska, *Wzory miłości w kulturze Zachodu*, Warsaw 1975, p. 46.

ic love, however, is a unique relationship that cannot be rationalised, based as it is on a certain charismatic element also present in early orgiastic forms of religion. Thus, according to Weber, in modern Western societies 'eroticism was raised into the sphere of conscious enjoyment (in the most sublime sense of the term). Nevertheless, indeed because of this elevation, eroticism appeared to be like a gate into the most irrational and thereby real kernel of life, as compared with the mechanisms of rationalisation'.[2] Thereby, the romantic notion of *true love*, freed from any utilitarian functionality, was conceived as a means to escape from 'the iron cage of rationality'.

The aim of romantic lovers is to re-enchant their world. As Weber puts it:

> the erotic relation seems to offer the unsurpassable peak of the fulfillment of the request for love in the direct fusion of the souls of one to the other. This boundless giving of oneself is as radical as possible in its opposition to all functionality, rationality, and generality. It is displayed here as the unique meaning which one creature in his irrationality has for another, and only for this specific other.[3]

It should be noted that this approach to the erotic sphere is deeply subversive. Romantic love implies the rejection of everything considered reasonable and respectable within the petit-bourgeois worldview. According to Starczewska, a fight against the hostile and uncaring world is thus a necessary leitmotif of any modern romance. Romantic lovers constantly strive to achieve unity, but on their way they actively seek to face as many difficulties as possible. They see omnipotence as a constitutive aspect of true love: as a result, they try to reach unattainable goals merely to demonstrate the power of their mutual involvement. While their aim is to attain absolute unity of the will, they try to achieve this by rejecting the rational code of conduct of the bourgeois *homini oeconomici* and replacing it with rules of their own creation.[4]

In a more mystical idiom, this radical reinvention of two loving subjects can be described — as Weber puts it — as 'the direct fusion of

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[2] M. Weber, *Essays in Sociology*, New York 1946, pp. 345–6.

[3] Ibid., p. 347.

[4] Starczewska, *Wzory*, p. 33.

souls', which in turn presupposes boundless devotion to the beloved subject. In this aspect, romance is both closely related and profoundly different from mystical forms of religion. According to Weber:

> Certain psychological interrelations of both spheres sharpen the tension between religion and sex. The highest eroticism stands psychologically and physiologically in a mutually substitutive relation with certain sublimated forms of heroic piety. In opposition to the rational, active asceticism which rejects the sexual as irrational, and which is felt by eroticism to be a powerful and deadly enemy, this substitutive relationship is oriented especially to the mystic's union with God. From this relation there follows the constant threat of a deadly sophisticated revenge of animality, or of an unmediated slipping from the mystic realm of God into the realm of the All-Too-Human. This psychological affinity naturally increases the antagonism of inner meanings between eroticism and religion.[5]

As a result, there is always a mounting tension between the mysticism of love and that of religion. The devotion of the religious mystic is truly objectless, whereas the romantic lover is devoted solely to the chosen unique human being. The mystic wants to attain absolute unity with God: he loves God in every man, but he loves no human being as such. The lover wants to attain similar unity with the beloved subject, who effectively becomes his God. Therefore, the relation between love and religion is *substitutive*: these two kinds of mysticism, while psychologically close, are mutually exclusive as ways of life.

To sum up: according to the Weberian view the romantic idea of love is a self-consciously irrational one; it emerged as an answer to the progress of modernisation and it breaks completely with any notion of conventional happiness offered by modern society. It is a subversive way of experiencing transcendence amongst the dreary routines of everyday life. As such, it can be perceived as a modern substitute for religion.

This subversive aspect of romance reaches its most extreme manifestation in the voluntary death of both loving subjects. Perhaps the most striking real-life example of such a conclusion is, to this day, the suicide pact of the Romantic writer and poet Heinrich von Kleist

[5] Weber, *Essays*, p. 348.

and his terminally ill lover, Henriette Vogel, which resulted in Kleist shooting Vogel and himself on 21 November 1811 on the banks of the Kleiner Wannsee. What makes this case different both from its literary counterparts (such as the deaths of Romeo and Juliet) and later incidents of a similar kind (such as the case of Dagny Przybyszewska and Władysław Emeryk) is the fact that it was very carefully and self-consciously staged by its participants.

As observed by Hilda M. Brown, the suicide of Kleist may have been precipitated by many important factors: his lack of recognition as a writer, overwhelming financial troubles, the dire political situation and the terminal illness of his lover. Brown claims, however, that at the same time the poet 'may have believed that the deep significance the "Doppeltod" held for him and for Henriette would be clear to others and would send signals to his friends and family of the meaningfulness of the joint act'.[6] When put into this perspective, what happened on the banks of the Kleiner Wannsee can be seen as the staging of his last drama: a subversive manifesto. The death of Kleist and Vogel was meant to be perceived not as a irrational act of despair but as a meaningful conclusion to their romance. The innkeeper who offered them accommodation described the lovers as cheerful and effusive — they were clearly unapologetic about what they were intending to do. According to Brown, the implicit rejection of the petit-bourgeois values was met with considerable outrage:

> Even more liberal minds, schooled on the popularity of works such as Goethe's *Die Leiden des jungen Werther* (1774), could not condone the drastic step. The minute recording of the preparations taken by Kleist and Henriette Vogel at the inn near Wannsee, their festive, even joyous character (eyewitnesses spoke of the 'exaltation' and 'enthusiasm' exhibited by the pair), and the deliberation with which they carried out their plan, to say nothing of the impropriety of the relationship itself, constituted a scandal of the first magnitude.[7]

[6] Hilda M. Brown, 'Ripe Moments and False Climaxes: Thematic and Dramatic Configurations of the Theme of Death in Kleist's Works', in: Bernd Fischer (ed.), *A Companion to the Works of Heinrich von Kleist*, Woodbridge 2003, p. 211.

[7] Ibid., p. 210.

The *Liebestod* of Kleist and Vogel should be seen as the ultimate manifestation of the subversive aspect of romance. This element, while rarely recognised with equal clarity, is nevertheless always present in every intimate relationship true to the romantic ideal. It should be stressed, however, that romantic subversion is, in a way, always 'private'. The aim of the loving couple is, first and foremost, to isolate themselves from the world they have rejected: as a result, even the most extreme realisation of their project cannot influence the society at large. What can be achieved is, as in the case of Kleist and Vogel, a somewhat successful artistic statement, which in turn can be easily reinterpreted by the bourgeois philistines as a mere 'scandal of the first magnitude'. Thus — in full accordance with the Weberian thesis — what was supposed to be an act of mystical union slips abruptly into the mundane 'realm of the All-Too-Human'.

Giddens on intimacy: the reevaluation of romance

It has already been noted that the view of the role of intimacy in modern societies proposed by Anthony Giddens can be considered a further development of the Weberian perspective.[8] Giddens agrees with Weber's conclusion, according to which erotic passion is one of the modern-day ways to achieve a secular equivalent of redemption. In the era of radicalised modernity, hopes of self-emancipation are still located in the erotic sphere. As Giddens puts it:

> Sexuality has the enormous importance it does in modern civilisation because it is a point of contact with all that has been forgone for the technical security that day-to-day life has to offer. (…) Sexuality has become imprisoned within a search for selfidentity which sexual activity itself can only momentarily fulfil.[9]

[8] C. Lindholm, 'The Future of Love', in: V.C. de Munck (ed.), *Romantic Love and Sexual Behavior. Perspectives from the Social Sciences*, Westport-London 1998, p. 21.

[9] A. Giddens, *The Transformation of Intimacy. Sexuality, Love and Eroticism in Modern Societies*, Stanford 1992, p. 197.

This statement, while in accordance with Weber's thesis, goes far beyond it in its further implications. Whereas Weber had seen romantic love as a sort of private, mystical escape from reality, Giddens asserts that the new form of intimacy which emerged out of the aforementioned fixation with the erotic sphere is actively transforming modern societies in many ways.

Giddens claims that in the era of radicalised modernity, self-identity has become reflexive. Instead of being determined by gender, age or social status, it has become an open project. As a result it is now obligatory for every individual to find out who (s)he is. In this quest for self-identity we increasingly rely on various 'expert systems', such as academic knowledge, therapeutic discourse, media, popular guides, alternative medicine, esoteric knowledge, etc.

According to Giddens, our intimate relationships have also become reflexive. This transformation of intimacy took the shape of the new model of *confluent love*, taking the place of (now outdated) romance. This new concept of intimate relationships can be seen as a demythologised version of the romantic ideal. Whereas romantic love was perceived as a unique matching of two perfectly fitted souls — 'a marriage made in heaven' — confluent love is definitely a more mundane affair, based on a rational agreement between two partners engaged in a so-called 'pure relationship'.

Its exact shape is a matter of a contractual, freely negotiated agreement between free agents acting for the realisation of their own aims and desires. This agreement is always open to renegotiation. Thus, confluent love is not supposed to be everlasting or unlimited — the 'contract' can be terminated at any time, effective immediately. Moreover, any aspect of true dominance and involuntary — or voluntary — submission is strictly excluded. The chief condition of success for both parties is the full sincerity of negotiations and subsequent re-negotiations of the contract.[10]

The most important difference between both models of love — romantic and confluent — is the underlying idea of the loving subject. In the case of romance, the beloved human being has to be taken 'as is', with all of his or her unique qualities, both negative and positive. After the establishment of 'the unity of two loving souls', the beloved person is never

[10] Ibid., pp. 61–2.

supposed to change in any substantial way, for now (s)he is considered to be the cornerstone of the private universe that the lovers co-create. From this point of view, every attempt to find a new self-identity must be seen as a serious threat to the entire existential project of the romance. As the result, the lover is absolutely dependent on his beloved, or, to put it in terms borrowed by Giddens from modern therapeutic discourse, romantic love leads inevitably to neurotic co-dependence. In effect, it is absolutely irreconcilable with the idea of a pure relationship.[11]

Giddens argues that in the postmodern context the romantic idea of love is seen as a dangerous delusion, bound to be promptly abandoned. He admits that romance has had its uses in the proper time and place — mainly as a way to assert the autonomy of the individual in early-modern patriarchal cultures. Today, however, subjects have become reflexive: as a result, they simply no longer fit into the outdated modes of romance. The reflexive subject is constantly obliged to change and to expect the same from his loved ones. To maintain a pure relationship, the individual must place his trust precisely in that unlimited willingness to change. Instead of sanctifying love for love's sake, the confluent lover considers his bond with his significant other to be a sort of life insurance: according to Giddens the purpose of confluent love is to achieve *ontological security*.[12]

As an aside here, it should be noted that the crucial notion of ontological security is never clearly explained. Probably the most straightforward definition of this term offered by Giddens reads as follows:

> The phrase refers to the confidence that most human beings have in the continuity of their self-identity and in the constancy of the surrounding social and material environments of action. A sense of the reliability of persons and things, so central to the notion of trust, is basic to feelings of ontological security; hence the two are psychologically closely related. Ontological security has to do with 'being' or, in the terms of phenomenology, 'being-in-the-world.' But it is an emotional, rather than a cognitive, phenomenon, and it is rooted in the unconscious.[13]

[11] A. Giddens, C. Pierson, *Conversations with Anthony Giddens. Making Sense of Modernity*, Cambridge 1998, p. 136.

[12] Giddens, *Transformation*, p. 75.

[13] A. Giddens, *The Consequences of Modernity*, Cambridge 1996, p. 92.

As we can see, Giddens takes care to distinguish between ontological security and the more mundane 'trust'. In effect, the former term becomes somewhat vague: it might be understood as a kind of continuous feeling of emotional stability. Maintaining this state is supposed to be the main aim of a pure relationship; it must be noted, however, that there is no sure way to achieve this objective once and for all. This vagueness of a central notion may be seen as an important clue: ontological security should be treated more as an ideal — or a myth — influencing our actions than as a tangible reality.

It should be stressed that by placing emphasis on ontological security as the aim of a relationship, Giddens abandons the subversive aspect of loving. It is thus not surprising that he does not value the romantic idea of love very highly. Judged solely as a way to achieve ontological security, romance is clearly not the best option: it can offer some emotional stability, but at the cost of a potentially neurotic attachment to the beloved. Moreover, according to Giddens, romantic subversion is not a valid means of emancipation for modern, reflexive subjects.

Dissemination of the confluent idea of love is supposed to be a main agent of democratisation in the contemporary Western world. As Giddens puts it:

> The possibility of intimacy means the promise of democracy (…). The structural source of this promise is the emergence of the pure relationship, not only in the area of sexuality but also in those of parent-child relations, and other forms of kinship and friendship. We can envisage the development of an ethical framework for a democratic personal order, which in sexual relationships and other personal domains conforms to a model of confluent love.[14]

The recent transformation of intimacy is thus to be seen as a dissemination of the revolutionary idea. The idea of a pure relationship presumes the equality and autonomy of both partners: it offers both stability and emancipation at the same time. Instead of rejecting the world in a romantic manner, confluent lovers transform their societies from within. Therefore, although the romantic idea of love is surely a subversive one, modern society has no need for this subversive potential.

[14] Giddens, *Transformation*, p. 188.

Bourdieu on love and domination: the power of a loving dyad

Masculine Domination, by Pierre Bourdieu, is, first and foremost, a book about symbolic power and symbolic violence. It is organised around three main questions: how masculine domination is naturalised, why it is misrecognised by its subjects and how it is socially reproduced. Moreover, in an unexpected twist, the book contains perhaps the most compelling contemporary defence of the romantic idea of love.

Bourdieu asserts that the cognitive structures prevailing in both modern and traditional western societies are organised around sexual difference. The fact of being born a man or a woman locates a person within a cognitive grid in which masculinity is associated with all that is dominant. These cognitive structures are linked to the objective structure of society via the sexually differentiated dispositions (*habitus*) instilled into gender-differentiated bodies in the process of socialisation. Thus, the legitimisation of domination is achieved by the social construction of bodies. According to Bourdieu, the strength of what he calls the *masculine sociodicy* 'comes from the fact that it combines and condenses two operations: it legitimises a relationship of domination by embedding it in a biological nature that is itself a naturalised social construction'.[15] In effect, masculine domination remains largely misrecognised, because the social differentiation of sexual dispositions 'lead[s] the dominated to take the point of view of the dominant on the dominant and on themselves'.[16] This misrecognition can take the extreme form of *amor fati*: the desire to be dominated.

It is clear that, in the world of masculine domination described by Bourdieu, the very idea of a 'pure relationship' in the Giddensian sense is absolutely unworkable. One cannot create a balanced relationship just by asserting his will to do so, and no amount of therapeutic work can help individuals to change the habitus instilled into their bodies. The only possible breach in the rights of male domination can be made by love, pure and simple.

The curious 'Postscript on domination and love' contains an almost ecstatic apotheosis of the selflessness, reciprocity and trust achievable

[15] P. Bourdieu, *Masculine Domination*, Stanford 2001, p. 23.

[16] Ibid., p. 42.

only by two loving individuals. According to Bourdieu, 'pure love' has nothing to do with grim *amor fati*. The quasi-mythical unity of the loving dyad is the only possibility for the attainment of true symbolic autarky, allowing the lovers a constant recreation of the world, outside of history and outside the social structure. As Bourdieu puts it, the aura of mystery surrounding *pure love*:

> (…) is easy to understand from a strictly anthropological point of view: based on the suspension of the struggle for symbolic power that springs from the quest for recognition and the associated temptation to dominate, the mutual recognition by which each recognises himself or herself in another whom he or she recognises as another self and who also recognises him or her as such, can lead, in its perfect reflexivity, beyond the alternatives of egoism and altruism and even beyond the distinction between subject and object, to the state of fusion and communion, often evoked in metaphors close to those of mysticism, in which two beings can 'lose themselves in each other' without being lost.[17]

The quoted passage is rooted firmly in the Weberian tradition. Love is perceived here as a form of charismatic ritual in which the loving couple attains mystical unity. The focus is put entirely on the private sphere: 'pure love' has no political uses. It is an aim in itself. Nevertheless, in a certain way, it can offer us freedom in a private world of our own creation. In this sense, pure love is the ultimate subversion, because, as Bourdieu puts it, only the unified loving dyad has 'the power to rival successfully all the consecrations that are ordinarily asked of the institutions and rites of "Society", the secular substitute for God'.[18]

The labours of love

In addition to their many differences, the presented concepts of love share one common point: both Giddens and Bourdieu claim that love presumes hard work. The intimate relationship involves a continuous labour of reinvention in which the loving subjects must willingly par-

[17] Ibid., p. 111.

[18] Ibid. p. 112.

ticipate. This activity is to be seen as a sort of 'career', certainly not a hobby, and most certainly not as useless toil. It is tacitly assumed that the labour of love is in some way productive, since it may bring tangible rewards, some of which can be somehow accumulated. And, just like all work, love can be done well or poorly.

What kind of work is done in an intimate relationship? According to Giddens it is mostly therapeutic. To be a good partner, one should ceaselessly re-establish his personal boundaries, eradicating every trace of co-dependence. The focus is placed here on developing the self and maintaining intimate communication with the other, with the final reward being 'ontological security'.[19] The same cannot be said about Bourdieu's loving dyad, in which case the labour of love is mostly ritual and symbolic. Personal boundaries are not to be established but abolished, as the main focus rests on removing the very possibility of symbolic domination by attaining the unity of loving subjects. This, on the other hand, can be achieved only by the means of daily, private rituals in which the lovers freely and willingly participate.

It should be noted that these two different notions of love-work are the true cornerstones of both conceptions. It can be argued that the constant contribution of labour constitutes the backbone of love as such, and that love as a feeling is utterly inseparable from love as daily toil. The differences between the two concepts can thus be put in terms of two different sets of expectations.

The true confluent lover expects his partner, first and foremost, to offer him a 'fair deal'. His capacity for labour is seen as an asset separable from all of his unique qualities: in theory, at least, everyone can be a good partner/lover if (s)he is willing to work hard enough. In this aspect, the idea of a pure relationship is deeply linked to a certain conception of human rights described by C. B. Macpherson as possessive individualism. The main assumptions which comprise this political theory were summarised by him as follows:

1. What makes a man human is freedom from dependence on the wills of others.
2. Freedom from dependence on others means freedom from any relations with others except those relations which the individual enters voluntarily with a view to his own interest.

[19] Giddens, *Transformation*, p. 89.

3. The individual is essentially the proprietor of his own person and capacities, for which he owes nothing to society.[20]

The first two assumptions are crucial for understanding the idea of a pure relationship: it can be defined simply as a voluntary relationship of two parties, neither of which is dependent on the will of other, formed to achieve the common goal of ontological security. The third assumption is the key to understanding the concept of labour associated with confluent love. The individual is seen here as the proprietor of his own person and capacities, including the capacity for labour. As Macpherson puts it, according to possessive individualism:

4. Although the individual cannot alienate the whole of his property in his own person, he may alienate his capacity to labour.
5. Human society consists of a series of market relations.[21]

The idea of confluent love is based implicitly on these presumptions: the capacity of love-labour may and should be separated from the loving individual. On the one hand, the loving subject may have some predilections towards a specific individual and his unique traits; on the other hand, however, (s)he should not take those predilections into account when evaluating the relationship and its further prospects for achieving ontological security. What counts most is the capacity and the willingness to work, while the unique, charismatic traits of the beloved individual should be treated, at best, as some kind of extra romantic 'flavour'. One cannot measure and evaluate those intrinsic characteristics because they cannot be alienated from the person that one loves. As a result, the labour of confluent love must be seen as alienated: as such, it is not suited to be the basis for romance in any meaningful sense.

Therefore, from the romantic point of view, the pure relationship is still a market relationship masquerading as love. It should also be noted that, according to Giddens, it is virtually impossible to simultaneously sustain the kind of intimacy which forms the core of confluent

[20] C. B. Macpherson, *The Political Theory of Possessive Individualism*, Oxford-New York 1990, p. 263.

[21] Ibid., p. 264.

love and retain the true romantic 'feel' of associated emotions. Every step towards recognising the uniqueness of the love-object can lead to its sanctification, and consequently towards addiction and co-dependence, which in turn would put an end to the pure relationship.

The symbolic, ritual love-work of the unified dyad is aimed precisely towards the dealienation of love. The whole purpose of daily rituals in which the lovers participate is to become recognised as unique. Love is exchanged for love and nothing else: it is an aim in itself. It would be appropriate here to quote the well-known passage from Marx's *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*, in which the true lover is seen as a perfect example of a non-alienated human being:

> Let us assume man to be man, and his relation to the world to be a human one. Then love can only be exchanged for love, trust for trust, etc. If you wish to enjoy art you must be an artistically cultivated person; if you wish to influence other people you must be a person who really has a stimulating and encouraging effect upon others. Every one of your relations to man and to nature must be a specific expression, corresponding to the object of your will, of your real individual life. If you love without evoking love in return, i.e., if you are not able, by the manifestation of yourself as a loving person, to make yourself a beloved person, then your love is impotent and a misfortune.[22]

This might be seen as a perfect summarisation of the romantic concept of love: an interpersonal relation in which both sides manifest their true, non-alienated selves. It is worth noting that there is no notion of equality here. Whether your love will be fortunate or impotent depends on who you are; and furthermore, you cannot make yourself a beloved person just by putting some extra effort into it. It should be noted also that this kind of relationship is bound to be imbalanced, as one cannot establish clear rules of romantic exchange. As a result, the loving subjects can be considered equal only in a very abstract sense, in which 'love can only be exchanged for love, trust for trust', etc.

Romantic subversion should be treated not only as an irrational attempt to re-enchant the world. The ultimate aim of subversive microac-

[22] K. Marx, *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*, in: E. Fromm, *Marx's Concept of Man*, New York 1961, p. 167.

tivities, such as the everyday rituals described by Bourdieu, is to dealienate our most intimate social relations. As he puts it:

> These are so many features, brought to their highest degree, of the economy of symbolic exchanges, of which the supreme form is the gift of self and of one's body, a sacred object, excluded from commercial circulation, and which, because they presuppose and produce durable and non-instrumental relations, are diametrically opposed, as David Schneider has shown, to the exchanges of the labour market, temporary and strictly instrumental relations between indifferent, interchangeable agents – of which venal or mercenary love, a true contradiction in terms, represents the limiting case, universally recognised as sacrilegious.[23]

To sum up: the union of romantic lovers is a mystical one: they seek to achieve a certain 'state of grace' through daily rituals. The result is a barely communicable, ecstatic state of transcending the social world and its mundane necessities. By contrast, the way of the confluent lover is the path of a Puritan. He tries to reach salvation through everyday toil, but he is never fully sure if he is moving in the right direction. At the end it could easily be proven that ontological security, always elusive, is merely the projection of his desires.

Conclusion

According to Weber, the romantic idea of love is a modern substitute for religion. The same assessment is present in both perspectives analysed in the above paragraphs. It is most obvious in the case of Bourdieu, whose idea of pure love stems directly from a Weberian root. The notion of 'the unity of a loving dyad' is self-consciously proposed as a basis of a charismatic, quasi-religious ritual. The attainment of such a unity is clearly impossible: it is always being approached but never fully achieved. Nevertheless, the myth of two lovers continuously re-creating their own world cannot be easily dismissed, for it offers us the means to dealienate our social being.

[23] Bourdieu, *Masculine Domination*, pp. 110–11.

Giddens's concept of confluent love might be seen as an attempt to demythologise romance and cleanse it, once and for all, from all charismatic and religious connotations. This objective, however, is never fully attained. The vague idea of ontological security must be seen as a piece of a comforting mythology. Confluent love can thus be considered a substitute for religious commitment of the Puritan sort in which the elusive state of ontological security is a functional equivalent of salvation. It is also worth noting that the idea of a pure relationship would fit rather well into the petit-bourgeois milieu rejected by the Romantics: after all, Victorian families were nothing if not ontologically secure. It could be argued that the idea of confluent love is essentially an improvement on the Victorian template: Victorianism without the patriarchy and the repression of sexuality, in which the pureness of a relationship is seen solely as pureness of intention and fairness of the 'contract'.

It seems that in this era of radicalised modernity we are forced to choose between two kinds of involvement: a pure relationship of a market kind and the mystical bond of pure love. Both choices are linked with a different kind of everyday toil; therefore, they are mutually exclusive. Moreover, to make things worse, there is no easy way to choose between two concurrent mythologies: both choices seem rational and irrational at the same time. If we decide to follow Giddens, we should gain a valuable sense of direction in our romantic endeavours, but our search for ontological security could eventually lead us astray. If we follow Bourdieu, we may succeed in dealienating our intimate relations, but we may also find that our social world, permeated deeply by symbolic violence, has become even more insufferable than before.

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ON SEXUALITY, CARNALITY AND DESIRE: PHILOSOPHICAL REFLECTIONS ON THE FILM *THE MONK*

ABSTRACT

The eighteenth-century English writer Matthew Gregory Lewis wrote one of the most dramatic Gothic novels, *The Monk*; over 200 years later, a film of the same name appeared, based on the novel and directed by Dominik Moll. The film, a free adaptation of the book, presenting the story of the moral downfall of the monk Ambrosio, has inspired us to philosophical reflections on sexuality, carnality and physical desire. In the context of these issues we have attempted to analyse and interpret this cinematic work of art. The method we have adopted is based on a thorough discussion on the topics developed in the film and related issues. This method, while not pretending to scientific objectivity, enables us to outline an interesting field of research as well as to identify a number of theoretical problems and questions which remain open.
The formula we have adopted is to quote lines from the film The Monk which permit the analysis of selected issues related to sexuality, carnality and physical desire. Moreover, these quotes serve to order the text and enable the precise identification of interpretive trains of thought.

KEYWORDS

sexuality, carnality, desire, love, Greek tragedy, European culture

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Introduction

The eighteenth-century English writer Matthew Gregory Lewis wrote one of the most dramatic Gothic novels, *The Monk*; over 200 years later, a film of the same name appeared, based on the novel and directed by Dominik Moll. The film, a free adaptation of the book, presenting the story of the moral downfall of the monk Ambrosio, has inspired us to philosophical reflections on sexuality, carnality and physical desire. In the context of these issues we have attempted to analyse and interpret this cinematic work of art. The method we have adopted is based on a thorough discussion on the topics developed in the film and related issues. This method, while not pretending to scientific objectivity, enables us to outline an interesting field of research as well as to identify a number of theoretical problems and questions which remain open.

The formula we have adopted is to quote lines from the film *The Monk* which permit the analysis of selected issues related to sexuality, carnality and physical desire. Moreover, these quotes serve to order the text and enable the precise identification of interpretive trains of thought.

We will open the article here with a short summary of the plot, which is necessary in view of the method used. The film presents the

story of the monk Ambrosio, who as an infant is found within the walls of a monastery. He grows up in confinement, raised by monks; he acquires the reputation of a peaceable, God-fearing boy, devoted to the study of sacred books; he takes his monastic vows at a young age. Ambrosio's life passes in daily prayer and preaching, until the moment when the mysterious Valerio, whose face is concealed behind a mask, appears in the monastery. Meeting Valerio completely changes the life of the monk and the entire religious community. The boy turns out to be a woman – who proceeds to seduce Ambrosio. At the same time, the beautiful and pious Antonia appears in the monk's environment. Another significant female character is a young nun who is sentenced to death by starvation by her prioress for breaking her vows of chastity. Ambrosio, involved first in a relationship with Valerio, then seduces Antonia, who turns out to be his sister. After spending a night with Antonia, the monk murders his own mother. For committing this crime, Ambrosio is sentenced to death by his fellow monks.

'It all began when I saw her slim legs'

In what sense is *The Monk* about sex? It seems that, above all, it talks about the force that drives human lust or desire. Here, the physical dimension of sex is rather marginal. The sexual act is literally the culminating moment of the monk's story, but its real meaning is revealed later, in the sphere of values. The film thus sketches out a system of tensions that denote, symbolise, and present events on a meta-level. Throughout the story, we are confronted with two exclusively carnal encounters: the monk Ambrosio having sex first with the mysterious Valerio, then with his half-sister Antonia. However, carnality in the film remains concealed. The only moment of literally shown, unrestrained nudity is the presentation of a naked Ambrosio following intercourse with his sister. He is then completely exposed, embodying wild, primal eroticism, although the sexual act preceding this scene is not shown in the film. We see only elements of foreplay and the couple embracing after intercourse.

Perhaps the reason for this convention is the setting of the filmic action in a very prudish society and era. The best example of the prevailing austerity is that Antonia cannot meet her fiancé without the pres-

ence of a chaperone. The themes of sexuality, sex, and eroticism in this society are clearly suppressed, even smothered, and forced out of consciousness, something that builds up within the protagonists and ultimately leads to tragedy. Can we, then, interpret Ambrosio's attempt at twofold sexual satisfaction (with Valerio and Antonia) as a result of the excessive sublimation of heretofore hidden and stifled drives? The role of sublimation is, as we know, to bring relief through a transfer of emphasis and redirection of drives. It would seem that such a role in the life of the protagonist could, up to a certain point, be fulfilled by the inspired sermons he delivers. Repetition of the words of Scripture alone, however, does nothing to help him in a moment of weakness, failing to provide the desired relief. Hence the monk finally follows a different, sinful path, but as it turns out, flight through sex is not to be his salvation either. Ambrosio remains insatiable.

'Ambrosio became an example of diligence and faith to all the brothers'

The film's protagonist is considered by the brothers and the faithful to be the model of a virtuous servant of God. Moreover, Ambrosio himself regards himself as a religious authority, and considers himself a man absolutely pure and free from sin. The reason for this attitude is evidently to be found in his story. As an infant, he was abandoned by his mother and at the same time condemned to death. He was found by one of the monks, Father Miguel, who took him into the congregation. Miraculously rescued, the child thus came to the monastery, where he was surrounded by an aura of uncanniness consisting of his miraculous rescue and a birthmark on his arm in the shape of a hand. It seems that Ambrosio believed in his exceptional status, and that he had been anointed by God.

Such an interpretation of the story of the monk's origin seems to fit the convention of the 'hand of fate'.[1] This convention assumes that whatever happened had to happen, and that the series of events leading to the specific and tragic finale of the story had actually been formed

[1] J. Schmidt, *Słownik mitologii greckiej i rzymskiej* [Dictionary of Greek and Roman mythology], transl. B. Sęk, Katowice 1996, p. 102.

at the moment of Ambrosio's conception. A man's story is thus set in motion at birth and cannot be stopped; its course is determined by fate, regardless of how the man struggles with destiny, what he thinks about himself, or what decisions he makes. None of this matters in the face of fate. And it inevitably leads the man to tragedy.

'Will you pick me a rose to remember you by?'

One source of perplexity is the question of free will in the context of the problem under study, as well as the question of the exact part Ambrosio plays in entering into this sinful liaison. It seems that the monk spends very little time making conscious decisions. He is led into the developing situation somewhat involuntarily. His first conscious decision is an attempt to break with Valerio (i.e. the verbal command to turn women out of the monastery), the second his request for a sprig of enchanted myrtle. These events, however, are linked from the very beginning to the motif of a mysterious dream. In one scene, the monk talks about it to Antonia in the monastery garden. Ambrosio confides to her that he has a recurring dream in which he sees a woman concealed by a red cape. He observes her from afar, and then approaches her, but can never see her face. The dream breaks off whenever the monk nears the hooded figure. Ambrosio wonders about the meaning of this dream. Is the crux of it that the monk follows only what he has already dreamed – what has already happened? Can we, therefore, in the context of the Greek theory of fate, object here and speak of the hero's free will?

It seems that the only occasion when his free will operates is the admission to the monastery of the burned boy Valerio. Superficially, this is not a bad decision. There are no negative consequences at first; on Ambrosio's part, it is merely a noble act of mercy to a poor boy. The next example of a free decision on the part of the monk would appear to be the moment of revelation of the pregnant nun's secret. This time Ambrosio shows no mercy, and the proceedings are intended to emphasise his authority. The monk again appears to be clean and sinless, a moral authority with the right to decide about the consciences of others. What is more, Ambrosio is convinced that evil and sin do not concern him, that he is above all weakness. The young monk acts in these situations as a harsh judge.

However, in our opinion, the road to Ambrosio's downfall begins exactly at the moment he issues his moral judgments on other people. The beginning of this road is symbolised in a scene in the monastery garden, where the monk is praying and contemplating. One day a lone woman approaches him; she turns out to be the burned 'boy', Valerio. With a touch she relieves the monk's headache: the first physical contact between Ambrosio and Valerio. Their relationship develops up to the moment when the monk decides to break contact with her. But just as he wishes to end the relationship with Valerio, he is bitten by a centipede. In this scene, Valerio asks him to pluck a rose in memory of their final encounter. Here, the classic literary theme of temptation and punishment is revealed. Ambrosio reaches for a rose and is severely punished: he is bitten by a centipede, whose venom is highly toxic to humans. Ambrosio's fate is, at this point, symbolically sealed. The centipede appearing in a rose garden is thus similar to the biblical serpent that tempted Adam and Eve and led to their exile from Paradise.

This scene is very interesting in the context of myths operating in our culture. In the book *Love in the Western World*, Denis de Rougemont points to the myth of Tristan and Isolde as one of the foundations on which our Western European notions of sexuality, love between man and woman, and passion are built.[2] A significant moment within the myth is the beginning of the story of the two title characters, whose passionate relationship is initiated by the accidental ingestion of a love potion. From this perspective, the subsequent story of the lovers appears not as the result of completely free choices and conscious decisions, but as a possible effect of the introduction of poison into their bodies.[3] Thus the motif of a love story in which the main characters do

[2] We read in the work cited: 'A great European myth of adultery exists: the story of Tristan and Isolde […] It is like a great and simple picture, a kind of basic scheme of our most complex afflictions'. Compare Denis de Rougemont, *Miłość a świat kultury zachodniej* [*L'amour et l'occident*, or Love in the Western World], transl. L. Eustachiewicz, Warsaw 1999, p. 11.

[3] Rougemont explains the introduction of the magic love potion to the story of Tristan and Isolde thus: 'The real significance of passion is so frightening and so little conducive to sincere confession that not only those who experience it, who cannot fully realise it, but also those who want to paint it in all its astounding suddenness, feel compelled to use the misleading language of symbols'. Compare Rougemont, *Miłość a świat*, p. 35.

not act in a free, independent, or even conscious manner is strongly inscribed in our thinking about love, sex and passion.

'Instead of fearing punishment you should you want it with all your heart'

The decisions made by the monk Ambrosio from the moment the action begins (the first scene of the film, the moment the mysterious man is confessed by Ambrosio) seem based on pure intentions. However, they ultimately lead him to break all his eagerly professed rules and to experience a complete fall from the moral and religious heights upon which he has placed himself. Bad things begin to happen systematically around him. The first to sense this is his guardian, Father Miguel, who warns Ambrosio of impending evil. It seems that evil penetrates the walls of the monastery along with Ambrosio's subsequent decisions: when, against the will of the majority of the monks, he takes the burned 'boy' Valerio into the monastery, or when he reveals the secret of the pregnant nun, which leads to her death. However, these decisions of the monk seem based on legitimate, righteous premises. Moreover, they also fit in with the rules and strict religious atmosphere prevailing at that time: the burned Valerio is shown mercy, the nun who has committed the sin of breaking the vows of chastity and adultery receives a well-deserved punishment.[4] Here, however, an essential paradox is revealed in Ambrosio's behaviour. As a result of his decisions, theoretically correct and in accordance with the strict ecclesiastical code of the day, the nun was starved to death, while the 'boy' was admitted to the monastery – which, though it seems to be an expression of compassion and mercy on the part of the monk towards Valerio, leads to sinful behaviour on the part of both Valerio and the monk himself.

It should, of course, be pointed out that, from the contemporary viewer's vantage point, Ambrosio's decision in connection with the unfortunate nun appears to be an evident departure on the part of the monk from divine law. We also observe that Ambrosio acts here as

[4] For interesting comments on the relationship of Christianity to issues of sexuality and physicality, see Rougemont, *Mity o miłości* [*Les mythes de l'amour*, or Myths of love], transl. M. Żurowska, Warsaw 2002, pp. 9–14.

a man who believes that he has the right to judge others and forget grace and mercy, that is, the main principles of the Christian faith. In addition, we already note some inconsistency in his behaviour, since, if all his decisions were actually dictated by the religious severity of the time, they would be characterised by a uniformly unyielding attitude, which, however, clearly breaks down in connection with the adoption by the congregation of the burned Valerio. Therefore, it seems that the key to understanding the emerging contradictions in the actions of the monk lies precisely in his attitude to Valerio. This is extremely symbolic, because the burned boy in the mask turns out to be a woman, a temptress, perhaps even a messenger of Satan, and the personification of impure forces.

In this context, a number of important questions naturally appear: is Ambrosio's decision in regard to the 'boy' actually a conscious choice and the result of his free will? Or perhaps, at the time he makes decision, the monk is under the influence of impure forces hiding behind the mask, thus becoming a mere puppet in the hands of Satan?

'Satan only has as much power over me as I allow him'

This significant line is uttered at the beginning of the film, which states that Satan has only as much power over a man as is entrusted to him by the man himself. This quote is a motif in the monk's story; in fact, it serves as the opening of Ambrosio's tale (the scene in the confessional) and, in a paraphrased form, also serves to bring the action to a close (the scene in the desert). Are we inclined to agree with this statement?

Ambrosio seems to be subjected to Satan quickly and to a significant degree. The monk does not see the evil he encounters and cannot resist it. The evil around him is irrelevant and thus the monk retains the impression that he is doing the right thing. Perhaps this is because Ambrosio has lived for many years in seclusion, essentially until the moment when the masked Valerio knocks at the monastery gate.

All of the elements of the monk's story seem to refute the idea that the power of Satan over the soul of a man depends only on the man himself. The significant words about the limited power of Satan over man are spoken in the first scene of the film, when Ambrosio is con-

fessing an older man. The same sinner appears at the story's final moment, in the desert (which could be non-existence, purgatory or hell) and serves as the personification of the devil, whom the monk so blindly challenged with his proud declaration. Or vice versa: the words that fall in the confessional from the mouth of an Ambrosio convinced of his own moral superiority may contribute to the challenge posed in response by Satan himself. The demon seemingly puts the monk on trial, merely to prove that his words are meaningless. Man ultimately has no power over evil. Rather, it is evil that governs man and directs his fate.

'I want to hide from the world and to get closer to God'

In the context of the present analysis, the concept of purity, understood in a very strict and definite sense, is important. It means the total absence of contact with members of the opposite sex: in the case of the monk, with women. Ambrosio lives in an isolated monastery. He sees women only in the course of his sermons preached from the pulpit. But even early scenes showing him during Mass reveal the tension between him and women. Women stand and listen to the monk as if enchanted, in a state of tension, almost of mystical rapture. It is appropriate at this point to ask whether an element of sexual tension appears here. The impression Ambrosio makes on women is primarily religious. The sermons he gives are so wonderful and spiritual that they attract crowds. But is it possible in this context to ignore the element of sexuality? Antonia faints while listening to one of Ambrosio's sermons, which seems to be a literal, physical reaction to his presence. In fact, an assessment of someone's attractiveness is often made suddenly and in completely the same way: *I find this priest physically attractive*. Such a judgement is not immediately verbalised, but is rather an automatic reaction. The same thing happens when we see a handsome man walking with his wife in the street: the obvious accompanying context of marriage and family does not change the fact that we see him as a handsome man who draws our attention. How, then, does this happen? Extraintellectually, or preintellectually? Or on the basis of a primitive reflex that makes our body react before we manage to determine whether a man is 20, 30 or 40 years old, a priest, a father or single? This is biology, which

we continually deprecate and struggle to rationalise. Genes coding our behaviour and pheromones stimulating corresponding centres in the brain work on the biochemical level.[5]

'Let these thorns penetrate into my psyche, erasing any thoughts other than the thought of God'

Let us ask ourselves whether the profound piousness of Ambrosio, so strongly emphasised from the opening scene of the film, can be authentic in a situation which has been created, and continues to function, outside the context of evil? In other words: does the problem with his spirituality consist in the fact that from the very beginning it appears false and hypocritical? For it seems that knowledge of evil is indispensable for one to be able to consciously choose good. In addition, the austere religiosity embodied by the monk is suspicious and deficient from the beginning. Such religiosity and purity result only from complete ignorance of evil, and therefore from the impossibility of making a choice. Living in complete isolation, Ambrosio has no opportunity to commit sin and choose evil, because in his hermetic world, up to a certain point, temptation is completely lacking. In seventeenth-century Spain, monasteries were closed places. The only contact monks had with the faithful occurred during Holy Mass, confession or rare visits to the homes of the faithful. Monks lived on the margins of ordinary life. Ambrosio therefore exists in the monastery as in a closed Garden of Eden. But the story presented in the film seems to convince us that a return to that garden is not possible for us within the limits of earthly reality.

From this perspective, the confession scene opening the film, which, as has already been said, symbolises the moment of the intrusion of evil within the monastery walls, is of extreme importance. This moment seemingly disrupts the homogeneous character of the sacred place. The fact that evil pervades the monks' world seems to suggest that in truth the monastery was not completely secure or consistent: a place for

[5] Considerations concerning love as physical infatuation can be found in José Ortega y Gasset, *Szkice o miłości* [*Estudios sobre el amor,* or Studies on Love], transl. K. Kamyszew, Warsaw 1989.

evil and sin could be found within it. Until then the monastery had been a lifeless, vacant space where there was no possibility of choice. Here a significant role is played by Ambrosio, who is somehow predestined to commit sin and thus to throw the monastery open to evil. His impurity began with the commingling of the genes of his father and mother, since it was at that moment that the hand of fate appeared. Ambrosio might therefore be, for some time, isolated in a monastery, and thus free from sin, but eventually evil is bound to appear in his adult life.

In the context of fate, the the question of Ambrosio's free will also seems essential. The monk, in fact, often reveals his weak will and lack of ability to make independent decisions. From a wider perspective, this reveals the whole story of his life: Ambrosio was introduced to the monastery not as a young man with a vocation, but as an unconscious child. He was raised in a convent by his brethren, apart from the whole world, in order to decide in the end to accept ordination as a monk. Could a decision made in such circumstances be in any way conscious?

'God, I assure you, condemns every sin'

Still worthy of consideration is the question of the action of fate in the monk's life. In the final scene of the film, the dying Ambrosio seems to make a conscious decision: the choice of goodness and the way to God. How does this decision appear in the light of the action of fate, from which, as we know, there is no possibility of escape?

Here is the place for free will, which always appears at the moment when fate is fulfilled, that is, when everything that had to happen has come to fruition. The dying monk's choice of goodness takes place precisely at the point of resolution of the action. The completion of the story also marks the appearance of another ancient theme, the moment of purification, or *katharsis*.[6] This is when everything returns to the natural order and man is reconciled to the nature of reality. Everything falls back into its place, and man himself returns to God. All the cards are on the table, showing clearly

[6] The ancient concept of *katharsis* is addressed by G. Baudler in *Bóg i kobieta. Historia przemocy, seksualizmu i religii* [*Gott und Frau. Die Geschichte von Gewalt, Sexualität und Religion,* or God and woman: a history of violence, sexuality and religion], transl. A. Baniukiewicz, Łódź 1995, p. 73.

what was good and what was bad, who thought and acted rightly and what the truth was. This is the essence of Greek tragedy.

The concept of free will is also deeply rooted in the Christian tradition. In the film, in a monastic setting, we become acquainted with the story of a monk, a clergyman, and therefore we naturally expect in this story spirituality and moral purity, associated with the clarity of free choices. However, despite this specific setting (the monastery, the Mass, the monks, the praying faithful, etc.), such spirituality is not seen for some time. Moreover, nothing and no one stands in the way of the evil that appears: dishonesty, pride, impurity and even murder steal into the monastery. It appears, therefore, that evil had to appear, regardless of the gift of free will that man paradoxically received from God. Let us refer here to Georg Hegel, who wrote about Greek tragedy in a very interesting manner.[7] The philosopher argued that human decisions, unless taken in accordance with divine law, are doomed to failure. An illustration of this rule may be found in the story of King Creon, who waged an unsuccessful struggle with his fate, up to the moment when he had killed everyone around him and was left completely alone. Antigone and her brother had been killed, but nevertheless, as long as Creon failed to act in accordance with the plan of the gods, all his actions were doomed to failure. At the same time he was unable to abandon the path he followed, and so went on to complete self-destruction. It was not until he had reached the absolute bottom, when he could create no more destruction around him, than Creon understood that he was unable to change reality, in which nothing operated but divine law, which was always victorious in the end.

Is there also a place in the Christian world, then, for the actual operation of divine fate? What kind of Christian God would destroy everything? At this point we must stress that it is possible to come away with the impression that God, in this film, is completely silent. Of course, one can accept that everything that happened to the monk was necessary, and that God Himself directed it all. But basically God remains distant and transcendent with regard to the world of humans, in some respects like a watchmaker who winds up the mechanism, after which

[7] Compare G. W. F. Hegel, *Wykłady z filozofii dziejów* [*Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Geschichte,* or Lectures on the Philosophy of History], transl. A. Landman, J. Grabowski, Warsaw 1958, vol. II, p. 22.

the hands work completely by themselves. God appears moreover as the force driving the activities of Satan; Satan himself becomes a tool in his hands. It is God who has set Satan onto man, for man to ultimately be able to return to his Father. We return in this point to the existing thread: that the appearance of evil was necessary for Ambrosio to be able to truly choose God and goodness. Indeed, if someone lives in a closed world, isolated from reality, in, as it were, a 'bubble', then it is necessary to destroy the world for him to see the truth. By himself, he is not likely to want to turn his head towards the light – as is so well described by Plato in the metaphor of the cave.[8] There is always a need for someone to lead us out of this cave. In the film, this would be Satan: that is, the one who leads man, contrary to all appearances, in the direction of light, truth, and, paradoxically, God Himself. It is worth noting in this context that one of the names of Satan, Lucifer, means precisely 'the light-bringer'.[9]

'Love is like a poison'

In interpreting the behaviour of the monk from the point of view of e.g. psychology (especially the theories of Sigmund Freud), we might say that the power of the libido is, for human beings, the most important – in relation to which, of course, we agree that it can be sublimated. On the other hand, it is worth noting that although in the film all threads lead to the sexual act, which is simultaneously a symbol of the blackest sin (it is not enough that the protagonist sleeps with his sister; he also kills his mother!), it seems that sex is treated here only instrumentally. Presentation of the sexual act is accompanied by extensive symbolism, leading us directly to reflection on the already mentioned Freud[10] or

[8] See Plato, *Państwo* [The Republic], book VII, transl. W. Witwicki, Kęty 2003, pp. 220–50.

[9] W. Kopaliński, *Słownik mitów i tradycji kultury* [A dictionary of myths and cultural traditions], Cracow 1991, p. 613.

[10] Cf. S. Freud, *Objaśnianie marzeń sennych (Dzieła, t. II)* [*Die Traumdeutung,* or The interpretation of dreams (Works, Vol. II)], transl. R. Reszke, Warsaw 1996.

Carl Gustav Jung[11]; however, sex seems to be shown here above all as a tool for the destruction of man.

Passion and sex appear in the film as a tool differentiating femininity and masculinity. Moments of silence between the main characters in selected scenes of the film emphasise the subtlety of women and their strong tendency to close themselves off, arousing curiosity as well as desire on the part of men. The portrayal of woman as an absolutely pure entity also tends to inflame passion. The world depicted in the film is a romantic and sensual one, which is, however, also marked by a certain lack, one that causes passion and desire to grow ever stronger. When the moment of the theoretical satisfaction of desire appears, that is, the moment of the sexual act, the desire is left completely unextinguished. The libidinous force is so great that it cannot be silenced. This can be compared to the plucking of the first apple from the tree, which, however, fails to satisfy our longing. The result is that our desire to eat these apples grows greater and greater. Another expression seen in the film is the moment of insatiability, when Ambrosio moves from the realm of desire, from the sexual sphere, into the realm of crime, directed precisely by this mysterious force of passion, which is associated with complete lack of self-control.[12]

‘I give you my soul. I renounce all rights and blessings. I recognize only your power. I curse my Creator.’

We can imagine Ambrosio’s relationship with God, because the monk states, shows, and feels that this relationship exists. But God does not show Himself, nor is there any trace of His interference. One might

[11] Cf. C. G. Jung, *Archetypy i symbole. Pisma wybrane* [Archetypes and symbols. Selected writings], transl. J. Prokopiuk, Warsaw 1976, as well as *O naturze kobiety* [On the nature of women], transl. M. Starski, Poznań 1992.

[12] Zofia Rosińska, in her article ‘Sztuka: sycenie pragnień’ [Art: a brew of desires] writes in regard to this mechanism that ‘the physical act of sex can at best satisfy a sexual need, but it is not able to soothe the resulting desire. Moreover, desire finally quits the regions of sexuality and, still unsaturated, leads to crime and ends in the death of the subject-objects’. Cf. Z. Rosińska, ‘Sztuka: sycenie pragnień’ [in:] *Estetyka pragnień* [The aesthetics of desire], J. Brach-Czainy (ed.), Lublin 1988, p. 135.

think that the story of the monk is one of deeply religious, pious people who, paradoxically, live in a world without God. Even at the end of the film, Ambrosio is left completely alone, and we, the audience, are still left with this question about God, about His presence and grace. The film ends with the monk's whispered prayer, the words of the sixth Psalm: 'Have mercy upon me, Lord; for I am weak: O Lord, heal me; for my bones are vexed. My soul is also sore vexed […] Return, O Lord, deliver my soul: oh, save me for thy mercies' sake'.[13] Thus we assume that this may be the end of his journey, meaning forgiveness, rest and return to God. But we still do not see this God, or any sign that would indicate His presence. Neither do we see that Ambrosio has regained peace; neither God nor the nun to whose death he contributed come to him. No one says that he is forgiven.

It seems, therefore, that the spirituality symbolising the presence of the divine element appears only as a hope on which we can feed after watching the film's final frame. It is also typical of Greek tragedy that there is no literal moment of forgiveness. Someone dies and there is no longer any chance to forgive or to receive absolution. For when the action is brought to an end, one turns to reality, completely defeated. There is only this moment, as in the quoted psalm, when one has to surrender completely. That is why we said earlier that sex is used here only instrumentally, as a tool to destroy Ambrosio's consciousness and disturb his monastic, walled-in, hermetic world. Sex in itself is therefore neither bad nor good. Interestingly, at the very end, when our hero is in the desert, Satan holds him accountable not for having sex with women, but for his guilty conscience and for his killing of a human being.

In terms of the images which are shown to us in the film and simultaneously conform to what is characteristic of Western culture, adultery is a symbol of sin. This is the sin Ambrosio allows himself to commit with two women, Valerio and Antonia. Meanwhile, we assume that the chief sin represented in the film is false, empty spirituality; but its tangible, physical expression is, to be sure, sex. Without a doubt, the film thus certifies certain attitudes operating in our culture: even, for instance, the idea that sin is very strongly linked with sex, a connection

[13] Psalm 6: 3–5, in: Czesław Miłosz, *Księga Psalmów* [The Book of Psalms], Paris 1982, p. 61.

which is often made before anything else. Interestingly in this context, we sooner think of sex, rather than a lack of spirituality, as a sin, even in a place like a monastery![14] According to this line of thought, Ambrosio is held accountable not for a lack of pity or for the excessive religious strictness he shows in regard to the pregnant nun. The monk is judged and condemned only when he seduces Antonia and breaks his vows of chastity.

'Perhaps you are dreaming of the Holy Virgin'

In Western European culture, not only is an act of adultery considered a sin, but woman herself is also, in a certain sense, regarded as a symbol of sin. The biblical Eve tempts man and is the first to fall victim to Satan in Eden. We may therefore assume that the homogeneous, hermetic monastic world begins to disintegrate at the moment when a woman appears within it. First of all, the man who comes to the confessional in the opening scene of the film confesses a sin he has committed with a woman. In his story appears a young niece who stimulates his imagination and who has intercourse with the man. Next, the burned and masked Valerio appears in the monastery; she turns out to be an attractive girl. We also have the mysterious woman in a red coat from Ambrosio's dream, as well as Antonia and her mother.

All of these female characters play key roles in the story of the monk as presented in the film. They surround Ambrosio and become the causes of his actions, leading ultimately to the monk's complete downfall. We can ask, however, whether the impact of women on Ambrosio's life is completely clear and direct, or whether in truth their presence only contributes to his sinful choices – in other words, whether the sin is Ambrosio's having sex with Valerio and Antonio *per se*, or whether it can be identified with any contact he has with a woman whatsoever. In this context, though, is it at all possible to look at a wom-

[14] About this astonishing rule functioning in Western culture, Rougemont points out: 'In our time, sin means to the average Christian (if I may say so), mainly immorality, not a lack of a sense of spirituality; above all, the first example of immorality that comes to the mind of the average Christian is a violation of the 'laws' of sexual life. One sees here the weakest aspect of the West'. Cf. Rougemont, *Mity o miłości*, p. 212.

an asexually? Seemingly, the sin referred to here need not be a sexual act; it may be 'merely' impure thought, emotional involvement, or addiction to women. The presence of women disturbs the calm and tranquility within the monastery walls and deprives Ambrosio of his inner convictions regarding his own moral purity and integrity. Contact with a woman, therefore, is in no way neutral. Indeed, this the monk's story seems to suggest this to us from the very first moment: the man in the confessional talks about his niece, about her comely calf in its stocking, the sight of which suffices to entice him to sinful thoughts and deeds. This is a Gombrowiczian theme in the story of the monk Ambrosio.[15]

'And the eyes of them both were opened, and they knew that they were naked'[16]

In the context of the temptation posed by the female body and its nudity, it is worth recalling Giorgio Agamben's essay on the latter theme. There we find a fragment in which the author cites an eleventh-century bas-relief depicting the expulsion of Adam and Eve from Eden, as well as God changing their clothing, from fig leaves to leather.[17] The woman, however, does not want to conceal her body by donning the leather covering. As Agamben writes, she defends herself in this way against expulsion from Paradise. Adam dresses himself without protest and waits for the God-defying woman. Eve, defending herself against the divine order, has crossed her legs and covered her face by pulling her dress over her head. It seems that Eve, as opposed to Adam, wishes to remain naked and uninhibited. This nudity, however natural for her as

[15] 'Calf' is one of the key words that appear in Witold Gombrowicz's novel *Ferdydurke*. 'Calf' is connected mainly with the world of the Młodziacy [Youngbloods], whose leader is the liberated schoolgirl Zuta, also a symbol of modernity. 'Calf' also indicates youth, vitality, openness, and above all freedom of morals and sexual promiscuity. See Witold Gombrowicz, *Ferdydurke*, Cracow 2003.

[16] Bible, *Genesis 3:7,* in: *Biblia Tysiąclecia: Pismo Święte Starego i Nowego Testamentu* [The Millennium Bible: The Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testament], Poznań 2003.

[17] G. Agamben, *Nagość* [Nudity], transl. K. Żaboklicki, Warsaw 2010, pp. 71–6.

a woman, becomes fatal to man. The nudity of a woman awakens his desire, and desire is a straight road to sin.

Agamben subjected this matter of sinful nudity to an interesting analysis. When Adam and Eve were still in Paradise, they wore no clothing, but even so, they were not naked, but covered in the grace of God. It was God himself who clothed them in this grace, and therefore there is no mention of nudity until the moment of commission of the original sin. Thus people became naked when they were stripped of the grace of God as a result of Eve's violation of the sole divine prohibition. From this perspective, nudity in the Judeo-Christian culture is closely linked to sin. But one thing remains a mystery: why did Eve want so badly to remain naked after the expulsion from paradise? This instance very clearly explains the difference between feminine and masculine nature. Adam donned clothing without protest, hiding his nakedness from the world; in contrast, Eve refused to obey. Agamben writes about Eve, as depicted in the bas-relief, a 'slender, silvery figure, desperately defending herself against the donning of the garment, becomes an extraordinary symbol of femininity, making woman the vigilant guardian of paradisiacal nudity'.[18] Eve, therefore, was not ashamed of nudity; rather, it emanated from her. Why? Perhaps because as the first woman she already knew what an impact an exposed female body has on a man. In addition, nudity is the natural state of man, in which he is dominated by drives associated with the sphere of libido, unrestricted by any cultural or social norms or prohibitions. Eve, therefore, wanted to remain free and unfettered, even if it was God who first decided to curb this aspect of human nature.

How, then, is the difference between man and woman represented in the context of the biblical story? Symbolically – for in our culture, it is man who uses reason, while woman remains a sensual entity. The man accepted clothing, as instructed by God, because according to the laws of reason, a human being owes obedience to God. The woman, on the other hand, from the beginning did not want to be subject to the divine commandments and wanted to return to her natural state, that is, to a state of nudity – but the nudity that existed prior to sin. Thus, we can assume that the biblical Eve, in fact, despite her flight into nudity, evaded sin, for he who wears clothing can sin, while he who has none

[18] Ibid., p. 72.

is not yet capable of sin. The conclusion is that as long as a human being chooses not to cover his body, there is no potential for sin, because the category of sin does not yet exist.

On the subject of nudity in the context of this film, we see it only after Ambrosio's sin of breaking the vows of chastity. The monk has intercourse with his own sister, and this is the significant moment of consummation of his whole story. When Ambrosio is reaching the end of his sinful road, nudity is revealed. Earlier, we see no nudity, as everyone is fully clothed: nuns, monks, women, the faithful; even Valerio, who tempts Ambrosio, is clothed, her face hidden by a mask. Only at the moment of two terrible crimes (incest and matricide) does nudity appear. We see the monk naked and exposed, along with the truth about his life, the true meaning of which is revealed.

'Why must Ambrosio be so cruel to me?'

Let us now consider the question of the motives directing the actions of the main characters. An interesting example is the character Valerio. At some point, the woman learns that she is not the monk's real object of desire, but she is still subject to him. How can we explain the motives for her conduct? There is no question of any kind of revenge, or jealousy of the other woman. Perhaps the reason for her attitude is that Valerio is essentially the embodiment of the evil force forming part of the fate that operates throughout Ambrosio's story. As has already been mentioned, however, Valerio also embodies femininity, in which form evil entered the monastery. Satan takes the form of a woman precisely to make it easier to overcome physical and psychological distance and take possession of Ambrosio's body and soul. Valerio offers the monk her help in the conquest of Antonia and does not feel jealous of the other woman. It seems that this is only possible because femininity is not Valerio's true nature, but only diabolical nature clothed in a robe of femininity. Valerio's behaviour also seems quite comprehensible in the context of the power she acquires over the monk. The woman knows exactly what he is doing and even directs his activities, giving him the sprig of myrtle which enables him to conquer Antonia.

Moreover, Valerio knows where her actions will lead Ambrosio. The woman is aware that the monk is discarding her because he wants

another. Therefore she seems to say: go to her, because I know where it will lead you. Valerio knows that total annihilation awaits Ambrosio, and that only afterwards can the return to God take place. The monk offers her sex, but it is she who refuses, and does so because he really loves another woman, whereas Valerio will never be the object of his love. And women are not jealous about sex, but about love, about a man's feelings. True jealousy is thus jealousy about feelings.[19] The monk has never loved Valerio; perhaps he was merely fascinated when the prospect of sexual intercourse opened up in front of him. Thus it seems that Valerio has manipulated him from the very beginning. She exploited him, used him, even raped him in the delirious scene of intercourse following the bite of the centipede. But didn't she, in this way, save his life? After all, she sucked the deadly venom from his finger and thus at that moment rescued him; this may be the main reason that Ambrosio ultimately has mercy on her. Mercy, however, is the only feeling on the monk's part that Valerio can count on.

'Save me. The meaning of my life is your love'

Love. In this story, are we dealing with love at all? Of God? Of women? Of a mother? Of a child? Of another human being? Is there love here in the Christian sense, or, perhaps, only in a purely sexual sense, between a man and a woman?

It seems that there is love between the betrothed couple: Antonia and the rich young man applying for her hand. One significant scene, in the context of the feelings linking them, is the one in which the couple takes a boat ride on a beautiful sunny day. However, it seems that everything in this scene is artificially arranged. We have the necessary ingredients: the woman, the man, a pleasant afternoon on the boat, an umbrella, a love song. But the whole scene, apparently saturated with the innocent love of two young people, appears to be nothing more than a convention. This is a courtly, picturesque love: young people in a boat, flirting with each other, in the indispensible company of a chaperone. Hence this topic seems to be a mere ironic treatment, not an ex-

[19] I. Primoratz, *Filozofia seksu* [The philosophy of sex], transl. J. Klimczyk, Warsaw 2012, pp. 123–5.

ample of true love between two people. Only moments earlier the drama between the main characters had been played out, and meanwhile the young man serenades his beloved.

Perhaps love appears in the story of the pregnant nun. We can only guess that her child was the fruit of love, since it could also have been conceived under the influence of a momentary desire. Does the young girl really love her unborn child? It seems that here we cannot yet speak of true love. The child is still unborn, and the nun is very young, and like a frightened child. Thrown into the dungeon, she screams that she is pregnant and that they are killing her child, but really it is she who is starved to death in the cell. Is she really thinking at that moment about the child? Certainly she is, but the child is not yet the object of her love.

However, in speaking of the love of a mother for a child, we cannot overlook Antonia, Ambrosio and their mother. In the case of the monk, his mother cannot love him because she does not actually have him with her, but only an idealised image of him, which, in this context, seems to be the real object of her affection. Yet another sad love story is associated with the figure of the mother of the two main characters: her youthful misalliance ruined her husband's happiness, and, as it seems, he returned the favour; she was left alone, passive and resigned. This love, then, bore no positive fruit. Even their child, Ambrosio, was abandoned and condemned to death. Perhaps that is why the mother warns her daughter against feelings of love.

Another kind of love still resounds in the background: love of God. Antonia speaks of her love for Him, sings psalms, and is fascinated by the monk because, thanks to him, she experiences a feeling of closeness to God. The mediation of the monk clearly indicates, however, that the feeling is not, in fact, pure love of God, because the accent is shifted to the stimulus represented by her contact with Ambrosio. The proximity of the monk seems more important than her feeling for God in itself.

One overall conclusion forces itself on us: love is always present in conventions: courtly love, vague love for God, sexual relations (i.e. carnal love), or the satisfaction of desire. This means that in a world in which there ought, theoretically, to be love – between a man and a woman, between a mother and child, between a human being and God – we do not find it anywhere. The clearest thread seems to be the mother's love for Antonia, but in the end it turns out that her daughter

does not have an easy life with her, because the mother is sick, passive, and shut away in her sorrow. She loves the one who is absent rather than the one who is at her side. Perhaps this display of love, or the lack of it, reveals, in the most painful fashion, our conception of it. We seek it, desire it, and talk about it, but ultimately, perhaps, we are incapable of love.

So, then, is there really no hope for any pure and lasting feeling in the world of human beings? In reality, is everything aimed only at sex? Are all our activities directed towards sexual fulfilment? What we call love seems to be a convention and a kind of game: we sigh to each other, we win one another's love, we spend romantic afternoons on a boat, we write love letters, we visit our mothers, simply in order to play the game – all in the context of the unceasing operation of fate. Interestingly, though, this game, which we play throughout our whole lives, is often not even pleasurable. There is no place in it for pleasure; what is more, our participation is paid for with sin and suffering. All this to attain physical fulfillment or sex itself. This is a mockery of the pleasure which, as it turns out, is inaccessible to mankind. Nor is there any such thing as healthy carnality, since nudity is always ultimately an expression of sin.

In this context, we can wonder whether Ambrosio feels pleasure lying in bed with Antonia after sex. The answer, however, leaves no doubt: momentary physical pleasure is immediately paid for with suffering, in the form of the tragedy played out between mother and son. Specific sins are involved here: matricide and the motif of an incestuous relationship with his sister. We don't see the moment of erotic fulfillment. The same is true in the case of the film's first act of physical intimacy. The sexual relations between Ambrosio and Valerio are shown in snatches, in a kind of delirium. Afterwards, Ambrosio even thinks that all of this intimacy was only a dream. The sexual act is, in this case, unconscious. The monk's lack of awareness during intercourse is the result of the centipede's fatal bite, after which Valerio saves him by sucking out the venom. The first instance of intercourse therefore represents Valerio's assumption of twofold control over Ambrosio: first, the girl saves his life, second, she exploits him sexually. Ambrosio thus becomes doubly dependent on the demonic woman.

In our analysis of love and its role in Ambrosio's story, an unusually important role is played by the very place where the monk's fate

unfolds. Seventeenth-century Spain was in fact a country marked by an unusual degree of strictness and even fundamentalism in matters of sexuality. Dating back to the time of Ferdinand II and Isabella (Los Reyes Catolicos), Spain had been one of the most Catholic countries in Europe. Those rulers completed the long process, begun in the seventh century, of the Spanish *Reconquista*, or reconquest of land from the Jews and Moors, by introducing very strict and fundamentalist Catholicism. It might be claimed, therefore, that the fates of the monk, Antonia and Valerio, unfolding in the atmosphere of Spanish severity, do not fit the realities of the modern world.

Paradoxically, however, it turns out that in reference to our hedonistic, liberal and pluralistic modern times, the fates of the characters are surprisingly up to date. Let us look for a moment at another contemporary film, directed by Steve McQueen, entitled *Shame*. The story takes place in contemporary New York. Sex is in the forefront of the story of the main character, a lonely man named Brandon Sullivan; he is totally addicted to it. Sex dominates him and ultimately destroys him. Why does this happen? Why does constant desire destroy man, both in seventeenth-century Spain and in a great contemporary metropolis? Here we reach the conclusion that times change, but people remain the same. *Shame* is in fact a completely different story, depicting the fate of a sex addict struggling with unpleasant experiences from childhood. It is the story of his downfall, because Brandon is so entangled in his addiction that even when he tries to really fall in love, he is unable to complete the sex act: his body refuses to obey him. Full of lust and regret, he loses himself in the big city, landing in a gay bar and having sex on the street with women he meets accidentally. Ultimately, however, we see him alone, crying in the street from a feeling of complete helplessness. Desire destroys him completely.

‘Satan has more power over us than we allow him’

In *The Monk*, there are attempts to convince the audience that Satan has only as much power over us as we ourselves allow him. This would mean that sex destroys us only to the extent to which we value it, for whatever we ascribe great importance to inevitably degrades, weakens and destroys us. Ambrosio sinned because he acknowledged sex as a sin. If he

had not considered physical intimacy a sin, it is likely he would have never committed it and would not have experienced a complete downfall. Ambrosio's driving force, however, was the urge to satisfy his desire.

The question, then, is: what, when we are creating a value system, do we place on the other side? Thus we have sex, but what, then, is the point of reference? In the case of Ambrosio, it was religious values and, as an absolute priority, the value of purity. The monk was taught as a child to strive for the ideal of purity, and therefore, in breaking the rules, his fall was all the greater. Had he lived closer to what he really was, a man of flesh and blood subject to emotion and desire, he would not have fallen at all. It seems that a key issue for our culture appears here: to accept our condition before we cover up our flesh. But it can be done? It seems that it cannot, because none of us is in paradise any longer; we have left it behind; we have sinned. We have managed to tame life outside paradise in various ways (films in the style of *Fifty Shades of Grey*, love stories about vampires, etc.) but the problem still exists, and it seems insurmountable. One can, for example, give up sex, but this is an absurdity that leads us nowhere. Lack of sex fails to liberate us; rather, it is a struggle against our own human nature. Freud suggested here the theory of sublimation of drives as one of the possible solutions. Thus, in reference to our film, the example of Antonia and her love of God might be a form of Freudian sublimation. But we might continue to ask: where does all this sublimation ultimately lead us? To eccentricity? To inevitable submissiveness?

'We're always searching to discover the meaning of things. But there comes a point when everything becomes clear'.

Let us return finally to the scene which, in the final minutes of the film, takes place in the desert. There is nothing there. Reality, revealed in all its truth, is absolutely nothing: a desert, nonexistence, nullity. But there is one thing: hope. The end of the story seems, then, to leave us with the hope that God will forgive Ambrosio. The audience's task is to reflect on whether he receives this forgiveness or not. But even assuming a positive conclusion and thus assuming that Ambrosio dedicates his life to Antonia and that God forgives him, what are we left with regarding the question of sexuality?

It seems that in the story of Ambrosio there is no room for a positive approach to the problem of human sexuality. It is likewise impossible, however, to reject it, and attempts to block out or deny sexuality are doomed to failure. Sexuality is the foundation of our human condition and there is no way to return to childhood. And when we enter the realm of puberty, the sexual sphere, we become naked, and remain so for life. Studies on the human psyche have shown that shame is the first experience of the awakening of human consciousness. We wake up to consciousness, to the world, through being ashamed. Along with original sin was born the consciousness of Adam and Eve, and with it, shame.

The Monk does not show us, in the last analysis, what is important in life. All the values it refers to are deconstructed and discredited, including love itself. Ambrosio's story leaves us with a sense of defeat and the consciousness that most of the things that happen around us depend on us only to a small extent. Consequently, we are faced with the need to come to terms with naked reality.[20] Of course, the story presented in the film offers us a partial justification, saying that our bad decisions are often dictated by a higher force, fate, over which man has no control. However, this also means that we only seem to make decisions, because they relate to things that are independent of us. And here, perhaps, lies the real and enduring effect of fate, even if nowadays we do not accept its real presence.

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[20] Cf. G. W. F. Hegel: 'The movement in which the unfeeling heart softens and is elevated to the level of generality is identical with the movement of consciousness which has confessed to what it is. The wounds of the spirit heal and leave no scars behind. The act is not everlasting; the spirit withdraws it back to itself; and that which disappears directly is the individuality contained in the deed, whether as intention or as existing negativity and boundaries of action'. In: Hegel, *Fenomenologia ducha* [*Phänomenologie des Geistes*, or The Phenomenology of Spirit], transl. A. Landman, vol. I–II, Warszawa 1963–5, p. 274.

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SCULPTURAL OBJECT OF DESIRE: EROTICISM IN MICHEL LEIRIS'S *AURORA*[1]

ABSTRACT

The article deals with sculptural metaphors presented in Leiris's *Aurora* in relation to eroticism. Aurora is the name of the the surrealist novel's central female figure, who appears in the stories of all the different male characters. All of the men – the narrator and subsequent characters – are searching for a point of stabilisation of their own subjectivities, which are losing their integrity and cohesion. The phantasm of Aurora, a Medusa-like woman, is the only entity that guarantees petrification, and therefore can stabilise subjectivity.
Eroticism connected to sculptural forms and Aurora's ability to be at once a petrifying Medusa and an animating force of nature shows the paradoxical condition of the language and the illusory nature of any male character's hopes for constructing stable subjectivity.

KEYWORDS

Sculpture, subjectivity, petrification, Medusa, surrealism

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In one of René Magritte's drawings, *Le Viol* (The Rape), used as an illustration for André Breton's *Qu'est-ce que le Surréalisme?* from 1934, we find one of the most shocking images of a female body in the history of art. Magritte replaced a female face with a torso; breasts take the place of the eyes, the navel replaced the nose, and genitals are situated where the mouth should be. This transformation has a particular significance: the body has not been converted into a different object; rather, the woman has been transformed into herself. The transformation takes place within the scope of her own body parts. The key to such a metamorphosis is internal exchange, not conversion into a different, external object. Surrealist defragmentation of the female body, criticised by some feminists as a reproduction of patriarchal sexualisation of women, gains another interpretation in Magritte's drawing as an illustration for Breton's thesis on surrealist assumptions. Breton defined surrealism as a means of liberation from Western rationalism and rebutted charges of surrealist indifference to social issues. Surrealist shock tactics were meant to disrupt conventional bourgeois morality and to reveal its hypocrisy as the origin of repression and alienation. Magritte's controversial drawing can be read as a visual representation of Breton's thesis. According to Robin Adèle Greeley:

> *Le Viol* is meant as an immediate and provocative answer to the question *Qu'est-ce que le Surrealisme*? It offers us a definition of Surrealism as a representation of the female face-body which, although forced into speechlessness, seems far from being powerless; rather, she threatens Medusa-like to break those enforced bonds at any moment and unleash the full power of her sexuality. The body as it is presented here is not a passive body; through it, sexuality and speech are presented as territories of competition, the control of which is under constant negotiation.[2]

The comparison of sightless eyes from the image and a Medusa-like glance seems non-accidental here. An ostensibly static and passive body has the power to control the viewer through its sexuality, which goes beyond defined concepts of femininity, and through such a transgression becomes something both problematic and dangerous.

[2] R. A. Greeley, 'Image, Text and the Female Body: René Magritte and the Surrealist Publications', *Oxford Art Journal* 1992/2, p. 50.

Michel Leiris, whose work will be considered in this article, had his own answer to Breton's question, formulated in an aesthetic, moral, and scientific system.[3] The whole of Leiris's life was organised around surrealist directives, although Breton cited only five years (between 1924 and 1929) of Leiris's surrealist activity. During this time, Leiris wrote *Aurora*, merely one of his surrealist novels,[4] which deals with the problem of a fragmented body and leads to the recognition of the impossible integration.

While combining such a thesis about disintegrated subjectivity with the role of a Medusa-like glance and metaphors of petrification and sculpturalisation, I will interpret *Aurora* as a novel about the impossible desire to integrate the self with the figure of a Medusa-like woman and with the sculptural petrification of reality.

Indéchiffrable énigme

'Aurora belongs to those works of fiction, which avoid all forms of stability and relate only to motion, expressing every one of its multifarious aspects, morbid as well as vigorous. The narrator's statements imply rejection not only of what is fixed but of all that is foreseeable'.[5] The whole story begins with the narrator's confession, in which he offers some remarks on his own condition, that of experiencing his body as spectral and dispersed elements:

> My penis felt diluted, as if reduced to water or to the powder of decaying bones. I stood upright, my legs like two monoliths swaying in the middle of

[3] S. Hand, *Michel Leiris: Writing the Self,* New York 2004, p. 28.

[4] Although written in 1929, *Aurora* was not published until 1946 because of Leiris's doubts about the naivety of the text. In his criticism of the novel, Leiris emphasised the temporal and experiential gap separating the later writer from his much younger and more naïve self. Moreover, Leiris also saw in *Aurora* a prediction of the horrors of Nazism, and his text only emphasises the powerlessness of art. See A. Warby, 'Introduction: The Dawning of Aurora' [in:] M. Leiris, *Aurora*, transl. A. Warby, London 2013, p. 8.

[5] R. Riese Hubert, 'Aurora: Adventure in Word and Image', *SubStance*, Vol. 4, No. 11/12 (1975), p. 74.

> the desert and my arms swinging loosely like the strings of a whip, hanging corpses, or two windmills (A 25).[6]

By moving to a different room, the man would bring about an imaginary rearrangement and reintegration of the organs in the body. The surrounding space manifests properties similar to the man himself:

> The shapes revealed their peaks and troughs like mountain-sides, and pulsated like animal bodies, swathed in dark skin. This muddle of contours and irregular-shaped humps and ridges was no different from a stormy night and even exuded a sort of aroma like a sunken lane or a wet road (A 30).

In such a world, all individual elements are mixed together, losing their integrity and cohesion in exactly the same way as the textual subject. At the end of the preface, after the narrator confesses his condition, the name Aurora is pronounced for the first time and he starts his journey. His sea voyage ends with a feeling of a slow and partial transformation of an elbow, which 'was no longer exactly like the rest of the body, but had taken on a slightly rough appearance like that of granite' (A 39). The day after his adventure, the man awakes with a mineral taste in his mouth. The name Aurora initiated the body transformation and has launched further visionary journeys.

Aurora as a key word in Leiris's novel is taken in part from Nerval; it is the schizophrenic conjunction of Aurélia and Pandora, which designates an 'insoluble enigma'[7]. In his next journey, the narrator refers to this énigme when he sees Aurora with a man who 'goes to hunt animal furs in icy regions' (A 49). The hunter meets the woman, who is lighter' and a 'coincidence'; 'an absence of contradiction' and 'link between contradictory terms' (A 49). The woman, whose name is Aurora, is the centre of the universe, a figure that both annihilates and reconciles contradiction. She represents the essence and the absolute. Her rendezvous with the hunter ends with the act of turning the man into stone – and not only him, but the entire space changes into a motionless landscape of metallic hardness, strewn with broken statues. 'The geometric sky reflected innumerable polyhedra of which only the sharpest

6 M. Leiris, *Aurora*, transl. A. Warby, London 2013.

7 S. Hand, *Michel Leiris: Writing the Self,* New York 2004, p. 32.

bones were visible, pale points as if made of chalk' (A 64). After the act of petrification of the man and the land:

> Aurora's hair became a mass of swirling flames and in a flash the most remote comets hastened to add their incandescent hair to the white heat of this furnace, while the pyramid lost its shape and was suddenly of earth. A moment later it was but a monstrous volcano and, in a flow of lava which would reduce the entire desert to ashes more effectively than the sun, it spat out the mutilated entrails and bits of chain from corpses of those who had been its prisoners (A 65).

The first, partial mineralisation of the narrator's body has subsequently expanded until the final metamorphosis of the space into a landscape of decay.

Mineralisation (as the first step of turning into stone) can be interpreted first as a defensive reaction against the *desubstantialisation and dissolution of the body and reality. By choosing petrification and stabilisation, the narrator seeks a solution for his sense of blurring contours of reality. In his Manhood (L'Age d'homme*), Leiris confesses that he always longed for some kind of armor to achieve in an external *persona* the same idea of rigidity he was pursuing poetically.[8] The presence of Aurora – her glance – promises the rigidity of the transformation of living flesh into cold, sharp stone. In this sense of Aurora's Medusa-like glance, she is the figure of a demonic sculptor who succeeds in arresting both the man and the space in the form of stone. Aurora's petrifying glance also has the power of annihilating opposition between architectural (pyramids) and organic petrification, and fluidification and decomposition.

> In Aurora, these elements are elevated to the level of an obsessional order: the angular presence of labyrinths, palaces, icebergs, museums, stones, diamonds, pyramids, cones, cathedrals and temples, in which people become cold, nude and rigid, or transformed into mummies or statues, is constantly obscured by *des ramifications végétales*, or traversed and transformed by floods, seas, rivers, alcohol, birds, clouds and honey.[9]

[8] M. Leiris, *Manhood*, transl. R. Howard, New York, North Point, 1984, p. 127.

[9] Hand, *Leiris,* p. 35.

According to Susan R. Bowers, the figure of Medusa in modern poetry can be interpreted as a 'rebellion against the stereotype of the creative woman as *unfeminine*'.[10] Bowers examines, for example, the poetry of Louise Bogan (from the 1920s), who created Medusa both as a 'divine sculptor' and 'enigmatic, powerful mother'.[11] Leiris's concept is close to this kind of rebellion against stereotyping (Aurora is the promise of integration of the male hero's subjectivity), but also reproduces the demonic image of a woman who threatens male activity. However, if the Medusa complex represents the extreme fear that, by denying the freely organised world with all its connections and internal colorations, the Other's look might reduce the subject permanently to a hard stone-like object,[12] then in Leiris's novel the complex is rather defined as a fear of the subject's own look that might reduce him to a fluid and unstable construction, dissolved in a liquid reality.

Sculptural eroticism

The antinomies of petrification and fluidification embodied in the figure of Aurora are continued in the story of Damocles Siriel. The young man in the third part of the novel explores the ruins of the Temple of Damocles and finds the journal of Damocles Siriel. Damocles was a tyrant, sexually excited by petrification. He altered the temple dedicated to Femininity to represent his own taste for cold, angular constellations, and, threatened by his outraged subjects, flooded it.[13] In his journal, Siriel explains that:

> For me life has always been synonymous with everything soft, lukewarm and undefined. Linking only the intangible, that which is no part of life, I arbitrarily identified all that is cold, hard or geometric with this constant, and it is for this reason that I love the angular lines the eye casts into sky to apprehend the constellations, the mysteriously premeditated order of a monument and finally the ground itself, the most perfect plane locus of all figures (A 72).

[10] Susan R. Bowers, *Medusa and the Female Gaze*, NWSA Journal, Vol. 2, No. 2 (Spring, 1990), p. 231.

[11] Ibid. p. 232.

[12] Ibid., p. 220.

[13] Hand, *Leiris*, p. 47.

Damocles Siriel's voice resounds like the autobiographical self from *Manhood*. Both seek some kind of monumentalisation of the ego by focussing on rigidity, coldness and sharp surfaces. Moreover, Damocles abhors his soft and fluid body and often fantasises about giving it the appearance of granite, believing that remaining motionless for hours would enable him to become to some extent more like a statue. Kenneth Gross argues that the fantasy of turning a living man into a statue arises out of a desire for the inhuman, the material, out of an inchoate demand for a partial or dialectical identification with stone, the dead literal, the solid or opaque, or whatever else stone can signify.[14] The fantasy secures something in the self that is otherwise bound to be lost: everything warm, soft and undefined, and thus associated with death.

Damocles's fear of losing the substantiality of the self is reflected in his idea of love as something associated with the image of hardness. In order to arouse his desire, the hero had to imagine that all the naked women in front of him were statues, 'cold, hard beings without viscera or skin — and not the female variety of those sinuous little goatskin bottles, full of sobs and ill-defined sensations, called *men*' (A 70). As a consequence of those fantasies, Damocles made love to statuesque women, totally shaved so that they no longer retained any animal qualities, lying on marble. In this scenario, sexual satisfaction is gained by the feeling of caressing not women but 'frozen rivers'. And the only female name Damocles had ever been able to tolerate was, because of its delightful coldness, Aurora.

In Victorian literature (e.g. Thomas Hardy and Vernon Lee), classical statues worked as a metaphor of desire that had been silenced, restricted or censored:

> The idealised white marble figure with its smooth surface, lack of expression, and generalised facial features signifies a body devoid of physical and psychic processes, immune from sexual desire, appetite, or emotion: it presents a body outside experience, outside history, 'outside a corporeal engagement with the world'.[15]

[14] K. Gross, *The Dream of the Moving Statue*, Penn State University Press: 2006, p. 133.

[15] J. Thomas, 'Icons of Desire: The Classical Statue in Later Victorian Literature', *The Yearbook of English Studies*, Vol. 40, No. 1/2 (2010), p. 253.

Aurora deals with this way of interpreting sculpture as an 'icon of desire' by emphasising the fetishistic character of Siriel's desire. Both fantasies and real acts of making love with statues are means of mediating the main desire of all Leiris's characters to save their subjectivity from melting into an unstable reality of smooth contours, delicate women and undefined borders. Aurora, both a spectral and material presence, embodies the desire for stony life, freed from any randomness and variability.

At the beginning of his journal, Damocles Siriel notes that his loathing to every mutable form was related to the fear of death. But fear of death causes aversion to life (A 72), in which the hero consequently sinks into his frozen world of statues. Siriel's eroticism, as well as that of all male characters in *Aurora*, can be compared with Sacher-Masoch's strategy of 'supersensualism', as a transmuted sensuality built on the transformation of every object into a work of art.[16] In Masoch's novels, women become exciting when they are indistinguishable from cold statues. Deleuze finds in Masoch's texts that 'the plastic arts confer an eternal character on their subject because they suspend gestures and attitudes'.[17] In Democles Siriel's history, arrested movement refers to the desire to freeze both the reality of the desirous subject and the object of desire: Aurora.

In the subsequent stories of *Aurora*'s different male characters (e.g. Paracelsus, who seeks the Philosophers' Stone), they try to find Aurora, who in each story becomes a different fantasy and different object of desire. Every time, her name is transformed according to men's desires. Aurora reappears as 'OR AURA', 'Eau-Rôh-Rah', 'OR AUX RATS', and, finally, when all the male heroes die, as 'HORRORA'; she is the only stable point maintaining their subjectivity. Her spectral and material presence is the only guarantee of their existence, though her own condition is continuously changing. The search for final, impossible union with Aurora is one that will therefore permit the simultaneous existence of metamorphosis and durability in each subject.

[16] G. Deleuze, 'Coldness and Cruelty' [in:] *Masochism,* transl. J. McNeil, Zone Books: New York 1991, p. 69.

[17] Ibid., p. 70.

The language of statues

At the beginning of the novel, the narrator refers to himself as a first-person narrative voice, expressing himself in direct speech, because 'only the word *I* epitomises the structure of the world' (A 43). When different characters appear, he speaks about 'coming to cathedral Death, to this third-person singular' (A 43), which a moment ago he had crossed out with one stroke of his pen. It is a paradoxical condition, in which the word 'I' decays (as the narrator's body and reality at the beginning of the novel decay) and the third person (fictional multiplications of the narrator's subjectivity) becomes a hope for reintegration in stone, frozen form, although this hope turns into the 'cathedral of Death'. Jean Pontialis indicated that 'it is only through a phantasy relation with the other to whom it delegates both its obsessional features and a certain power that must save it from the sickness unto death and its fragmenting effect'.[18] Aurora is a figure of such power because, as a Medusa-like fantasy, she has a petrifying glance, which mineralises the subjectivity of male characters. Transformations of her name do not change her domination over the entire novel, and she remains the 'enigmatic medium whose violent possession enables the narrator to achieve the occultation of thought and the gift of verbal transmutation'.[19]

The sculptural erotic fantasy of Damocles Siriel, his desire to possess Aurora as a figure of frozen and permanent subjectivity outside of the flux of time, also permits us to treat this surreal Medusa as an impossible object of desire for male characters, that is, self-stabilisation in the language that has been lost at the beginning of the novel. Eroticism connected with sculptural forms and Aurora's ability to be both the petrifying Medusa and an animating force of nature show the paradoxical condition of the language and the illusion of any male character's hopes for constructing a stable subjectivity. Referring to de Man's diagnosis, attempts to use language to give the world form or meaning, to posit a subject and reconstruct a lost wholeness, turn us, as users of this language, into statues.[20] Language creates something fixed,

[18] J. Pontialis, D. Macey, 'Michel Leiris, or Psychoanalysis Without End', *Yale French Studies: On Leiris* 1992/81, p. 138.

[19] Hand, *Leiris*, p. 36.

[20] P. de Man, *The rhetoric of Romanticism,* New York: Columbia University Press, 1984, pp. 94–5.

but at the same time it reveals its dehumanising violence – like Aurora, whose glance can suspend someone in a stone-like form and instantaneously open the abyss of the 'cathedral of Death' of a third-person narrative. All erotic explorations in Leiris's novel, as well as the statuesque metaphors, embody this fundamental aporia of language. And here, language itself remains as the only impossible object of desire.

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