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Situating the Jungle-village
in Leonard Woolf's *The Village in the Jungle* (1913)

Abstract: This paper addresses a gap in literary research in the scholarship on Leonard Woolf's *The Village in the Jungle*: a lack of demonstrated understanding on the part of major critics as to what constitutes a village-jungle in the early-20th-century Ceylonese context and, as a result, misunderstanding of the novel's main characters and events. By drawing on comparative and indigenous sources by writers like R.L. Spittel and Mayaranjan, the paper calls attention to narratives on forest-life as representing a sensibility that is experientially derived; this – in contrast to the claims of Woolf's critics – brings on a sensibility that lies beyond simplistic claims to "orientalism" and endorsement of colonial views. The discussion centrally draws on the significance of comparative local sources in framing insights to forest life in Ceylon, as the absence of such comparisons hinders the understanding of a novel like *The Village in the Jungle* to the point of producing readings that prove incomplete and even misleading.

Keywords: colonial writing, forest life; Leonard Woolf, Modernist writing; Sri Lankan studies, postcolonial literature.

1. Introduction: *The Village in the Jungle*
in Postcolonial Literary Discourse

After seven years in the colonial Ceylon Civil Service commencing from 1904 Leonard Woolf returned home to England in 1911. His Ceylonese experience in colonial administration in Jaffna and Mannar in the country's north, Kandy in the central hills, and Hambantota in the south had disillusioned Woolf of Britain's imperial enterprise. It brought him to confrontation with his own conscience of being a minion of an imperial mission and the realization that he nursed an

anti-imperial feeling during the last years of service (Woolf 1964, 47). Woolf's
nascent friction with empire was coupled by other conflicts in his personal life,
including the question of marriage, which overwhelmed him upon his return home
(Glendinning 2015, 11). His quitting the posting in Ceylon and marriage to Virginia
Stephen – a member of Woolf's London inner circle – happened in close succession.
Coinciding, Woolf published *The Village in the Jungle* in 1913: a story centred on a
rural jungle-village in southern Ceylon which, over time, became the most widely
read of Woolf's creative work. Upon publication, the novel was endorsed by the
likes of Arnold Toynbee and Edward Thompson as "one of the best half-dozen
novels ever written about the East," and as superior to Joseph Conrad's *Heart of
Darkness* and E. M. Forster's *A Passage to India* (qtd. in Ranasinha 34). Yasmine
Gooneratne, an early postcolonial critic of the novel, acclaimed *The Village in the
Jungle* as the "first great (if not quite the first)" work of creative art to "emerge
from the experience of [Ceylonese] living" (33). Over a century, the novel has
enjoyed long spells as a high school and university text while the book's Sinhalese
translation has had an uninterrupted print run since first appearing in the 1950s.

    Academic interest in *The Village in the Jungle* dates back to the 1970s (Glend-
inning 2006, 165), whereas the expansion of postcolonial critical paradigms in the
1980s and 1990s encouraged nuanced readings of the text. A broad arc of literary
scholarship locates *The Village in the Jungle* as expressing an anti-imperial posi-
tion (Glendinning 2006, 165; Glendinning 2011; Gooneratne 23; Kerr 150) and
a "profoundly interrogative critique" of structural violence pervading colonial
Ceylon (Davies 49). Yet others have examined the novel as interrogating "unstable
and mutable boundaries" that shaped Ceylonese villages in the late-colonial period
(Haghshenas 9). There is little dispute that the novel characterises some of Woolf's
first-hand impressions of remote people, cultures, lifestyles, and the lay of territo-
ries he encountered and helped to administrate in Hambantota, Southern Ceylon
(Glendinning 2015, 14): the official diaries and letters Woolf exchanged with his
London circles were at his disposal. These sources are instrumental in bringing
on a visceral ethnographic basis to the novel which, as Priyasha Mukhopadyay
has argued, presents the impression of a report produced from "inside" a culture
by deploying a narrative voice that was unafraid of "not knowing" (61). At best,
this voice is neither "sentimental nor antiquarian" (Gooneratne 24) in presenting a
narrative whose depth Gooneratne places on a par with William Knighton's *Forest
Life in Ceylon* (31), seeing it as one of the most comprehensive 19th-century nar-
ratives on rural Ceylon which, in part, offers a critique of the emerging plantation
economy under British colonialism.

    However, particularly in the 1990s and 2000s, *The Village in the Jungle*
attracted the attention of a group of critics who read the novel as reinforcing
colonial idiom, imagery, and imperial tropes (de Silva 1991; Thwaites 1995;
Samarakkody 1997). While Minoli Samarakkody looked on Woolf's writing as
representing locals as inadequate and incapable (75), Ruvani Ranasinha assessed

the novel as echoing "discursive projects of imperialist colonization" that reinforced the colony as hostile, devalued, and as a "place of impending disaster" (37). These assessments supported a critical inquiry that questioned Woolf's descriptions of, and responses to, the jungle as a place of danger and looming threats which he had described as "evil" (1992, 4). In particular, descriptions such as those where Woolf outlines the jungle as a dark and dangerous terrain – as in an early passage of the novel where three back-to-back references to the jungle being "evil" can be found (1992, 4) – have led critics (such as, for instance, E.F.C Ludowyk) to frame Woolf as passing "moral judgment" on rural life (Woolf 1992, ix).

However, in approaching the matter from a postcolonial sensibility, the present discussion takes a position against the denouncing of Woolf as an "orientalist" (in the Saidian sense) and as a writer who endorses imperial values: a passing of judgment that should not be hastened or be simplistically based on words and phrases, or the descriptions of the jungle. Such denunciations are largely a reflection of the critics' impoverished understanding of Ceylonese forest-life as Woolf experienced it as well as their metropolitan alienation from the sensibility and consciousness derived from life lived in (and in close proximity to) the kind of rural forest-lands that inspired Woolf's book. Adverse criticism of *The Village in the Jungle* as a work that "enforces imperial tropes" (Ranasinha's words) is also borne with disregard to Woolf's commitment and empathy, as reflected in his diaries, for the advancement of village life in remote Hambantota (Woolf 1962), where, in executing field duties, Woolf showed concern, diligence, and application that go beyond the mere call of service. On the other hand, the present discussion also attempts to mark a crucial oversight on part of critics in their alienation to the concept of "jungle-village" in the rural Ceylonese context. Despite frequent use of the phrase in their responses to the text, critics seem to visualize Baddagama through mental impressions they carry of an ordinary Sinhalese peasant village in the Sri Lankan south, resulting in ambiguous and flawed interpretation. In this context the present discussion introduces and explains the phenomenon of the "jungle-village" (as that phrase is applicable to 20th-century Sri Lanka) from an indigenous and postcolonial studies position and proposes to juxtapose *The Village in the Jungle* in a comparative map alongside two other writers – R.L. Spittel and Mayaranjan – who, writing a few decades after Woolf, share in the consciousness and ecological sense of early-20th-century forest-life; and whose idiom and sense of imagery intimately resonates with that of Woolf in representing the dangers and uncertainties of the wild.

2. The Jungle is Evil: Comparative Narrations of Forest Life

Woolf's representation of Beddagama is reasonably modelled on the remote hamlets that were scattered in vast forests of south-eastern Ceylon till about the late-1970s

and the early-to-mid 1980s. Referred to as *kaele gam* in idiomatic Sinhalese, these villages spread along jungle territories from the country's Vanni area (skirting the southern border of the present day Northern Province) to the outskirts of the Southern Province. This included a significant portion of the mountainous Uva and Sabaragamuwa Provinces and inland areas of the Eastern Province, including the vast wild terrain traditionally known in Sinhala as the *Maha Vaedi Rata* (or, the "territories of the Veddas").[1]

Cut off from main towns and one another by thick forests, these jungle-villages were largely connected by cart tracks and footpaths. Before the 1940s and 1950s – when multi-purpose state-driven development schemes such as the Gal Oya project, and later, the Mahaweli project were set up – these rural hamlets were the last outposts of centralized government. Built on a distinctly close connection with the forests and their resources, these villages also enjoyed a fair degree of semi-autonomy under local headmen who, despite being government appointees, were locally quite powerful and independent. Depending on the area, the villages demonstrated a mix of Sinhalese, Vedda, Vanniyar, and Tamil lineage, and those of Vedda and Vanniyar extraction (Ryan 2004 [1953], 144–145; Spittel 2003, 24, 88). Trade in these villages was often led by Muslims who came to remote forests from coastal towns (Spittel 2001 [1950], 72–73). They bartered with the villagers, Veddas, and half-Veddas and enjoyed the monopoly of the illegal *ganja* (Indian hemp) trade (Spittel 2000 [1941], 70; Spittel 2001 [1950], 72–74).

In local histories, the settlement of these jungle-villages is attributed to a host of reasons from their being the detritus of older civilizations, displacement due to British colonial dominance in central territories (Mayaranjan 1957, 55; 88–92), epidemics and plagues, to adventurous fortune-seeking (Mayaranjan 1957, 124–125). Over time, with increased assimilation and migration, Veddas and Sinhalese came to share resources, cultivations, and family relationships (Ryan 2004 [1953], 144; Spittel, 2003, 24; 88), and – as census reports from about 1946 suggests – were frequently categorized commonly as Sinhalese (Ryan 2004 [1953], 144). Leonard Woolf's many field duties and responsibilities as Assistant Government Agent of Hambantota took him to the furthest ends of these forest regions from 1908 to 1911. His involvement in the lives of villagers who, against harsh and precarious conditions, toiled to eke out a meagre living seems to have challenged Woolf's outlook on administration. Woolf's diaries of Hambantota (1962) present the picture of an energetic and committed young civil servant, proactively fighting cow diseases such as rinderpest, experimenting with improved ploughing mechanisms, setting up and investigating progress in local schools, petitioning his own superiors for improved infrastructure for pilgrims and so on. The Hambantota posting convinces Woolf of his growing scepticism that Britain's colonial enterprise in the East was a mistake (1964, 47). His work recorded in the diaries indicates little sympathy for the colonial office and the self-interests of government.

The plotline of *The Village in the Jungle* anchors on the family of a rural

cultivator and hunter named Silindu. The Silindu family cultivated *chena* land on permit, while – as the writer puts it – the man's "real occupation" was hunting (1992, 9). Despite its being a fairly straightforward indication of Silindu's forest-origins and Vedda lineage, lacking anthropological and historical inclinations, critics have on the whole missed out on the significance of this reference. Writing through the 1920s, 1930s, and 1940s, R.L. Spittel – particularly in *Vanished Trails* and *Savage Sanctuary* – frequently presents Vedda men and women who are comparable to Silindu's position: settlers in Sinhalese villages who lead a life of cultivation, but who are also engaged in hunting and gathering in the forests. For instance, the main character in *Savage Sanctuary*, Vannaku Tissahamy, a jungle dweller, embodies in every aspect an admixture of Sinhalese and Vedda influences. Tissahamy hails from the hamlet of Holiké (Spittel 2000 [1941], 13), east of the Bibile-Maha Oya road in the Uva border, some miles north of Woolf's Hambantota. Made of "six or seven homes" that "scattered about in fenced gardens" (Spittel 2000 [1941], 19), Holiké, in its layout and composition, is reminiscent of Woolf's Baddagama. In introducing Tissahamy, Spittel refers to his ancestry and heritage along the following lines:

> To-day no pure Vedda exists. The few communities scattered about the forests and bearing that name have a moiety of either Sinhalese or Tamil blood. But among them are found, to this day, a few individuals who embody the wild traits and pursue the traditions of their ancient forebears […]. Even as a child Tissahamy had shown that to him had descended in large measure the instincts of savage ancestors. (2000 [1941], 13)

Tissahamy's parents descend from two leading Vedda clans – the Unapana and Morana clans – while his village, "until the gradual intrusion of the Sinhalese," the reader is informed, had "always been a Vedda settlement" (Spittel 2000 [1941], 13). This description is consistent with historical patterns in rural demography where early forest dwellings of Veddas were either overcome by Sinhalese – or Tamil – encroachments (Brow 2011 [1978], 10), or were absorbed by one of the two bigger ethnic groups. Kiriamma, Tissahamy's grandmother, is described as a "full-blooded Vedda, proud of her ancestry" that had taken leave of her forest home to spend her declining years with her son in Holiké (Spittel 2000 [1941], 13). "Although you have now become like Sinhalese," she advises her grandchildren, "if people ask you who you are, tell them you are Morana Veddas" (Spittel 2000 [1941], 13).

When Tissahamy was eight, he was adopted as a protégé by the Buddhist priest of the village temple in Mullagama (Spittel 2000 [1941], 14). The priest, a Sinhalese man, taught Tissahamy reading and writing while indoctrinating in him the Buddhist way of life (Spittel 2000 [1941], 15). However, Tissahamy's forest ways persisted and the inclination for a life in the wild drove him to join the "village boys in all their pastimes and pranks" which included the trapping of animals and hunting with pellet bows and deadfalls (Spittel 2000 [1941], 15). While the identity

of these village boys – who enjoy typical hunting techniques prevalent among both Veddas and rural Sinhalese – is not specified in the text, Mullagama can be safely assumed to be a Sinhalese settlement. As a youth, Tissahamy takes for wife Hudu Bandi of Dorakumbura, a village close to the Maha Oya river (Spittel 2000 [1941], 32). He removes with the girl to a life in the Vedda village of Embillenne to which, several years later, he brings a girl, Valli, from the Sinhalese village of Idambowa as a second wife (Spittel 2000 [1941], 60–61). Valli, it is later discovered, is the daughter of Handuna, the Vedda chief of Embillenne; and therefore of Vedda extraction who – for reasons suppressed by the narrative – had been living among the Sinhalese from childhood (Spittel 2000 [1941], 63). These details of Tissahamy's life and of his immediate circle draw attention to the flexible boundaries between remote Vedda and Sinhalese villages as well as their integration in sharing economic and cultural spaces in the timeline relevant to this discussion.

In *The Village in the Jungle*, Silindu and his family are referred to as Veddas on several instances (1992, 18; 26; 128). However, even the most perceptive of critics (such as Yasmine Gooneratne) have preferred not to assign importance to this referent and seen it off as a "nickname" brought on by that family's lifestyle which was seen as different by the others in the village (Gooneratne 29). However, Silindu's manner – his "silent, sliding step" (Woolf 1992, 9), taciturn and inert bearing (1992, 10), and his trait of sitting down for hours in silence doing nothing (1992, 16) – closely echo defining characteristics Veddas have typically been attributed in the writings of travellers, explorers, and novelists in Sinhala.[2] When he started for the jungle, Silindu "became a different man" overcome with alertness, as he "glided through the impenetrable scrub" in "slightly bent knees" with "toes turned out" (1992, 10). At night, he is said to sleep lightly ("like a deer") and to start up from the heaviest sleep and be "fully awake" in an instant: a quality that leads the writer, in a manner of speech, to claim that Silindu slept "with his eyes open" (1992, 16). Silindu's instinct as a forest-dweller is further characterized by the fearful reverence with which he looked on the jungle (1992, 10): a fear which, in spite of his familiarity with the forests, made him wary of the wilderness as evil. In this regard, Woolf contrasts Silindu with less conspicuous men who boasted mastery over the jungle – like the audacious hunter in the novel's opening pages – whom the jungle claimed except for some scattered bones and bodily remains (1992, 4). Silindu's reverence of the jungle came naturally as it did to forest-living Veddas for whom the dangers of forest life were daily occurrences. In what comes across as a handing down of knowledge and heritage, Silindu inculcates in his daughters from childhood a sense of the jungle and its "world of devils, animals, and trees" (1992, 16). These stories, in turn, fascinate and mold the thinking of young Hinnihami and Punchi Menika who are drawn by their father's imagination and worldview (1992, 14–15).

The story in *The Village in the Jungle* develops through a series of hostilities and misfortunes encountered by Silindu's family which – besides the

hunter – consists of twin daughters, Hinnihami and Punch Menika, Silindu's unmarried sister Karlinahami, and Punchi Menika's husband, Babun. The family's troubles include Hinnihami's being directed by an oracle to marry against her will (1992, 71–72) and, later, the death of Hinnihami's and Punch Menika's children who succumb to jungle fever (1992, 80–81). Guided by superstition and desperation, a village mob tortures Hinnihami's beloved fawn to death right before her eyes while – it is implied – Hinnihami, too, was brutally raped (Woolf 1992, 83). She succumbs to her injuries and dies a silent death by her father's side. Further misfortune follows the family when Fernando, a moneylender from the town, is keen on having Punchi Menika for his mistress (1992, 87–88; 95–97). When his plan fails, Fernando, with the aid of Babehami, the headman, brings on a false charge of thievery against Babun and Silindu. The trial of the accused men presided by an English magistrate is among the most quoted sections of the novel. During the trial Babun and Silindu – simple villagers who are alienated by the dictates of English law – are confused and stupefied. The judgment reflects the measured sympathy of the presiding official who – while unwavering – yet feels compassion for Silindu and Babun whom he takes to be victims of ignorance and powerlessness. The judge reflects that there was something in the case that he quite did not understand (1992, 123): a nagging thought that hung over Woolf's conscience as he presided on behalf of the government among a people whose ways he did not fully comprehend (1962, 125–126). Babun received a six month sentence in prison, while Silindu was dismissed of charges. Reflecting on the novel's courtroom scene, Ruvani Ranasinha endorses the view that Silindu's "inability to defend himself in court is treated as an act of irrationality" (38). However, whether this is the case has to be considered carefully since Silindu quite lucidly processes the full scale of events leading to Babun's jail sentence soon after he left the courtroom (Woolf 1992, 126–127). I suggest that the courtroom operated on a rational paradigm that was quite different to the logic of Silindu's world: a cosmos that was informed and governed by the call of the forest. Having fully comprehended the nature of the threat looming over his daughter Silindu resolves to eliminate the threat at the cost of his own freedom. It is with this objective that he tricks, traps, shoots, and kills the headman and Fernando (1992, 132–135). Unlike in Elleke Boehmer's claim that these killings were carried out with "a burning need for retribution" (4), in Silindu's reasoning, the murders were nothing more than acts of necessity.

　　Woolf's descriptions of and references to forest life contributes to an imagination and consciousness shared by writers who were openly receptive to the looming dangers of the wild: dangers that were often deceptive, hard to predict, and outside human faculty and control. For instance, the devastating impact of the encroaching jungle on isolated and abandoned villages – as it is recorded in the closing passages of *The Village in the Jungle* – echoes the lived experience of remote life as documented by writers like Mayaranjan, whose memoirs are referenced below. "Doomed to slow decay," abandoned homes of the village begin to

"fade out" into the "surrounding jungle" (1992, 167). Trees, bushes, and creepers "crawled out from under the shadow of the fence over the compound" and grew over the surroundings right up to "the walls and the very door" of such places (1992, 167). It seemed as if "the jungle had broken into the village" (1992, 168) and that the village had "disappeared into the jungle from which it had sprung" (1992, 178). These meditations of the decline and fall of Beddagama presented in eight long-drawn, evenly paced paragraphs of impactful prose (1992, 176–179) echo the inevitable and gradual ruin of a jungle-village by pestilence, epidemic, or collective migration: for villages in the forests, a common enough fact of life.

The force of nature witnessed and experienced by jungle-villages is memorably reported in the memoirs of Mayaranjan, a Sinhalese school master who volunteered to work in the remote Eastern villages of Damana and Padagoda in the early-1950s (Gunasoma 26). Mayaranjan's memoirs[3] testify to an adventurous spirit where, travelling on foot or in a bullock-drawn cart, the writer often witnessed the dangers of the forest at close quarters. The jungle-tracks Mayaranjan used in the late 1940s and early 1950s were in all probability not much developed from what they were in the 1930s, when Spittel explored the jungle villages of the Vedda country. Even though Mayaranjan freely writes of the jungle's beauty in romanticized prose (1957, 15–21; 22–32) he is no less unaware of the ever-present dangers and threats (1961, 41–44) – or, in Woolf's words, "the evil" – that pervaded forest life. Close encounters with the wild mentioned in his memoirs bring to mind the death, in *Vanished Trails*, of the great Vedda hunter Poromola of Bingoda who – caught unawares in a careless moment – gets mauled by a bear (Spittel 2001 [1950], 150–151). The victim was discovered with his face a "gory pulp," "gouged eye-ball [hanging] out of its socket," lower jaw "broken and sagging," "the skull dented" and "the body covered with cruel gashes" (Spittel 2001 [1950], 150). The threat posed on travellers and cultivators alike by roaming bears, elephant herds, and leopards (Mayaranjan 1961, 25) are day-to-day realities for folk in jungle-villages. Mayaranjan's narrator is often "petrified" by the calls of a sambhur, leopard, or bear from within hearing distance of the jungle track (1957, 20). In particular, he draws on the wild buffalo as the most intimidating counterpart in the wilderness; whose "straighten-headed gaze holding aloft bayonet-like antlers," the writer claims, is "too intimidating for a human to withstand" (1957, 25; trans. V.P.). Tracks of hunting leopards are frequently found along cart-tracks (1957, 51) while the musk of elephant herds lingers around the paths the roaming beasts had only recently left leaving broken twigs and trees behind (1957, 50). The precarious struggle of villagers to safeguard homes and crops from these beasts is framed into a story which Podi Mama (the narrator's uncle in Mayaranjan's *Apé Rajyaya*) relates: how, without firing a shot, they drove the elephants away from the settlements with the use of fire, noise, and crackers. "To shoot an elephant is an *evil* thing," Podi Mama claims (1961, 42; trans. V.P.; emphasis mine). As Mayaranjan writes: "If the shot bags the elephant, then, it is all fine. But, if the

elephant survives the shot, he becomes the worst enemy of mankind and comes back for revenge" (1961, 42; trans. V.P.). Here, what I have translated as "evil thing," in Mayaranjan's original text is worded as "napuru vedak": literally, a harmful action; or, an action that prompts harm. I contend that Woolf's use of the word "evil" in his description of the jungle – and, later, in referring to the actions of the headman and the trader Fernando – bring on a somewhat similar connotation of potential danger and threat.

In order to remove the evil influence hanging over his family – and particularly, the life of his daughter Punchi Menika – Silindu resorts to the "way of the forest" by hunting down and eliminating the threat. He takes strength in his hunter's instinct which Silindu claims to have always guided him in doing what was right (Woolf 1992, 127). Silindu demonstrates the skill of the hunter in the daring and well thought-through plot that becomes fatal to the headman and the trader. In contrast with Gooneratne's suggestion that Silindu acts out of the impulse of "a joyous, half-primitive […] cornered wild buffalo" (27), his movements are calculated and collected. As a hunter must in the thick of the wild, Silindu is already resolved to face the consequences of his actions. In fact, when the death sentence he anticipates all along gets reduced to a life term it confuses Silindu and leaves him with "uneasiness and disappointment" (Woolf 1992, 164).

3. Conclusion

As Victoria Glendinning concedes, Woolf's empathy with Silindu and other villagers came from an "understanding that the jungle was, simply, all [the villagers] knew" and that "it was the condition of their existence, their world, both a source of food and a source of danger and death" (2015, 14). She notes further on that

> Woolf the administrator knew how the system worked. It had nothing to do with imperialism, but with the dynamics of subsistence living in a closed society, and the inhumanity of man to man. The conscious, analytical Woolf, the civilized man, the bureaucrat, the imposer of order, is not asleep in *The Village in the Jungle*. (2015, 15)

As I have underscored in this discussion, critical opinion on Woolf and *The Village in the Jungle* (as text) have been undermined by two kinds of absences: a demonstrated lack of anthropological and historical nuance of the jungle-village as a site, as well as an ignorance of comparative literature that share with Woolf a common idiom and sensibility in framing Ceylon's forest life. These hindrances, in turn, result in flawed readings of key aspects of the novel such as Silindu's lineage, outlook on life, and certain courses of action he follows: factors that are interlocked with his forest-ways distant from the metropolis. Commentaries on Woolf from both the global and Sri Lankan academies rarely, if at all, engage in

depth with local knowledge that can be discerned to bring on valuable insights on forest life. Regardless of these limitations, the metropolitan critic and academic continue to direct opinion on writings such as *The Village in the Jungle* which – despite a cultivated postcolonial sense of reading texts – ring hollow and misleading on fundamental premises such as those that have interested this discussion. It results in grossly misleading statements made even by senior researchers on the subject like Ruvani Ranasinha, who claims of Woolf as follows: "[i]t is perhaps not surprising that a writer who had only experienced the English countryside of Sussex and Cambridge should experience an element of fear on encountering Sri Lankan jungle" (37). This statement can only emerge from a misreading of a jungle-village (which I have characterised in this essay) as an ordinary peasant village: a misreading that is symptomatic of the limitations of academic criticism that guards itself from cross-fertilisation and exposure to local knowledge, as well as one that, despite its limited scope, allows for generalisations. Unfortunately, such convictions carry substantial weight in framing realities of the global south and are often accepted and circulated uncritically: a practice that stands to be challenged and corrected by comparative sources and critical re-interventions in the line encouraged by this discussion for the advance of postcolonial scholarship and the representation of marginal places.

Notes

1. A convenient example can be found in the literature of Sinhala author Simon Nawagattegama who draws on remote village and forest life in the north western region of the country for anchorage. Nawagattegama's key prose work introduces the hunter figure as a fully immersed presence of the complex jungle ecology. Hunters who "did not ever sleep by resting his head on the ground" and those who may have "with wide open eyes, slept where he stood" (Nawagattegama 2021 [1981], 8; trans. V.P.) shed important light to how the hunter was perceived and visualized within the imaginary of forest life.
2. Excerpts from Mayaranjan's work cited in the paper have been translated from the Sinhala by the writer.
3. A detailed study of the origins and the anthropology of Vedda communities in Ceylon/Sri Lanka – an area that falls outside the scope of this essay – is recommended in support of this discussion. For some key sources (available in English) see Nevill (1886), "Part I" of Parker (1909), Seligmann and Seligmann (1911), Wijesekara (1964), Brow (1978), and Obeyesekere (2022).

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"It Was a Brutal Land": Exploring the Personal and the Political in Damon Galgut's *Small Circle of Beings* (1988)

Abstract: This article is a critical discussion of Damon Galgut's *Small Circle of Beings* (1988) from the perspective of Elleke Boehmer's postcolonial poetics. The discussion concentrates on the story "The Clay Ox" and the eponymous novella of the collection. It is argued that both the story and the novella convey a tension between the personal and the political by describing the subtleties of human relationships while at the same time showing that even this intensely private dimension of the characters' existence is shaped by forces that affect the entire nation. As it is shown, Galgut's collection of stories is representative of white writing in the times of the interregnum insofar as it depicts isolated, conflicted protagonists, includes the theme of physical and mental disintegration, and explores the state of personal and political precarity.

Keywords: Damon Galgut, South African literature, postcolonial short story, South Africa, apartheid

1. Introduction: Embracing the Personal and Emphasizing the Political

In the year 1988, when South Africa was two years into the nationwide State of Emergency,[1] Damon Galgut published his first, and to this date only, collection of stories, *Small Circle of Beings* (1988). Galgut's collection embodies some of the features that Stephen Clingman identifies in South African writing during the interregnum of the 1980s: "'unreal' time, the problematic self, closed environments, unstable vision, the press of an insistent but unknowable future, and apocalyptic presentiments" (637). Representative of late apartheid literature, *Small Circle of Beings* describes characters in various stages of inner conflict, shaped by the closed environments of their families, rejecting the present but increasingly apprehensive about the future.

The central thesis of this article is that *Small Circle of Beings* reflects the times of the interregnum not only in its depiction of isolated, conflicted, and insecure protagonists but also in its overriding themes of regression, disintegration, and destruction, all of which refer both to the personal lives of the protagonists and to the wider, socio-political situation in South Africa in the late-apartheid era. The comment on the relationship between the personal and the political brings me back to Clingman's reflections on South African fiction in the 1980s. Clingman's contention is that "the 'interregnum' in South Africa went through phases" (634) and that in this decade, when the end of apartheid was rapidly approaching, "fiction continued to tell its story in forms that ran not so much parallel to the political, but in tension and articulation with it" (646). This tension, which Clingman explores in the novels of Gordimer and Coetzee, is also visible in Galgut's collection: while the five pieces of short fiction included in *Small Circle of Beings* are intensely personal, two of them (the eponymous novella of the collection and the story "The Clay Ox") convey the impossibility of turning away from the legacy of apartheid, showing that politics is a major force in the shaping of individual lives. The reading offered in this article has at its centre the tension resulting from the simultaneous gesture of embracing the personal and emphasizing the political. The fact that the private dimension of his characters' lives is seldom, if ever, presented as a refuge from the world outside lends credibility to this interpretation; in Galgut's stories, the family, with its history of violence and trauma, is a place from which the protagonists seek, successfully or not, to escape.

The 'homelessness' of Galgut's protagonists – the fact that they are estranged from their immediate environments – has an intensely personal dimension also when it is considered in the context of Galgut's life. My aim here is not to explore the similarities between Galgut's stories and his family background but rather to view the isolation of his protagonists as symptomatic of his position as a South African writer in the 1980s. An insightful commentary on the situation of white writers in the 1980s can be found in Nadine Gordimer's 1982 lecture "Living in the Interregnum," in which she argues that "[t]he interregnum is not only between two social orders but also between two identities, one known and discarded, the other unknown and undetermined" (1989, 269–270). Gordimer contends that the white South African who has discarded his identity as determined by social and political privilege will have to live in suspension insofar as he "does not know whether he will find his home at last" (1989, 270). Gordimer's answer to this predicament of white South Africans during the interregnum was to join the liberation struggle by devoting her works to the exploration of socio-political changes in her country. It is worthwhile to add that already in 1974, in an interview with Michael Ratcliffe, Gordimer emphasized that she was "a white South African radical" (1990, 145). In contrast to Gordimer, Galgut never referred to himself as a radical, but he did participate in anti-apartheid demonstrations: in an interview with Chris Harvey for *Penguin*, he recalls taking part in university

protests and being attacked by the police. He sums up this recollection with the words: "I think by my early 20s, I was quite aware of the inverted world that I belonged to" (Galgut 2022).

My suggestion is to read Galgut's *Small Circle of Beings* from the perspective of Elleke Boehmer's postcolonial poetics. Boehmer defines postcolonial poetics as "reception-based or readerly pragmatics" (2108, 2), whose focus is on how literary texts communicate their knowledge to the reader. She encourages readers and critics to abandon a stance of detachment and instead concentrate on our interaction with the literary text. In her conception of postcolonial criticism, works of literature – not only novels but also poems – are viewed as places where "the meanings circulate" (2018, 8). This understanding of the literary text brings her to the following conclusion: "Therefore, when reading, we do not have necessarily to add theoretical scaffolding to our experience of the text in order to decode it […]. Rather, we must attend first and foremost to how the text communicates, to the denotations and implications it puts in motion. Our task, in effect, is to follow the text's inferential processes, guided by its poetics" (2018, 8).

Boehmer defines her postcolonial poetics by putting emphasis not on what it is but what it does, or – to be more precise – what it enables the readers to achieve. In a passage discussing postcolonial aesthetic, Boehmer writes about it in the following way: "It allows us to look into the mystery that is not so much the other, generically speaking, as the opaque yet always situated other person" (2018, 35). Boehmer's decision to substitute "the other person" for "the other" (a term as much entrenched as overused in postcolonial criticism) is liberating, but this is not the main reason why the passage has been quoted here; Boehmer's reflection is significant chiefly because it emphasizes the workings of the individual mind, as conveyed in the postcolonial text and explored by the critic. While this kind of postcolonial poetics need not be discussed solely in terms of allusions and inferences – as Boehmer does in her study – there is a sense in which these notions are especially relevant in the discussion of the short story, which has been described in terms of gaps and silences, facilitating the imaginative and affective involvement of the reader. Inferences in Galgut's stories may relate to the protagonists' family situation – their family background, their relationships with parents and spouses, the influence of the family on their lives – but since this article explores the interplay between the personal and the political, the main focus will be on what is conveyed – both overtly and covertly – about the protagonists' states of mind in the wider socio-political context.

2. The Impossibility of Escaping the Political: "The Clay Ox"

What I have earlier described as the tension between Galgut's simultaneous gesture of embracing the personal and emphasizing the political is thematized in the story

"The Clay Ox," which concentrates on a chance encounter between an escaped soldier and a woman planning to organize a bomb attack in Pretoria. It is worth noting that "The Clay Ox" is the only work in the collection which includes overt references to the political situation in South Africa: as we learn from the reference to the South West Africa People's Organization (SWAPO), the narrator, an escaped soldier, must have been part of the South African Defence Force (SADF) fighting in the South African Border War. The fact that the woman he meets on the way is planning to organize a suicide attack on an army compound in Pretoria makes it possible to situate the story around the mid-1980s – a time of increasingly violent resistance to apartheid.[2]

On its most general level, "The Clay Ox" is about the impossibility of escaping the political forces that shape individual existence. The theme of escape recurs throughout the story, most emphatically in a passage in which the ex-soldier remarks that the escape from army headquarters was not motivated by any plan other than self-annihilation: "Flight had promised to accelerate my descent towards the thrilling detonation of my own extinction" (163). In contrast to the tone of fatalism in this statement is the hope of leaving behind politics and emigrating from his country. This vague hope of reaching an apolitical state of existence is nevertheless thrown into doubt by his solitariness (he offers the young woman the chance to join him, but she declines, choosing instead to press on with her attack), and, no less importantly, by his experience of fighting in the war. There are at least two passages in the story suggesting that the effects of war – the most dramatic manifestations of the political – are deeply imprinted on his psyche. Besides the quoted comment on "the thrilling detonation of my own extinction," another significant passage can be found later in the story when the ex-soldier compares the hillocks that they pass during their journey to the Drakensberg Mountains to "the mass graves of men killed in fighting" (162). The recurring imagery of death, destruction, and disintegration, alternating with his strong desire to escape the war and politics in general, can be discussed in the context of Robert Jay Lifton's analysis of trauma, specifically his comments on the survival syndrome. Lifton's contention is that the near-death experience of survivors forces them to confront the moments in their lives which they associate with isolation and powerlessness: "The death encounter reopens questions about prior experiences of separation, breakdown, and stasis as well as countervailing struggles towards vitality; reopens questions, in fact, around all of life's beginnings and endings" (170). Galgut creates the impression that his protagonist's war experience remains suppressed, only to emerge as flashes of violent imagery. The ex-soldier's escape from the army can be seen as his desperate attempt to find a life outside of history, and the same refers to his appeals – addressed to the young woman – to accompany him in his flight from South Africa.

The man's feeling of despondency, which may be analysed in terms of his war experience, is also visible in his descriptions of the natural environment, specifically

the Drakensberg Mountains, where he and his female companion camp for two days. Described by the man as "huge and static and grim" (170), the mountains fill the man with awe but they also introduce an air of gloom, as he reflects on the reasons behind humankind's fascination with landscape: "I'm quite prepared to believe that man's lingering obsession with inhospitable regions like jungles, icelands and (dare I say it?) deserts, comes from spiritual equivalents to all these places in himself" (170). While this comment is formulated in existential terms, it is significant that it is made in the course of his last-ditch attempt to separate himself from the nefarious impact of politics on his life. The shelter offered by the Drakensberg Mountains does not insulate him from the insidious influence of ideological forces: while he may well be able to reach Durban and escape abroad, he will find it decidedly more difficult to shed the legacy of war.

The discussion of the impact of war on the ex-soldier brings us to the central topic of the story, namely his response to the injustices of apartheid. Unlike the woman, whose opposition to apartheid reveals her communist convictions, the narrator's political stance is decidedly pacifist – a legacy, it seems, of his service in the army. The contrast between the two stances is at its clearest in an episode in which the man decides to give all his money to the impoverished children selling clay statues at the roadside. This spontaneous act of charity is criticized by the woman in terms that are evocative of the Marxist notion of class struggle: "Every cent you give them takes them further from desperation. They must be desperate [...] before the revolution will begin" (167). Situated on the opposing pole of this rhetoric is the man's rationale for his actions. Rejecting the idea of political struggle, he formulates his own manifesto, in a rhetoric that is glaringly different from that used by the woman: "I understand only simple ideas. The most terrible thing about the Nazi era was that it made no exceptions. Not even for children. We *must* allow children to believe in things like happiness. If not in happiness, then in the *possibility* of happiness. I can put it no better than this (I don't want to grow old). Desperation should be reserved for old age" (167–168; original emphasis). The simple language in which he expresses his beliefs conveys his opposition to the woman's political rhetoric, alert to socio-political processes but blind to the plight of the individual and devoid of empathy towards the afflicted and the under-privileged. The child-like rhetoric that he adopts, so out of touch with the political climate of the 1980s, is reminiscent of an earlier passage in the story, in which he describes his difficult childhood – the short time spent with his biological father, followed by the physical and emotional abuse that he and his mother suffered from his stepfather. This mini-narrative of childhood as an idyllic time irrevocably lost stands in strong contrast to the rest of the story also because it is told in the present tense, creating a sense of immediacy, as if the man was reliving the times when he was victimized by his stepfather. Following this interpretation, the man's refusal to grow old, voiced in the parenthetical sentence in the passage quoted, is not only an expression of his opposition to social injustice but also a reference to his family

history – a lingering and regressive attachment to idealised early childhood and the desire to turn the clock back to a time of innocence, before the desperation of his later years.

While the man's avowedly apolitical and pacifist stance does lead to tangible results (he gives money to the begging children), it fails to give him any sense of purpose in his life. This lack of purpose and direction is contrasted with the purposefulness and determination of the Dutch settlers in the 19th century. The settlers are referenced twice in Galgut's story: first, when the narrator, reflecting on their trek through the Drakensberg Mountains, calls them "part of our history" (165). The second, more important, reference is made towards the end of the story, when the narrator imagines "the bearded Voortrekkers in their wagons" (176) travelling over the Drakensberg to reach the platteland beyond them. In the same passage, he compares the great migration of the Dutch settlers in the 19th century to his own and the woman's historical legacy: "Our heritage was no less ox-like in its solidity and stance. But then – so many oxen are made of clay" (176–177). While – as we saw – the narrator sees the Great Trek as "part of our history," it is quite clear that "our heritage" – his and the woman's heritage – is based not on the adoption of the social order proposed by the Afrikaners, built on the master-servant dialectic,[3] but on the rejection of this order. The possessive pronoun "our" in "our heritage" can be viewed as the man's recognition of their shared anti-apartheid convictions, but it should be kept in mind that there are clear differences between her radical and his escapist political stances; indeed, in contrast both to the *Voortrekkers* and to the woman, whose strong resolve to organize the bombing remains unshaken, the man is described as confused and directionless. If there is coherence in his actions, it can be found in his determination to flee the shaping force of politics in his life.

"The Clay Ox" can be discussed in terms of an interplay between past and present, collective and individual identities. Both the male and the female protagonists of the story are keenly aware of the need to reject the collective identity of their racial group, as forged through decades of white supremacy, in an attempt to shape a new identity, rooted not in the past but in anticipation of the future. It is worthwhile to note that the interplay between the individual and the collective identities can also be considered in the context of their differing political stances: whereas the woman, declaring herself as part of the revolutionary action (she is perhaps part of *Umkhonto we Sizwe* – the military wing of the African National Congress), has subjugated her individual goals entirely to the demands of the struggle, the man's chief goal is self-preservation. While he identifies himself broadly with the goals of the anti-apartheid struggle, this identification is nevertheless tenuous and undercut by what seems a doubt concerning the radical measures adopted by the woman and other revolutionaries. It is not only the case that the man refuses to contemplate giving his life for a larger cause – he rejects the notion that it is justifiable to sacrifice oneself and others to achieve a larger goal. More importantly, he refuses to see – and appreciate – the fact that the woman's planned act

of terror is a response to the terror of the state; pertinent here is Elleke Boehmer's general comment on terror, as viewed from the postcolonial perspective: "*Terror* in this sense refers *both* to the violent operation of global systems, *and* to attempts to thwart, block, and subvert them" (2018, 70; original emphasis). Given those pacifist convictions, the man's contention that "so many oxen are made of clay" (177) can be read as an expression of his criticism – the contention that violence cannot constitute a firm basis for a new social order.

Irrespective of their differences, the man and the woman share the same historical moment, presented – once again in symbolic terms – in the following words: "Above us the slow white torrent of stars wheeled imperceptibly across the sky. And down in the valley those red fires burned on, burned on" (177). The passage contrasts the romantic notion of the Trek (following the stars in search of new land) with the reality of the late apartheid, as represented by the "red fires" coming from the dwellings of the poor and the dispossessed. Those fires are described as points of reference for the two protagonists of the story insofar as they symbolize the legacy of apartheid, which will always – to some extent – determine their futures, irrespective of whether they decide to stay in South Africa or go into exile.

In Chapter Four of *Postcolonial Poetics*, devoted to the topic of terror in postcolonial writing, Elleke Boehmer posits that postcolonial writing "includes reflections on that chiasmic break into the now *and also* on attempt to go beyond the terror-stricken state, to investigate ways of continuing, to provide a fuller understanding of the painful losses as well as the eventual gains of such acts" (2018, 73; original emphasis). In Galgut's "The Clay Ox," the connection between the now and the after – in the shape described by Boehmer – is significantly absent. The only way of proceeding from terror (terror viewed both as the violence of the state and people's militant reactions to it) to what lies beyond it is by rupture, understood as a decisive and dramatic severance from one's legacy and one's personal history; while in the case of the woman, this rupture takes the most radical form of suicide, the man contemplates his future only in terms of severance from his past – as was mentioned, he considers going into political exile, without the possibility of return (at least not under the existing regime). Nonetheless, the fact that the man's plans of leaving the country are presented as a distant prospect puts into question even this way of moving forward. As a result, Galgut's story conveys a state of lethargy – a sense of emotional and physical impossibility, which refers specifically to the socio-political situation of white South Africans during the interregnum.

3. The Intersection of the Personal and the Political: "Small Circle of Beings"

Similarly to "The Clay Ox," the political context is also significant in the interpretation of the novella "Small Circle of Beings," in which the intensely

private sphere of the protagonists' interiority is intricately connected with the wider context of South Africa in the turbulent times of transition. Unlike Sofia Kostelac, who argues that the novella "deliberately obscures the overdetermined socio-historical context of its production" (73) and "does not gesture towards a larger socio-political reality" (78), I do not reject the orthodox interpretation that views the dynamics of family relationships as symptomatic of social relations; instead, in the discussion that follows I wish to elaborate on this point. Of equal importance is my argument that the social and political dimension of the novella is not only a question of allegorical interpretation – of grafting the political onto the personal – but is inherent to this work; in other words, the socio-political forces in the background of Galgut's novella have an effect on the protagonists' lives and should consequently be discussed at greater length.

"Small Circle of Beings" has at its centre a claustrophobic and destructive parent-child relationship, described from the point of view of the mother who, characteristically of Galgut's prose, is an alienated character, estranged from her immediate surroundings.[4] Since the unnamed woman is the narrator of the novella, it is from her perspective that we learn about her son David's battle with cancer, his gradual recovery, and the contemporaneous disintegration of her marriage, which falls apart because of her husband's infidelity. The decision to start a new chapter in her life leads to a disastrous liaison with a violent man, Cedric, who physically and mentally abuses both her and her son. Although the woman ultimately parts from her aggressive partner, this traumatic time leads to a crisis in her relationship with David, who decides to leave the family home. At the end of the story, the woman remains alone with her elderly mother, a silent and distant presence that nevertheless exerts a strong influence on her daughter's life.

Before a more detailed discussion of "Small Circle of Beings," I would like to make a reference to Elleke Boehmer's postcolonial poetics. In her understanding of "the heuristic power of literature" (2018, 3), Boehmer's emphasis is "on the verbal and structural dynamics, the poetics, through which our understanding of the particular postcolonial condition being represented (race, resistance, liberation, reconciliation, precarity, and so on) may be shaped and sharpened" (2018, 3). As I will demonstrate in the analysis that follows, Galgut's novella explores the postcolonial condition of white South Africans at a time of transition, when the patriarchal order of the family and the hegemonic structure of the racist social system continue to exist, but they fail, nonetheless, to give the protagonists a safe and stable sense of identity; in this reading, the insecurities and tensions of the protagonists – especially those of the novella's narrator – point to the tenuous nature of the socio-political system.

The socio-political context of Galgut's novella is created partly through occasional references to other races and social groups. Those subtle references – however infrequent – have the capacity to involve the reader more intensely in what Boehmer calls "the flow of implication" (2018, 8), which is evident whenever

the woman alludes to her servants and her relationship with them. From the few references made by the female narrator, it becomes evident that people from outside her social class inhabit the peripheries of her vision, but they do exert a degree of influence on her self-perception and on the way she views her immediate surroundings. In one passage, the woman remarks upon labourers toiling on farms adjoining her house: "Labourers work there among the trees, picking the fruit as if to feed an endless hunger. But it isn't theirs" (5). Uttered early in the story, the sentence, which concludes a longer passage, is likely intended to give the reader pause, since there is too little context to determine whether it is simply a statement of fact or whether it has a political dimension, subtly conveying her attitude to the exploitation of farm labourers. Even if the woman is alert to the social injustice that surrounds her – and the sentence quoted by no means makes this clear – she is incapable of imagining any change to the existing socio-political order. This becomes evident in the fourth and final part of the novella, where her servants Moses and Salome retire from the farm – a change that is greeted by the narrator with the following words: "It feels strange to say goodbye to them, this odd twosome who have expended their lifetime on a house and a garden that they do not own" (110). The dispossession of her black servants[5] is presented here as an obvious fact which can be glided over; indeed, in the same paragraph, the woman goes on to imagine that Moses and Salome's children will – like their parents – continue to serve her son David until they too become old and retire.

While the woman's perception is shaped mostly by her privileged social position, she is also intuitively aware of the racially and socially conditioned limitations of her perspective. This feature of her narration, and of her general approach toward the surrounding reality, is at its most pronounced in her strained relations with the servants. The constant presence of Salome and Moses clearly unsettles the woman, who is discomfited by Salome's reserved courtesy and unnerved by what she perceives as Moses's ominous sullenness. Her attempts to reach an understanding with Salome by giving her presents (what she calls "sheer impulsive charity" (7)) prove ineffectual as she realizes that the gifts may, in fact, be worthless to the beneficiary. Unable to negotiate the economic and social divide between her and her servants, the woman takes the situation for granted, allowing her ignorance to turn into suspicion. Imagining Moses and Salome alone in their house, after a day's work in her house and her garden, she finds herself wondering: "Do their tongues at last break loose and say mocking, malicious things about me, their ridiculous figure of a mistress, that keep them giggling long into the night?" (8–9). Characteristically, this awareness of being exposed and mocked is wholly absent from the mindset of the woman's mother, who, despite suffering from an unspecified mental illness, has retained the habit of ordering her servant about the house. As the woman reports, the old woman's daily routine is to follow Moses around the garden "in order to keep an eye [on him]" (11). It is through such tacit references that Galgut supplies historical and political context to his novella, pointing to the changing attitudes

between the earlier generation of white South Africans, deeply entrenched in their attitude of privilege and domination, and the later generation, represented here by the female narrator, which clings on to the social and economic privilege, closely connected to the "bourgeois imperial whiteness"[6] of her social class, but finds itself increasingly apprehensive about the future.

Galgut's female narrator lives in a state of tension resulting from her acceptance of the political status quo on the one hand and, on the other, the intuitive and emotive revelation that the master-servant relation, so consistently cultivated by her mother, is no longer feasible or possible in her case. Faced with this impasse, the woman's goal is to erase the emotions of confusion and apprehension by creating the safe and secluded space of everyday life, which for her is associated with her house and her garden. That this is not only a physical task but also an imaginative endeavour is evident from the beginning of the novella, where the woman juxtaposes the cultivated space of her garden with the chaotic and threatening forest, presented as perilous and unsettling. She refers to the natural environment outside of her garden as a "wild land" (4), a "jungle" (4, 28), which remains uninhabited, with the exception of a mysterious and half-mythical witch doctor, imagined by her – somewhat romantically – as a hermit living in a cave. Intrigued and vaguely fascinated by the mysterious rituals that she imagines the witch doctor to perform, the woman admonishes herself for her attraction to "these inscrutable dark people" (6), by whom she means both the doctor and those that visit him, including Moses and Salome. In her conceptual map, the forest becomes a mythologized space, which, consistently with the traditions of Judaism and Christianity,[7] is conceived primarily in terms of danger. This conception of wilderness works in opposition to what she perceives as the safe domain of her garden, which she imagines as a pastoral space of refuge, symbolizing such values as "simplicity, peace, [and] immemorial usage" (Coetzee 2007, 3).[8]

Considering the woman's pastoral conception of the garden as a space of emotional and spiritual refuge, it is deeply ironic that this garden is almost solely cultivated by the silent, indifferent, and somewhat menacing Moses, whom she associates with wilderness. Moses is, in this sense, a stranger, "neither friend nor enemy" (Bauman 55),[9] who is paid to create a space of comfort for the woman and the other occupants of the house. Most ironically, the woman seems unaware of the fact that by virtue of his unsettling presence, she is unable to view her garden and her house as a wholly comforting and safe space. Her attempt to erase the stranger from the private space – a defensive strategy directed against her fear of change – is entirely self-defeating. Unlike her mother, the woman is deeply unsettled by Moses's presence, as he embodies a vaguely defined fear of destruction and dissolution. As she writes, "I am, I think, afraid of him. I believe him capable of things, of deeds I try not to imagine" (8). The fact that Moses is described as part of her inheritance and a permanent fixture in the house underlines the futility of her attempts to forget or to marginalize him.

Another way in which Galgut explores the link between the individual realm of his protagonists' experience and the socio-political context is by analysing the pathologies connected with the functioning of the white, middle-class family. This dimension of the novella is evident in its third, penultimate part, in which the woman describes the violence and victimization to which she and her son are subjected by her partner, Cedric. The physical abuse begins with David, who is beaten by Cedric for what he sees as the boy's insubordination. Trying to mediate between her son and her partner, the woman explains away the beating as a form of discipline. When she becomes a victim herself, she plays down the seriousness of the abuse by viewing it as occasional and predictable, in this way stretching the limits of what she perceives as normal. She goes on to describe scenes of reconciliation in which both sides apologize, the woman taking the blame for the violence to which she was subjected. The effect of this self-manipulation is that she begins to view physical and mental abuse as a token of her guilt (in an attempt to present physical violence as potentially remediable), and even as an expression of his love for her.

The discussion of aggression within the family brings us back to Galgut's statement – made one year after the publication of *Small Circle of Beings* – that "what takes place in the family relates to what takes place in the state" (Galgut; qtd. in Kostelac 73). While the connection between state violence and family violence is more explicit in Galgut's first novel, *A Sinless Season*, the wider social context of the violence described in the novella should not go unnoticed. Resorting to aggression to build his authority in the house, Cedric represents the abusively patriarchal model of the family, in which the woman becomes an accomplice, only to reject that authority on the realization that the man's gratuitous violence will not cease. Significantly, even after parting from Cedric, she occasionally resorts to violence to impose her will on David. She conceptualizes violence as "a terrible force I am not capable of stopping" (102) and a "sickness [which] has continued" (114) beyond David's cancer, the latter description indicative of her tendency to think about her family in terms of dissolution and disintegration. This interpretation has been taken up by Sue Marais, who in her article on short story cycles published during apartheid, mentions Galgut's *Small Circle of Beings* alongside volumes by Denis Hirson and Peter Wilhelm, arguing that unlike black writers, whose works "project a sense of community," white authors create works that "foreground notions of unrealized or failed community" (197). The fact that the dissolution of the family takes place in the context of physical abuse points to the analogy between the breakdown of the family and the disintegrating late apartheid state, fruitlessly seeking socio-political cohesion through the use of violence. The analogy is carried further by the symbolic scene in which the deranged mother sets fire to the house, almost succeeding in burning it down.

"Small Circle of Beings" ends with what seems like a double reversal of roles: after the departure of her husband and son, the woman turns to her mother,

developing an ambivalent relationship in which the roles of caretaker and care-giver become disconcertingly fluid. Acting in her capacity as the guardian and the caretaker, the woman washes her elderly mother, dresses her in a nightgown, and prepares her for bed, but then the woman suddenly reverts to the role of a child as she pleads with her mother to stay with her in the dark. The novella concludes with the image of the mother and the daughter lying alongside one another: "We cling to each other. In this way we lie, twined like lovers or enemies, inseparable in our embrace. We sleep" (117). The ending of the novella has been interpreted by Sofia Kostelac in terms of "consolation" (78), which the woman reaches after being freed from a failed marriage and her violent lover. As Kostelac writes, the woman finds herself "finally able to embrace her own mother, despite the uncom-fortable alterity which she represents in her senility" (78). When considered in the context of the entire novella, there is, nevertheless, an ambiguity in this image of the reconciliation of the mother and daughter: while it may imply that the woman has claimed a victory over her powerful fear of illness and old age (the main justi-fication for her shunning her mother throughout the story), the scene is described not in terms of development but rather of regression to the role of a small child, dependent on the parent. In this reading, the woman's life is not characterized by progression, however halted and painful it may be, but by the circular logic of the return to her childhood (in this sense, the woman's prediction about the end of her son's illness and the return to their previous life – "We will be back where we began" (26) – reads like an ironic prophecy of the events that conclude the novella). "Small Circle of Beings" ends on an ambivalent note, making it impossible to state authoritatively whether the image of mother and daughter "inseparable in [their] embrace" is indicative of the woman's emotional and spiritual development, or rather a reluctant regression to the close parent-child relationship. In this sense, the circular logic of Galgut's novella is representative of South African writing in the 1980s, which Boehmer describes in terms of "a suspension of vision, a hemming in as opposed to a convinced and convincing opening up or testing of options" (1998, 44).

4. Conclusion

Four years before the publication of *Small Circle of Beings*, in November 1984, Njabulo Ndebele delivered his lecture "The Rediscovery of the Ordinary: Some New Writings in South Africa," in which he argued that "the convention of the spectacular has run its course" (49) and that it was time to "rediscover the ordinary" through honest and subtle rendition of the protagonists' experience. In this new conception of late apartheid writing, the focus should be on the quotidian reality of the characters' existence, because it is everyday life that constitutes what he called "the *very content* of the struggle" (57; original emphasis). In Galgut's conception

of writing, by contrast, the focus on everyday life does not invariably have wider resonances; indeed, the emphasis on the personal dimension of his characters' experience can be viewed as symptomatic of his desire to reject politics as a force that defines South African literature.

Galgut's focus on the personal dimension of his protagonists' lives is evident in the themes recurrent in *Small Circle of Beings*, such as the return to the family home, claustrophobic child-parent relationships, unresolved issues from childhood that plague characters later in their lives, and, no less importantly, the connected themes of illness, disintegration, and death. All those themes point to one feature shared by Galgut's protagonists: while they reject politics as a domain in which they can attain self-realization, they are also clearly unable to reach any kind of emotional or spiritual fulfilment in the family; in other words, they are neither at home in their country nor in their family environments. The alienation of his protagonists – the fact that they are always at a remove from the place in which they find themselves – enables Galgut to explore the dynamic of a given community from a detached perspective. This detachment creates the impression that his stance as a writer is that of an observer, whose goal is not to allow political or personal sentiments to determine his aesthetic choices. Galgut's detachment as a writer is reflected in his writing style, which is, as Robert Kusek has noted, "clean and sparse prose with no ornamentation" (109). Galgut's style is also cool and calculated; even in those stories that are narrated in the first person, the self-conscious stance of the protagonists leads to a language that is more analytical than emotional.

The tension between the personal and the political, the individual and the collective is present not only in those works by Galgut that were published in the times of the interregnum but also in his later works, which came out during the democratic transformations. While each of those novels deserves a separate analysis, one general comment can be offered: Galgut's protagonists look upon the personal as a refuge from the political, trying to create a life unaffected by their country's turbulent history and its challenging present, but those endeavours are often shown as ineffective and driven by unfeasible and egoistic goals. The very fact that Galgut's protagonists, for example Adam Napier in *The Impostor*, seek an intensely private existence is already a commentary on their political stance, all the more so that political events are present in the background – as they often are in Galgut's works, with varying degrees of intensity. Both in his apartheid and post-apartheid works, Galgut shows how history shapes the perception and everyday life of South Africans, doing so both by means of allegory and by a subtle exploration of the characters' interiority.

I would like to conclude this reading of *Small Circle of Beings* with another reference to Boehmer's *Postcolonial Poetics*. As we have seen, Boehmer claims that her focus is on "verbal and structural dynamics […] through which our understanding of the particular postcolonial condition being represented (race, resistance, liberation, reconciliation, precarity, and so on) may be shaped and sharpened" (2018, 3). Among

the notions that she enumerates in parentheses, precarity comes across as especially relevant in the discussion of the postcolonial condition conveyed in Galgut's collection. Precarity characterizes the protagonists' attitudes both to their families and to the social (and racial) groups in their country. It is not only the case that Galgut's protagonists are unsure as to their position in these groups – although it is true that they struggle to find their place in their respective families and social milieus; more importantly, his protagonists often feel that their inevitable fact of belonging to these groups (if only by virtue of their origin, skin colour, and social status) puts them in a historically and politically precarious position. It would be a mistake to draw a clear distinction between the sense of personal and political precarity in Galgut's stories, as the two are intricately connected and mutually reinforcing.

Notes

1   "Between July 20, 1985, and March 7, 1986, the government applied a state of emergency in many parts of the country. On June 12, 1986, it proclaimed what became an annually renewed, indefinite, nationwide state of emergency and arrested hundreds of antiapartheid activists" (Thompson 235). The State of Emergency was lifted on 8 June 1990.
2   As Clark and Worger observe, in the years 1984–1988 the intensity of bomb attacks, "especially of buildings (police stations, bars, restaurants) at which members of the security forces were known to gather," increased considerably: "The number of such attacks rose from 45 in 1984, to 137 in 1985, 230 in 1986, 235 in 1987, and peaked at 281 in 1988" (104).
3   One of the leaders of the Great Trek, Piet Retief, offered the following statement in the *Grahamstown Journal*: "We are resolved, wherever we go, that we will uphold the just principles of liberty; but, whilst we will take care that no one shall be held in a state of slavery, it is our determination to maintain such regulations as may suppress crime, and preserve proper relations between master and servant" (qtd. in Thomson 134). As Thomson writes, while Retief (and other Boer leaders) accepted the abolition of slavery so as not to antagonize the British colonial administration, by undertaking the Great Trek they sought to establish communities based on the pre-British social order, founded on the clear and rigid division into masters and servants.
4   As Johan U. Jacobs writes in the context of Galgut's *In a Strange Room* (2010): "Alienation [...] characterizes all protagonists of Galgut's novels: solipsism of one kind or another is the dominant feature of their lives, and his narratives foreground the alienation of these protagonists and their efforts to break out of it" (91).
5   It is worth keeping in mind that in the 1980s, "[t]he Land Act and the Group Areas Act still excluded Africans from land ownership outside the Homelands and the African townships" (Thompson 228).

6   Alfred J. López juxtaposes "bourgeois imperial whiteness" with the "marginalized whiteness" of the impoverished and disempowered social classes. Referring to "bourgeois imperial whiteness," he writes: "And certainly this dominant form of whiteness did and does come with all sorts of privilege and has had all manner of atrocities committed in its name" (18). Both the narrator of Galgut's novella and her mother display attitudes characteristic of "bourgeois imperial whiteness," with its unspoken acceptance of the social and political status quo. In this sense, they are not unlike many white South Africans during apartheid. As Mellisa Steyn writes, "[t]hroughout the apartheid era white South Africans knew they were racialized, and some of their earliest memories recount difference in how they were positioned relative to 'others.' What *was* taken for granted, however, was the 'naturalness' of being thus privileged" (122).

7   As J.M. Coetzee observes, "[t]he origins of this conception of the wilderness lie in pre-Israelite demonology, where the wilderness (including the ocean) was a realm over which God's sway did not extend" (2007, 51). As Coetzee adds, wilderness later came to signify "a place of safe retreat into contemplation and purification, a place where the true ground of one's being could be rediscovered, even as a place as yet incorrupt in a fallen world" (2007, 51).

8   As Coetzee writes, "[t]o pastoral art the West has assigned the task of asserting the virtues of the garden – simplicity, peace, immemorial usage – against the vices of the city: luxury, competitiveness, novelty" (2007, 3). It is characteristic that Galgut's narrator opposes the garden not only to the wilderness but also to the city, which she perceives in terms of threatening novelty. Indeed, one of the reasons why she postpones taking her sick son to a specialist hospital is precisely because she fears the city.

9   I am referring to Zygmunt Bauman's definition of the stranger as an unsettling, possibly threatening presence. As Bauman writes, the stranger's ill-defined role – the fact that he is neither unambiguously an adversary nor an ally – disrupts social life, which is built precisely on this opposition: "And all this because the stranger is neither friend nor enemy; and because he may be both. And because we do not know, and have no way of knowing, which is the case" (55).

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We Don't Know What We Want": The Ups and Downs of Global Travel in Dave Eggers's *You Shall Know Our Velocity* (2002)

Abstract: Dave Eggers's *You Shall Know Our Velocity* (2002) can be read as a (post) modern voice in the ongoing debate on educational, transformative and redemptive potential of foreign travel for the young Americans in the late 1990s. The article focuses on representation of global travel experience in the novel employing American Old World journey conventions on the one hand and tourism-travel dichotomy on the other. The backpackers in Eggers's novel can be characterized as drifters. Their encounters with otherness most often result in confusion. All in all, the novel downplays the role of travel in the globalized, homogenized world at the turn of the 21st century.

Keywords: global travel, international theme, Dave Eggers, backpackers, tourism, travel writing

1. Introduction

Dave Eggers's *You Shall Know Our Velocity* (2002) narrates the adventures of two young Americans who circle the world in one week. In the post-9/11 world such carefree journeys belonged in the past. Perhaps this sense of belatedness was one of the reasons behind the novel's positive but not very enthusiastic reception. The praise was much less lavish than in the case of Eggers's memoir *A Heartbreaking Work of a Staggering Genius*. In fact, as Susanne R. Samples has observed, no critic ever reviewed Eggers's *Velocity* without comparing it to the author's Pulitzer prize nominated debut (5). The effect of the second book syndrome has also been manifested in the scarcity of scholarly research devoted to the novel (Samples 5). Indeed, it still remains the book in Eggers's oeuvre which has garnered the least critical attention since its initial publication in 2002, especially while compared to

his later works. This article aims to fill the gap in the existing scholarly analyses of *Velocity*, which either discuss the novel's connections to his other works (Gower 27–42), consider its significance in the development of Eggers's career as an independent publisher (Hamilton 65–83), focus on unreliability of the narrator and metafictional elements in the novel (Samples, Clements) or explore its paratextual contexts (Brouillete). Aliki Varvogli has compared Eggers's novel with J.S. Foer's *Everything is Illuminated* (also published in 2002), arguing that both narratives engage with the issues of globalization and the Americanization of the world, and represent travel as a disappointing venture, because of Europe's insufficient "otherness" (2006, 83–95). My aim is to analyze to what extent *You Shall Know Our Velocity* can be read as continuous with the tradition of Old World travel in American literature. Does encountering the world beyond their shores still function as means of self-fashioning for young American "innocents"? What may be the significance of the round-the-word travel in the globalized world at the end of the 20th century? Drawing on the distinction between tourism and travel, the paper also inquiries into the roles of sightseers and philanthropists that the characters play during their voyage.

Will Chmielewski and Francis "Hand" Wisniewski, the two main characters of *Velocity,* are representatives of lower middle-class, provincial America. They come from Milwaukee and have not traveled much in the USA before setting out on a whirlwind tour of the world. Will, a traumatized, brooding introvert, is the narrator, and "the mind" behind the whole project. Hand, his traveling companion, functions as Will's opposite – he is talkative, practical and helpful, as his nickname suggests. They have been best friends since childhood, and at 27 they are still single, with no stable relationships or permanent jobs and no definite plans for the rest of their lives. Apart from circling the world in a week, Will and Hand want to give out $38,000 to the poor people they would meet on the way. The money is roughly half of the sum earned by Will a few years back when his silhouette was used as a logo on a package of a new type of electric bulb. Will feels guilty and confused about acquiring this "easy money" and believes getting rid of most of it "would provide clarity" (Eggers 4). Reading this confession in the light of the writer's biography, one reviewer has suggested that through Will's charitable project "Eggers is exorcising the demons of his own recently minted celebrity on the page. Certain descriptions of Will's anxiety over his capriciously acquired money sound much like an over-toured author, wondering if he'd made some sort of Faustian bargain" (Freeman). However, it is also possible to interpret the novel as an allegory that "deals with guilt and grief on the part of the first world, particularly the United States, confronted with staggering disparities between wealth and poverty, privilege and hardship" (Hamilton 67). Eggers has confirmed the latter interpretation explaining in an interview that "[y]ou can draw parallels to American foreign aid, on one level, at least; it's rife with complications and it always pisses someone off" ("Dave Eggers…").

Another set of ethical questions the novel addresses is connected with tourism as cultural practice. Though Will wants to be a tourist he nevertheless has doubts because: "that money could be used for hungry stomachs and you're using it for your hungry eyes, and the needs of the former must trump the latter, right? And are there individual needs? How much disbelief, collectively, must be suspended, to allow for tourism?" (Eggers 231). Will's musings reveal he is well aware that as an American tourist in developing or post-Soviet countries he will always occupy a privileged position. The plan to give away money to the individuals in need can be thus read as an attempt to appease one's guilty conscience by feeding the "hungry stomachs." As Gower observes: "Will is […] someone who is struggling to overcome his privilege and to find a new language for encountering the 'other,' even if his efforts often seem circumscribed by his position and limited in vision" (33). In other words, he wants to be a tourist who notices the needs of individuals and shares with them what he possesses.

2. Voyages to the Old World

Represented as an important educational and formative experience, the voyage to the Old World was a frequent motif in the late 19th-century American literature. According to William W. Stowe, European travel in that era was a highly conventional activity, almost a "kind of secular ritual, complete with prescribed actions, promised rewards, a set of quasi-scriptural writings" (19). Following into the footsteps of other travelers, whose books they had read prior to the journey, American men and women would visit places immortalized in literature or associated with great historical figures, admire magnificent works of ancient and Renaissance art and seek inspiration for their own writings. As a cultural and social activity, European travel was also inseparably connected with reading and writing; transatlantic pilgrimages were described in countless letters sent home and then published as travel narratives or fictionalized in novels exploring "the international theme" (Stowe 16). Collectively, both non-fiction and fiction have helped to shape the complex idea of Europe in the American imagination as the place admired as "the great museum of humankind" on the one hand but criticized as "the stronghold of backward feudalism and undemocratic evils" on the other (Freese 10). According to Malcolm Bradbury, "[l]ike America itself, [the Old World] was much more an idea than a real place, a generalized image rather than a spot on the map, and one thing it did was to help define what made American existence and character so different" (7).

Aesthetic appreciation of European sights, monuments and landscapes was most prominent in the writings of learned upper-class travelers who, like Henry James, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Henry Adams and Edith Wharton, presented themselves as "passionate pilgrims" on a Grand Tour. In contrast to them, a new class

of common middle-class tourists was rising in importance. Mark Twain's *Inno-cents Abroad* (1869) catered to the expectations of these bourgeois readers and promised them a relief from the usual "profundity" and "incomprehensibility" of travel books. Twain declared his account to be "a record of a pleasure trip" where he would look at foreign reality "as if he [i.e. the reader] looked at them with his own eyes instead of the eyes of those who traveled in those countries before him" (xvii). Consequently, he and his travelling companions were cast in the roles of ignorantly innocent American tourists who may occasionally feel at a loss when faced with European antiquities and art but believe firmly in the superiority of American political and social institutions over European ones. The opposition between a real traveler, who stages himself as an amateur historian and connois-seur of art and a common tourist, who seeks just pleasure and relaxation, already discernible in 19th-century American travel literature, continues to be evoked in 20th- and 21st-century travelogues.

In their writings on Italy, James and Twain exemplify two different ways of interpreting European travel: "James prefers a status quo that preserves the Old World as old, the common preference of the American tourist" (Decker 129). In his eyes, European countries are picturesque and rich in cultural possessions, while their undemocratic governments and economic underdevelopment are facts which remain beyond the scope of his interest. In contrast, Twain in his satirical travelogue uses comedy and ridicule to downplay the significance of European rich cultural heritage. From the perspective of a common American, proud of his country's achievements, Italy remains feudal, poor and backward.

World War I changed the relationship between the Old and the New World as it contributed to growing importance of the United States in the political and economic spheres. In the post-war decade, thanks to American expatriate writers of the "Lost Generation" who settled there, Paris "became the capital of American literature" (MacShane 15). For expatriate writers, European travel functioned an escape from middle-class mediocrity and materialism, offering freedom of artistic expression. In general, travel became one of the most prevalent literary metaphors in the 1930's, with writers turning their voyages "into interior journeys and par-ables of their times, making landscape and incident […] the factual materials of *reportage* – do the work of symbol and myth – the materials of fable" (Hynes; qtd. in Fussell 215). Ernest Hemingway's novels and short stories, based on his actual travels in France, Spain, and Africa, are a good illustration of such an approach. The motif of travel as escape and rebellion continues to be present in travels of the 1940s. In Henry Miller's non-fictional *Colossus of Maroussi* (1940) and Paul Bowles's novel *The Sheltering Sky* (1949) rejection of America stems from a pro-found belief that it caters solely to people's material needs while neglecting their spiritual and intellectual growth. Thus, both Miller and the characters in Bowles's novel engage in search for a new spiritual center of their personal world in more 'primitive' lands. Henry Miller finds enlightenment and personal transformation

by returning to Greece, the cradle of European civilization. Port Moresby, the main character in *The Sheltering Sky*, hopes to find answers to his existential questions in the Sahara, but he dies in the desert. According to Robbins, Bowles revised "the tradition of Hawthorne, James, and Fitzgerald, which made Europe a dangerous playground for the rich and aimless, by moving beyond Europe and playing up both the danger and the aimlessness" (1101).

In the postwar years, the number of American visitors to Europe, both tourists and commercial travelers, increased considerably (MacShane 17). Western Europe cased to be an attractive destination since it became more and more 'Americanized.' Consequently, it could no longer successfully function as America's Other. For that reason, some literary critics claim the motif of European journey has become exhausted in postwar American fiction, leading only to repetition or parody (Boddy 245). However, Zetterberg Pettersson argues that for some countercultural writers of the 1960s and 1970s, including William Styron, Mary McCarthy, John A. Williams and Erica Jong, such journeys still functioned as occasions for questioning conventional constructions of American national identity (11–17). Later, the fall of the Iron Curtain in 1989 had a profound influence on American travel experience in Europe, opening access to Eastern and Central European countries (Decker 142). In their political and economic transformation, post-Soviet countries relied on Western guidance and welcomed English-speaking experts and entrepreneurs which even led to establishment of American expatriate communities in Prague and Budapest. The 1990s – the decade of economic growth and prosperity in the USA – was also the golden era of backpacker tourism, since global travel was safe and affordable for young people. In the vein of the 19th-century Grand Tour, a "year out" for world traveling was often treated as a way to complement one's formal education, gather "cultural capital" and, last but not least, achieve a sense of personal self-fulfillment (Desforges 175–195).

However, the era of carefree backpacking ended after the 9/11 terrorist attacks on the USA. Subsequent American military involvement in the Middle East prevented leisure travel to many regions of the world and made tourists more vary in their choice of destinations. Continuing security concerns and economic recession in 2007–2009 further limited opportunities for foreign travel for many young Americans. The beginning of the 21st century can be treated as a watershed in the development of world tourism. The threat of terrorism after the 9/11 attacks profoundly affected modes of traveling and travel destinations (Baker 62). It is precisely at this peculiar historical moment that Dave Eggers's first novel – *You Shall Know Our Velocity* – may be located as a literary and cultural artefact. Though the first edition of book was published in 2002, and the second, revised version in 2003, the journey Eggers depicted in the novel took place in the late 1990s.

3. In the Footsteps of Phileas Fogg, or How to Go Around the World Without Seeing It

A project of circumnavigating the globe in the shortest possible time evokes Jules Verne's young-adult classic *Around the World in Eighty Days* (1872). There are obvious, if indirect, intertextual references to Fogg's literary journey in *Velocity*. First of all, Verne's novel made "the idea of circling the globe in a fixed time […] an indispensable part of modern mythology" (Verne xi) and Will and Hand clearly want to re-live this myth. Also, while planning their original timetable, Hand discovers the existence of the international date line while Fogg's servant, Passepartout, makes the same discovery soon after their return to London. It is also noteworthy that both novels rely on the "[a]nnihilation of time and space topos," which first appeared in the early 19th-century Western discourse of travel as a result of a belief that "[m]otion was no longer dependent on the conditions of natural space, but on a mechanical power that created its new spatiality" (Schivelbusch 10). While Fogg's world journey in 1872 was conceivable thanks to the completion of such big projects as the Suez Canal as well as cross-country railway systems in the USA and India, Will and Hand's adventure in the late 1990's is possible thanks to rapid development of air travel in the second half of the 20th century. The transportation technology has evolved, but what the two texts have in common is a fascination with fast movement across the globe. As Marzena Kubisz has observed, in the modern Western world, speed "has acquired the status of a 'cultural dominant' and has become a factor that powerfully determines and shapes the quality of people lives […]. The world is divided into the Fast and the Slow and it is one's access to speed that determines which world one inhabits" (63). In this respect, both the 19th century representative of the British Empire and the late 20th century representatives of the USA, a global superpower, remain privileged envoys of "the Fast" world, while the peoples and countries they visit belong to the "Slow" part.

In both novels, the voyage around the world becomes a race against time, though the strategies chosen to win are very different. Phlegmatic Fogg is well-organized and methodical. Determined to prove his point about the possibility of circumnavigating the globe in 80 days, he plans and executes his every move with mathematical precision. Unlike him, Will and Hand proceed in a chaotic or even frantic manner. Neither are they fascinated by timetables, challenged by the details of transport or consider the necessity to get a visa. Will and Hand change their route four times, and when they finally set out from Chicago, the weather conditions prevent them from flying to Greenland. On a whim they decide to fly to Dakar. As the narrator explains, "All we wanted was another continent, as soon as possible" (Eggers 26). Later on, he adds: "[t]he grand design was movement and the opposition of time, not drinking, hiding, sleeping" (156). Eventually, their original project of circumnavigating the world is reduced to visiting parts of Senegal, Morocco, Estonia, and Latvia. It is noteworthy that Will and Hand's race is

paralleled by the Paris Dakar rally in the novel, broadcast worldwide. Even though the two friends happen to be in Dakar during the rally, they never treat it as a 'must-see' event. Nevertheless, in every hotel room they stay at for the rest of the trip, they are compelled to watch cars racing across the desert. The rally, designed and advertised as a global attraction, serves as one more reminder that the world has shrunk and become an interconnected 'global village,' with villagers watching the same news and sports events.

Anther similarity between Phileas Fogg and two young Americans in *Velocity* is that neither of them is really interested in making discoveries or exploring the unknown during their global peregrinations: "Verne would have his readers comprehend the imperial Englishman not as a bold explorer but as a somewhat negligent, if chivalrous, sightseer, availing himself of frequently comfortable modes of transportation" (Sinnema 141). Will and Hand can also be interpreted as 'negligent sightseers' because they do not have any specific expectations as to what they wish to see (with one exception – the Great Pyramid). Since their journey is a race against the clock, the countries they drive through in rented cars function only as a background to their adventure. Thus, the whole project questions two fundamental tenets of leisure traveling, namely the choice of a place motivated by personal preference and the desire to get to know that place well.

4. Travelers/ Tourists/ Philanthropists, or the Roles They Play

Trying to asses Will and Hand's travel experience against the traveler-tourist dichotomy reveals that they do not really belong to either of these groups yet possess some select features of both. In academic debates and pop-cultural representations tourists and travelers have been frequently represented as polar opposites. A traveler is active, he or she seeks people, places and experiences not only for adventure and thrill of discovery but also because the journey possesses some deeper personal significance for them. Modern day travelers or travel writers – as these two roles tend to be conflated – frequently emphasize that their task goes beyond visiting and describing a foreign place. In the age of globalization and YouTube "it is not enough anymore simply to describe a landscape – we must root out its meanings" (Swick 37). Or, as another practitioner of the trade has expressed it: "A [travel] book has the capacity to express a country's heart, as long as it stays away from vacations, holidays, sightseeing, and the half-truths in official handouts; as long as it concentrates on people in their landscape, the dissonance as well as the melodies, the contradiction, and the vivid trivia" (Theroux 53). Obviously, in order to discover the essence of any place, travelers need time to become participants rather than only observers of local life (Swick 38).

At the same time, neither travelers nor tourists can escape anxieties caused by the globalization and homogenization of cultures at the turn of the 21st century. How

do you justify writing about your travel experiences if there are no blank spaces left on the map and no alien cultures? What kind of language should you employ to describe the 'Other'? In colonial times, Western travel books were produced and read in the context of an imperial discourse which sought to subordinate 'the Other' politically and culturally. This troublesome legacy continues to affect the genre in the post-colonial world, even though overt racism or a sense of cultural superiority are no longer accepted and thus seldom openly expressed. Debbie Lisle argues there are two tendencies discernible in late 20th-century Anglophone travel writing, which she defines as a "colonial" versus a "cosmopolitan vision" (3, 4). On the one hand, there are authors who resemble their colonial predecessors in "categorizing, critiquing and passing judgements on less-civilized areas of the world" (3). In contrast, other authors "make deliberate efforts to distance themselves from the genre's implication in Empire by embracing the emancipatory possibilities created by an interconnected 'global village' […]. Unlike their colonial predecessors, these writers frame encounters with others in positive ways – they reveal moments of empathy, recognitions of difference, realizations of equality and insight into shared values" (4). This is the "cosmopolitan vision" at work (4).

The young travelers in Eggers's novel are ill-prepared to go beyond stereo-typical binaries of West/East, self/other, us/them. Their innocence or ignorance make the "cosmopolitan" vision impossible so they frequently resort to relying on familiar stereotypes. Like most Western tourists on short-time trips, Will and Hand lack accurate information about the socio-economic realities of the peripheral countries they visit. As Will admits "I knew nothing, basically, but couldn't bear the fact that of the nations of the world, I had only ill formed collages of social studies textbooks and quickly-flipped travel magazines" (69). Obviously, these "collages" constructed out of textbook facts, stock images and TV news lack precision and veracity so that, paradoxically, all provincial, impoverished countries blur into one: "When I heard the word Portugal, I, thought of Madagascar, scrubby, dry, poor, the trees crowded with lemurs" (69). Morocco, which they imagined as similar to Tunisia, is surprisingly green but reminds them of the Balkans. Although they have never been to the Balkans, they have an idea of how the region must look like after the last Balkan War: "The crumbly buildings, the people with the earthtone garb, everyone walking around, the fires everywhere […], it looks like it was hit by tanks" (145). Not all first impressions are disappointing. Landing in Dakar, they react to the geographic otherness of Africa with youthful enthusiasm: "Did you feel that air? It's different. It's African air. It's like mixed with the sun more. Like our air isn't mixed as well with the sun. Here they mix it perfectly. The sun's in the wind, the sun's in your breaths" (43). However, quite soon, the initial thrill wears off and the foreign reality becomes too overwhelming: dirty children, beg-ging mothers, swindling taxi drivers and cheeky youngsters who demand money.

While the characters may delude themselves that they are not typical tourists, they act like them and are treated accordingly by the local people. Depending on

circumstances, the two friends become a laughing stock and/or a source of easy money. In Casablanca, the first man whom they talk to spins a tall tale about killer Tuaregs in the Sahara and then calls them "stupid" for believing in it; a moment later the taxi driver and his companion quarrel in French "on the best way to fleece [them]" (147). Similarly to most tourists, Will and Hand speak only English and a bit of French and the communication barrier makes them feel uncomfortable and sometimes also physically vulnerable in a foreign place. In Senegal, their rented car is stopped by the police for no apparent reason, later on they get chased, accosted by aggressive hash traffickers and repeatedly called "faggots." At times, they are even afraid for their lives. Singing travelers cheques on a taxi driving them to Dakar, Will makes sure "no one was watching, no one who would tell their buddies in Dakar that there were these tourists made of money […] who should be robbed and stabbed and later dragged around by their penises" (39). Some of these fears are certainly exaggerated but they reveal that the characters perceive African countries as unpredictable and potentially threatening to a white visitor. However, it is their money not their lives that the local people are after. Tellingly, one danger that is never mentioned in the narrative is the threat of a terrorist attack. This fact firmly situates the novel in a pre-9/11 world, in which American political, economic and military dominance has not yet been questioned. Will's and Hand's round-the-world trip is based on the premise that the globe is a friendly and safe place for young American backpackers.

In his 2011 essay on new developments in the post-9/11 American global novel, Bruce Robbins has identified two tropes for describing an incomprehensible foreign reality beyond USA: "Absurdistan" and "The Museum of the Misshappens" (1009). According to the former, "the foreign is the absurd or an inevitable object of satire," while the latter concept is based on representing foreign history as a succession of atrocities (1010). The narrator of *Velocity* resorts to both perspectives, depending upon the geographical region. As an American visiting post-colonial and post-Soviet states, Will depicts some aspects of reality as absurd and comic, other as grim or tragic. Why does a man at a bar in Tallin cries "Hail Hitler" when they enter? Why do people at a gas station in Latvia look menacing? In an internal dialogue with one of them, Will imagines the following explication: "We have been overrun for centuries. The Swedes, the Germans, the Russians. Then the Germans again, the Russians again. In the last thousand years, we have known twenty years of peace. You have no place to judge. You know nothing […]. You can't ever guess at life, at pain" (265). In the Baltic states, the burden of the past makes American tourists feel guilty about their privileged status; they are intruders with no right to judge the people whom history has treated so poorly.

Though Will complains about his ignorance of the world, he does nothing to learn more about the countries they visit. The only guidebook he and Hand buy cannot be considered a reliable source of information. According to the book, Estonians are so prosperous that everyone owns a cell phone, a surprising fact

which later on turns out to be a fabrication. Hand, who has imagined the country would look more like war-ruined Sarajevo, assumes they need to visit provincial areas in order to find the real, i.e. poor, Estonians to give them money. The idea that 'real' Estonians should be poor and live outside Tallin reveals that Will and Hand rely on stereotypes of Eastern European countries. It may also indicate that young Americans are in search of authenticity and believe – like many tourists – that 'real' life is to be found in provincial areas. In fact, their 'sightseeing' strategy – whether intentional or accidental – is based on avoiding typical tourist attractions such as resorts, museums or national parks. They usually rent a car and leave a major city by a randomly chosen route, which allows them to reach areas avoided by mass tourists. It is there that they try to get closer to the people by giving them money.

According to MacCannell, the "desire to share in the real life of the places visited, or at least to see that life as it is really lived" is an important component of modern tourist experience (96). Many visitors want to see "the back regions" (92) of the kitchens, workshops, and warehouses, realizing that "the front regions" (92) such as reception desks, parlors, and hotel lobbies offer but a version of foreign reality: standardized, sanitized and beautified. At the same time, tourists are criticized if they are not able to fraternize with the locals. In *Velocity* this criticism has been internalized as the narrator himself recognizes the impossibility of crossing certain boundaries between an outsider and a local:

> I wanted to meet them, would kill to meet them, would want to spend a day with them, a month, have them build a lean-to beside their house for us, share meals with us, show us the land, the care of their goats. But we wouldn't meet them because it was an invasion, and because I could not leap this gap. I could hope for good things for them, and tape a pouch of money to their wall, but I could not shake their hands, and could not show them my face. (120)

Will is thus fully aware that due to lack of time, his embarrassment, shame or reluctance to reveal his role as a benefactor, the contact between him and the local people is minimal or non-existent. Incapable of facing the poor as individuals, Will and Hand rarely pass money from hand to hand, developing instead an elaborate system of "textual mediations" (Brouillete 4). In a series of antics evocative of Tom Sawyer's and Huck Finn's adventures, they play the role of secret benefactors and enjoy themselves while drawing treasure maps, writing cryptic notes, attaching money to walls or domestic animals. Such activities allow them to "diffuse their guilt without confronting the poverty that is its cause" (Brouillette 5). For the readers, these incidents point to the characters' youthful naivete and playfulness.

Last but not least, though the pair wishes to project the image of benevolent do-gooders, they nevertheless tend to judge, offend, and humiliate the local people. One such unpleasant exchange, which betrays a lack of balance between the hosts

and the guests, takes place when they refuse money to a young man who insists on getting it:

> "You are not such the clever guy," said Hand. "Your brother he got all the brains, eh?" Hand was getting overconfident; the man knew no English, but continued nodding eagerly. "But you know why," Hand continued, "we gave to your brother three hundred of the dollars American? Because he didn't ask for it. You, you are crass – you know of this word, crass? – so no money you have coming." (118)

In this dialogue, the Senegalese teenager is reduced to the position of an arrogant and misbehaving child who needs to be taught a lesson. The black man remains silent while listening to the rant delivered by the rich white tourist. The fact that the boy even nods as if agreeing to what is being said about him, clearly points to his inferior position in this exchange. This scene – and several other similar incidents in the novel – reveal that sometimes tourists resort to colonial patterns of interaction in a post-colonial reality.

The double motivation for the trip, which is simultaneously a race with time and a charity project, creates an internal dilemma for Will and Hand who have to reconcile two distinct roles they are playing. On the one hand, Will and Hand are 'innocents abroad,' young bungling tourists who have ventured out into the wide world for the first time in their lives. They want their trip to be a unique and unforgettable experience, hence they crave for the excitement which comes with speed and spontaneity. On the other hand, they act as self-appointed benefactors "who have chosen money as their language of communication" (306) and deep down they expect that the act of giving alms will allow them to transcend barriers of race, class and culture. Paradoxically, money does not facilitate contacts with the locals but rather causes further moral dilemmas because it is impossible to bestow gifts on all those in need, nor is it possible to decide whose needs should have priority. As a result, Will's and Hand's "half-baked, ill executed scheme is neither genuine philanthropy nor self-indulgence," since hedonism is generally hard to reconcile with altruism (Varvogli 2012, 53). Towards the end of the story, the characters themselves begin to doubt their mission and its positive effects.

5. No Escape, or Traveling in the New Empire

What may Will's and Hand's journey tell us about the American experience of global travel in the late 1990s? The narrative confirms that airline connections and processes of globalization have changed the relationship between home and abroad, the familiar and the foreign. The British Empire has fallen only to be replaced with another, equally powerful, global empire whose products and values reach the most distant parts of the world. As Pico Iyer observes: "In the mid-19th century,

the British famously sent the Bible and Shakespeare and cricket round the world; now a more international kind of Empire is sending Madonna and the Simpsons and Brad Pitt" (n.p.). All the nightclubs or hotel bars visited by Will and Hand are designed to resemble typical American nightclubs and bars. The regulars and visitors alike listen to American music and gaze at posters from American movies, which decorate the walls. Young people in Morocco and Tallin speak English, know some American songs and bands, and are interested in American baseball or basketball players and dream of visiting New York.

The discovery that foreigners in distant parts of the world know more about American life and pop culture than vice versa is both surprising and frustrating. When Will and Hand pick up a hitchhiker in Estonia, they end up chatting with him about American rock bands: "That Taavi Mets seemed in every way someone we knew in high school was a natural thing and a reductive and unfortunate thing. Or maybe this was good. What did we want? We want the world smaller and bigger and just the same but advancing. We don't know what we want" (248). The narrator seems both pleased and troubled by the fact that the world has become more homogeneous, that young people in distant countries know so much about American bands, songs and celebrities. While familiarity is reassuring and it may give a traveler the much needed sense of home away from home, it may also be disappointing because it simultaneously robs him of the possibility to confront 'otherness' and to learn something about himself in the process.

The sense that the similarities outweigh the differences reaches its climax near the end of the trip. While driving through the Estonian forests, Will discovers with amazement that this landscape reminds him of Nebraska:

> Estonia could look like Nebraska and Nebraska could look like Kansas. Kansas like Morocco. Morocco like Arles. On and on. Growing up I thought all countries looked, were required to look, completely different – Congo was all jungle, robust and wet and green, Germany was all black forests, Russia was white, all of it Siberian. But every country now seemed to offer a little of every other country, and every given landscape, I finally realized, existed somewhere in the U.S. (231)

As a child, Will liked imaginary travels and, as the passage quoted above indicates, created his own version of Congo as a "jungle," Germany as "black" and Russia as "white." When these dream visions clash with reality, Will reaches a perplexing conclusion. Since every country has elements of other countries in it, there is no need to travel the world. Since every landscape can be found somewhere in the US, all you need to do is to return home. There is no escape from sameness; the 'otherness' of distant lands is illusionary. Caren Irr argues that such a blurring of distinctions between the landscapes of home and abroad distinguishes early 21st-century expatriate travel writings from its early 20th-century predecessors. In modernist literature, Americans paid attention to the "local particularities of

place and scene" in foreign countries because the hero could be "temporarily and therapeutically released" from his domestic constraints in an unfamiliar, alien landscape, far away from home. However, contemporary fiction portrays "a relatively continuous, tendentiously homogeneous world space" that emphasizes "the inescapability of the cultural matrix of origin" (666).

However, there is still one place in this global village which has preserved its unique, original status – the Great Pyramid of Giza, the last existing wonder of the ancient world, one of the world's most important tourist attractions, a monument that, despite centuries of archaeological research, still hides many secrets. While planning their trip, Will and Hand insist on ending it right there. They would bribe the guards and climb the pyramid at dawn to admire the sunrise from its top. The dream is as romantic as it is unrealistic as tourists are not allowed to climb the pyramid. Should it be read as an expression of anachronistic imperial fantasies in which Will and Hand symbolically conquer the most important monument of antiquity to manifest their power? Does the dream express longing for a symbolic climax of the whole adventure? Obviously, Will and Hand never reach Cairo and the Great Pyramid; they lack time and connecting flights. A trip based on the rules of chaos and coincidence cannot end with a grand gesture, planned in advance. Perhaps this failure suggests that glamour and exoticism of global travel is gone at the beginning of the 21st century. Words like 'excitement,' 'adventure,' and 'romance,' routinely associated with great journeys of the past, became empty signifiers used only by tour operators to sell package tours. Thus, the only conclusion to the whole enterprise is Will's parting remark: "It was a good week." Hand replies "I'm glad we did that" (306). Paradoxically, seeing the world changes nothing in the characters' lives. If some lessons have been learned, they are not spelt out to the readers, leaving them in doubt as to the sense of the whole adventure.

6. Conclusion

As a genre, travel writing has been traditionally indebted to both "rationalist" and "romanticist" aesthetics: "One narrative register inclines toward the acquisition of information, description of detail and an omniscient point of view; another favors sentiment, the minutia of human subjects and the dramas of subjective experience over the scientific certitude of informational orders" (Levin 2). In his study of the late 20th-century and early 21st-century Anglophone travel novel, Levin identifies a third trend – "literature of 'negation,'" manifested in the books which portray travel experiences in the globalized, decolonized world, dominated by mass culture and the logic of late capitalism (2). Though the young characters in contemporary adventure travel novels may possess some features of heroic explorers or introspective seekers, the resemblance is superficial. The young backpackers in Eggers's novel are neither passive tourists nor bona-fide world-explorers seeking authenticity or

beauty in 'off the beaten track' locations. Occasionally, they may approach either a tourist or a traveler *modus operandi* but their encounters with 'otherness' most often result in confusion, superficial admiration or naive amazement.

Neither is their trip a fulfillment of a dream about entering a new stage of life, where characters are transported from the mundane life in the USA to the exotic, magical lands beyond the ocean and then return home with "cultural capital" to build a bright future. Such a rhetoric of European travel as a realization of a dream and as a rite of passage was a staple of 19th-century and early 20th-century American travel books. However, in contemporary adventure narratives the completion of travel does not lead to identification with the social order and incorporation into the adult society on one's return. It seems self-fashioning through travel is problematic and limited in the era of globalization, and these novels "reveal a subculture of travel in which self-annihilation emerges as a viable alternative to re-incorporation into the social order" (Levin 3). This is indeed what happens to Will when he sets out on another journey and dies. The second, extended version of the novel reveals that he and Hand did not manage to settle down or start a meaningful relationship. According to Hamilton, both *Velocity* and several stories in the collection *How We Are Hungry* (2004) portray confused young Americans trying to find the meaning of life: "Eggers's fiction identifies the way that travel has become a lifeline for such characters, offering them a pre-packaged quest narrative ready for their digestion" (89). Yet if these characters are seekers, they do not really know what they are seeking. As a result, their quests remain inconclusive and do not bring personal transformation or spiritual enlightenment.

Traditionally, travel can also function as relief and escape, a thread which Eggers explores to some extent. When they set out, Will is trying to come to terms with the sudden death of Jack, his best friend. Images of Jack's mutilated face and body – his car was crushed by a speeding truck – continually haunt Will. Internal monologues reveal that he is unable to get out of a vicious circle of anger, grief and depression. The trope of travel as self-therapy is a fairly common motif in autobiographical travel writing at the turn of the 21st century, especially in women's memoirs (Rutkowska 100). However, such journeys are usually planned as solo ventures and require prolonged physical effort. Time is a necessary prerequisite for reflection and mental healing. The speedy trip across the globe in Eggers's novel is unlike any journey described in contemporary travel-as-therapy memoirs. It is the opposite of a solitary spiritual pilgrimage into oneself because, instead of facing and accepting the loss of a friend, Will simply wants to banish sad memories by living on the edge. Again, Eggers offers no conclusive evidence to prove that travel-as-therapy has been effective.

Is it the global reality at the turn of the 21st century that prevents the characters from successfully completing their quest? As Gower claims, Will and Hand "operate in a seemingly random universe that offers them little hope of control […]. Their general ignorance raises the possibility that a larger order could exist. That order might simply lie beyond the protagonists' ability to perceive it. So,

in a fairly conventional postmodern maneuver, the text holds out the possibility of closure even as, in practice, truth is always deferred, displaced, or otherwise denied" (31). *Velocity* shows that globalization may have erased some barriers between young people from distant parts of the globe but there are still political, economic and cultural borders which make some connections – both literal and metaphorical – impossible. Alternatively, the fault may be on the side of characters, representatives of Generation X, also referred to as the "Slacker Generation." The slacker manifests with his lifestyle that he "is only in the world but not a producer of it, that he is nomadically infringing on the system, not supporting it" (Sweet 161). In their travels, Will and Hand remain drifters, carried by randomly selected planes across the globe much like leaves carried by the gusts of wind. Their life decisions speak of a similar lack of control or commitment, they never consider settling down, looking for a stable employment, or starting a family. They prefer to opt out of the system, living for the moment.

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"Life Would Never Feel This Good Again": The Use of Pastiche in Edgar Wright's *The World's End* (2013)

Abstract: This article explores the ways in which pastiche, the past, and national identity are portrayed and navigated in the concluding film of Edgar Wright's *The Cornetto Trilogy*: *The World's End* (2013). By focusing on the relationship between the use of the past and pastiche, it will be considered how they are employed to negotiate the notion of national identity. Through its comedic strategies and tropes, the film rebels against a homogenised version of Englishness based on mythical assumptions of the past and striving toward perfection. The dissection of the cinematic structure of pastiche will reveal a temporal framework questioning contemporary narratives of national identity. Moreover, the exploration of nostalgia and the past as places of retreat, as well as pastiche as a device of comedic criticism, enable Wright to offer a portrait of Englishness as struggling to recover its identity amidst a turbulent and apocalyptic time.

Keywords: film studies, comedy, national identity, Englishness, nostalgia, pastiche

1. Introduction

British Cinema possesses a longstanding tradition of expressing national anxieties and fears through humour. From *Ealing Comedies* to *Monty Python's Flying Circus*, Peter Sellers to Catherine Tate, and Charles Chaplin to *The League* of *Gentlemen*, comedy has been able to encapsulate the nation's most ardent concerns, as well as to display a "structure of feeling" prevailing in a given society: "Comedy reflects what is accepted as a given within the larger discourses of a society at a particular time" (Heath 189). Heath also comments on British comedy's ability to deal with societal taboos and to reflect topics that generated a wide discussion in society. The 1990s and early 2000s cannot be understood without Richard Curtis's comedies,

whose middle-class version of what Englishness connoted interacted with political discourses about Cool Britannia and was commodified and exported around the globe. Comedy's potential to sketch a specific version of national identity poses some ideological dangers; telling audiences who is to be laughed at also delineates the boundaries of the community, establishing the distinction between the members and the outsiders. Andy Medhurst, building on Stuart Hall's conception of identity, equates nationalists' processes of delineating boundaries of belonging to those of comedy: "Nation construction is also involved in the business of identifying internal others, who are seen by those subscribing to an imagination of national community wedded to closed, fixed, impermeable versions of belonging" (28). Delineating boundaries of belonging can be used for purposes of national identity, oftentimes targeting minorities as the enemy within, but also, using the comedic potential to question the boundaries of the most hegemonic groups. Moreover, for humour to work and resonate with the audience, comedy films usually operate through reproducing culturally recognisable tropes and strategies: "Most comedy was domestically oriented, a factor which gave it a clear sense of Britishness and range of regional representation which did not predominate in other genres. More than any other genre, comedy put working-class characters on screen" (Street 71). It provides means for both questioning national identity and promoting social inclusion. While discussing *Little Britain*, one of Britain's most famous contemporary comedy hits, Sharon Lockyer discusses the tension between satire and representation, but she highlights the genre's ability to deal with challenging topics: "It is clear from the above discussion that television comedy has been, and continues to be, a significant discourse through which concerns, anxieties, and questions about class and class identities in Britain are discursively constructed and contested" (134). In the same manner, comedy has shown and articulated the UK's national concerns over the main identity clash between the British and the English.

One of the strategies through which comedy operates is pastiche. Commonly linked to the postmodern era, the use of pastiche has provoked deep-rooted scholarly discussion about its nature. Frederic Jameson famously defined pastiche as "blank parody, a statue with blind eyeballs," highlighting its differences from modernist parody: "It is a neutral practice of such mimicry, without any of parody's ulterior motives, amputated of the satiric impulse, devoid of laughter" (23). Linda Hutcheon saw, withal, pastiche as a postmodern parodical practice not dissimilar from parody: "repetition with critical distance that allows ironic signalling of difference at the very heart of similarity. In historiographic metafiction, in film, in painting, in music, and architecture, this parody paradoxically enacts both change and cultural continuity" (11). The use of pastiche provides, then, a space of cultural reflection for the analysis of the inner contradictions of concepts like national identity in negotiation with (global) capitalism. Richard Dyer has also explored how cinematic pastiches recycle cultural tropes that enable a critique but also a deeper understanding of both national identity and capitalism and their representation.

Dyer characterises pastiche as a "knowing form of the practice of imitation, which itself always holds us inexorably within the cultural perception of the real and also, and thereby, enables us to make a sense of the real" (2). Pastiche is, therefore, self-aware and completely intentional. In her analysis of Richard Linklater's filmography, Mary Harrod distinguishes between pastiche and nostalgia while also highlighting their interconnectedness: "Just as pastiche is not the same as nostalgia, and nostalgic art is in any case not always defined by a sense of loss, only under certain conditions does pastiche become melancholic" (36). This article intends to analyse the use of pastiche in Edgar Wright's *The World's End* (2013). The aim is to explore the features and use of pastiche as a parodical practice in the film, dissecting the cinematic pastiche structure and its significance, as well as its relationship to the film's depiction of the past and its reflections on the contemporary problems of national identity. Ultimately, it will be explored how Wright's use of pastiche enacts an affective satire that warns about the dangers of closed national identities while reclaiming the common cultural heritage. *The World's End* creates a structure of pastiche that articulates a criticism of the dominant narratives surrounding national identity while arguing to embrace a vision of a more culturally diverse nation.

Edgar Wright can be considered one of the most prolific English filmmakers of contemporary cinema. Known for his usual partnership with friends and protagonists Simon Pegg and Nick Frost, the director often uses pastiche as a resource for cracking the hegemonic codes and tropes of film genres, giving Hollywood conventions an English twist, and turning the heritage film tropes into comedic chaos. His *Cornetto Trilogy* typically depicts problems such as globalisation or the individual versus society. His films are filled with intertextual references and a characteristic sense of humour. While some scholarly work has dealt with Wright's oeuvre, the treatment of national identity has rarely been addressed. Samuel Amago describes Edgar Wright's cinematic juxtapositions and pastiche as used in *Hot Fuzz* (2007, the second film of the trilogy) in the following terms: "Surely there could be no serial murderer in Sandford! The film's originality lies in its highly self-conscious staging of Hollywood blockbuster movie tropes – the Western and the police action movie – within the context of small-town heritage England" (45). Thus, pastiche and ironic contrast are two characteristic filmic traits of Wright as an auteur. Wright's use of pastiche parallels Ingeborg Hoesterey's definition of cinematic pastiche: "Pastiche structuration in many contemporary films goes beyond mere quotation to comprise a complex medley and layering of different styles and motifs," it is a "practice of quotation and appropriation as well as filmic reflexivity as critique" (46). The *World's End* depicts a group of male protagonists in their forties, whose leader lives longing for the past, meeting up to relive a past achievement. The concern with identity as well as the use of Hollywood tropes such as the zombie invasion allow the film to reflect on the future of national identity, currently in a state between dissolution due to the pressures of globalisation and the permanent twisting claims by some nationalistic sectors of society.

2. The Old Familiar

Both Jameson and Hutcheon argued that pastiche and parody operate through mimicry for the purposes of questioning or depicting (depending on the reactionary or revolutionary potential of a particular piece) an established or traditional norm or principle (Hutcheon 11). In Edgar Wright's film, the principle under revision is the way myths related to Englishness have been narrated and, in this case, their contingency and unreliability. It is not unusual for national identities to rely upon myths as the core foundational narratives sustaining such identities. National myths sketch a portrait of the features and habits to which the nation aspires. The case of the UK does, however, involve more difficulties due to its geopolitical specificities. In containing the ontological duality between Englishness and Britishness, the UK has endured struggles over identity and national myths. As Krishan Kumar notes (118), Englishness could never be rooted in a reactive nationalism; a nationalism built on dialectical opposition to imperial power because it was the imperial power. Conversely, Englishness became the hegemonic identity of the British nation, and thus, it was able to reorientate its ontological core by dissolving it into Britishness and concealing its identity gaps with the subaltern implications that Britishness embodied: "English myths, I have argued, are rarely free-standing expressions of the national culture and the national history. They have an elaborate scaffolding of non-English structures, myths, and memories that have come from elsewhere, especially from the wider context in Britain" (Kumar 210–211). Therefore, the attribution and interpretation of Englishness (its myth, features, and national past) has been narrated, mainly, through the culture industry.

The *World's End* (2013) is structured through temporality. There is a clear framework behind the film's depiction of the past (paramount for the understanding of the film's aura), the present (in which the film develops), and the dystopian future that enthrones the ending. The criticism and portrayal of national identity is based on a combination of satire and affection and a juxtaposition of elements of Arthurian mythology with those of Cool Britannia. While the beginning represents past nostalgia in a sort of Cool Britannia manner, there is a mythical narrative paid tribute to and debunked throughout the whole film: the representation of the nation in medieval stories and Arthurian romance. Arthur Lindley discusses how some medieval films use temporalization and foundational myths to reflect on the present problems of a nation:

> Medieval films are rarely set in or primarily concerned with the Middle Ages. More usually, the medieval material is lifted out of its historical sequence to serve, in Barbara Tuchman's famous phrase, 'as a distant mirror of the present,' an analog or distancing device that enables us to see ourselves from a position of estrangement. (20)

The distancing device Lindley mentions is constructed in this film, I argue, through the combination of the comedic overtones and the elements of pastiche as a critical

device. Many elements in Wright's film are reminiscent of Arthurian or medieval films. First, the names of the protagonists are all resemblant to a feudal society and connote their function in that micro-community of their group in Newton Haven. Gary King wants to still be called 'The King,' as he remains the unofficial leader of the gang. We also have Andrew Knightley, the loyal and chivalrous best friend; Steven Prince, the alternative candidate to the throne; Peter Page, the meek and innocent friend. Not only are the protagonists' names conceptualised around the idea of medieval narratives, but the names of the pubs are, in the usual pub manner, also resemblant of medieval motifs (The Trusty Servant, The Good Companions, The Crossed Hands). Moreover, pub names are also indicative of the narrative stage that the characters are in, foreseeing the events. As such, Sam, Oliver's sister, appears at The Old Familiar; or Steve makes a hole in the wall with the car at The Hole in the Wall. Gary also mentions King Arthur when shaming Andy for not drinking, as he links manliness with alcohol intake and the mythical figure.

The very premise of the film is gestated around the idea of conquering the Golden Mile of pubs as if it were the Holy Grail while Gary, the king, was reuniting his Knights of the Round Table. Gary himself alludes to the mythical undertones of the event: "That night it was the site of a heroic quest. The aim? To conquer the Golden Mile. Twelve pubs along a legendary path of alcoholic indulgence" (Wright 00:02:11). The return to a supposedly mythical place after a while also contains echoes of Arthurian Romance, as Neil Archer points out:

> the film's interest in linking (the) King's literal and spiritual 'return' with the reformation both of a chivalric band and with a form of national recovery – as they unite to confront the deadening forces of the Network – distills the climactic narrative themes of Malory's Morte d'Arthur, which sees King Arthur returning to an England darkened by Mordred's rule. (Archer 210)

The heroes' attempt to relive their past quest can be better contextualised as the attempt to return to the mythical place Archer mentions. Notwithstanding, the depiction of the past is filtered through Gary's overly nostalgic and idealised perspective, evident from the outset of the film. The opening scenes' soundtrack dates back to a 1990s melody sampled from a children's TV show followed by a montage displaying the different characters at high school. This montage, uncoincidentally, looks similar to that of a high school John Hughes movie; and it is precisely this mixture between homage and fear of assimilation that Wright displays in The World's End. Moreover, it is also uncoincidental because the decade that Gary sets the audience in at the beginning (the 1990s) was also the decade when American investment in British film bloomed. Therefore, Hollywood tropes and genres that had been always found in British cinema multiplied: "Throughout the 1990s much of the indigenous production and distribution remained largely fragmented, made up of a large number of small independent production companies,

ill-equipped to compete with the US studios with their large capital base and their international marketing network" (Watson 82). Nevertheless, the American echoes are combined with the avowedly English aesthetic of such elements as The Primal Scream Soundtrack and the Sisters of Mercy t-shirt. Gary's narrative voiceover early on sets the idealistic, nostalgic tone: "Ever had one of those nights that starts out like any other but ends up being the best night of your life?" (Wright 0:00:43).

The mythical booze quest is uncompleted, ending the night in a moment of male comradeship bonded by a communal rite of passage. Gary, nonetheless, allows the memory to outline his life, nourishing his nostalgic and glorified identity, turning away from his adrift state in the present: "I remember sitting up there, blood on my knuckles, beer down my shirt, sick on my shoes, seeing the orange glow of a new dawn break and knowing in my heart, life would never feel this good again. And you know what? It never did" (Wright 00:03:51). There is a stark contrast between Gary's idealistically nostalgic words and his present situation, for when he is triumphant speech finishes, he is shown to be telling the story at an AA meeting. In the same manner, all the protagonists seem to have traded rebellious teenage alcoholism for middle-class ennui, an irrefutable sign that time has indeed passed, even if Gary refuses to admit so. Gary, as the main protagonist, seems to be immersed in a similar dynamic to that of his nation. Whereas Britain idealises past medieval glories and has integrated them into its identity through mythical narratives, Gary King idealises his past glories and has made them the core of his identity narrative through self-mythologisation. Thus, macro and micro-political scenarios are juxtaposed with different genres so as to elicit an emotional response from the audience, as Gary tries to elicit an emotional response from his mates. The elements that generate emotional patriotism are those widely recognised by the audiences as elements of national identity: pub crawls, bands, even the Arthurian mythology, or common knowledge about small towns.

The dull nature of the gang's daily routines allows Gary to convince them to reunite and spice up their blank existence. When they get to Newton Haven, they are surprised to acknowledge the lack of change in their hometown. Newton Haven remains just as the members of the gang remembered it: "It is not that the town's changed, we've changed" (Wright 00:35:09). It is this fact the one that initially articulates a feeling of distance from their former community. Adulthood is portrayed as a surrender to the hardships of capitalist society, but Gary's attitude of irrational evasion is not depicted in a flattering light either. However, when they start their mythical quest there comes the realisation that the town's apparent continuity merely hides mimicry and standardisation of what they considered the English way of life.

3. Remaking, Remodelling, Refurnishing

As mentioned before, the depiction of the past and its articulation through pastiche are built on the idea of the unreliability of English myths such as the Matter of

Britain, replicating Arthurian tropes but reterritorializing them into the story of a 40-year-old alcoholic who cannot seem to forget his 1990s teenage glory in his provincial hometown. The golden mythical Englishness based on Arthurian tropes and folk pub crawls seems outdated and unattainable, a distrustful memory tinted by idealisation and nostalgia. The outline of the present also deals with a myth affecting national identity: the Myth of Global Britain. Robert Saunders discusses the erasure of the imperial past through the myth of Global Britain: "a set of timeless national characteristics that required only liberation from 'Brussels' in order to flourish. As such, it rejected the importance of decolonization as a rupture, that might require a recasting of Britain's geopolitical ambitions or a more bounded, regional identity" (1160). Saunders argues that the use of the narrative of Britain's ruling market power as a trading giant, rather than an imperial nation, erases the more problematic past and absorbs all the subaltern traits of its richness into a hegemonic entity: "It cast the empire as an expression of British power, rather than as its source; as something Britain did, not as something Britain was (and is no longer)" (1160). This entity is, usually, Englishness, whose ontological foundation (namely the distinctive beliefs and values that constitute its identity and way of existence) gets altered.

Although Saunders alludes to the use of such a narrative for ideological purposes during Brexit, its employment begins in the 1990s. When he was appointed PM and during his campaign, Tony Blair set up a discourse about the diversity and challenges of a younger and more open nation. The neoliberal era was at its height, and Blair was able to configure an attractive narrative that commodified diversity as an inspiring trait for a generation of young, aspiring, middle-class professionals. The myth was based upon a conception of the nation as superficially diverse and full of advanced, working professionals, who found in the economic regime their passion and would see their aspirations fulfilled. However, *The World's End* debunks all these conceptions. The foundations of the 1990s New Labour did not align with what was delivered by the time Tory Britain came to power in the 2010s. All protagonists, except for Simon, have supposedly middle-class jobs and live in suburban areas. All protagonists appear to be stagnant and immersed in a state of semi-bourgeois slumber. The parodical elements reside in the portrait of the members of the gang as archetypical of midlife masculinity: the ruthless capitalist, the exhausted father, the one dating a woman half his age, etc. The options to solve the masculine midlife crisis are either to embrace passive obedience to capitalist inertia or go for an irrational retreat into a nostalgic past. However, both options are proven ineffective throughout the film. There is an implicit parallelism between the Matter of Britain and Global Britain as two marketed narratives whose defenders idealise so as to keep a mythologised image of the nation. These two moments in time offered the promise of a better future, subsequently attempting to refurnish the nation while concealing the disappointment about its drift. The questioning of the myth of Global Britain brings about more implications once the gang returns

to their hometown, Newton Haven. It also enables the reproduction of another cinematic pastiche structure with a critical aim. If the opening scenes presented tropes and motifs of Arthurian romance and medieval films to demystify nostalgic idealisations of the English past, once the pub crawl starts the firm reproduces motifs and tropes from another genre: horror.

Ever since they return to their hometown, the protagonists detect something eerie, experiencing an uncanny feeling that is attributed to the fact that the town has barely changed, and yet, there is something strange in it. All the pubs seem carefully curated to appear just as the gang remembered them and yet, it feels like a replica, untrue. The display of the aura-less scenery is remindful of Jean Baudrillard's conception of *simulation*: "Simulation is no longer that of a territory, a referential being, or a substance. It is the generation by models of a real without origin or reality: hyperreal. The territory no longer precedes the map, nor does it survive it" (1). As it will be certified later, the territory does not survive, or, at least, does not survive in the terms that it was conceived. Baudrillard alludes to the fact that the models of the real are not harboured in the reality; the artificial reproduction has dissolved the aura, and a sense of uniqueness can no longer be found or traced to a distinctive origin. It is this quality that defines the English pubs; they have been based upon what is already fictive, an untrustworthy memory that the grown-up version of the protagonists confronts. It raises a critique of the standardisation of pubs in the country, which have been turned into franchises with no distinctive traits. Similarly, they soon discover that most of the inhabitants of the town have also been turned into robotic, blue-blooded aliens whose purpose is to convert more adepts. These robotic aliens are called "blanks." It is at this point when the tropes and motifs of the different variations of the horror genre are reproduced. The film pays homage to horror films, especially *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (dir. Don Siegel, 1956). McDonald and Johnson dwell on the specificities of Don Siegel's film: "it relies on the concept of *infiltration* rather than invasion per se, and this coupling of a threat to the social and corporeal taps into the vulnerability of the social order" (130, original emphasis). Likewise, the citizens of Newton Haven have been invaded by a group of aliens that infiltrate society and attest to the vulnerability of the nation's current state, as well as the precarity of Englishness as a coherent, homogenising national narrative. The narrative choices of characterisation of the villain display echoes of fears and anxiety over globalisation. The alien group is called "the Network" and their purpose is "peaceful indoctrination and connectivity" (Wright 01:28:38). The film raises concerns about how such connectivity erases the individual and unique traits characteristic of national identity. Moreover, it also emphasises the potential dangers both of the Global Britain myth and the homogenising neoliberal discourse of Tory Britain. Uncoincidentally, the colour of the beheaded robots' blood is blue, the Conservative Party's emblematic colour. In one of the opening scenes, Peter Page is shown reading the Daily Express where the headline says: "New Survey suggests happier Britain" (Wright 00:05:23). Not only

does it deconstruct that vision of the anesthetised happiness supposedly produced by capitalistic prosperity, but it also reveals the inner kinetics that sustains such a system: the annihilation of individualistic or non-hegemonic traits.

Furthermore, when the protagonists finally face the Network's representative (played by legendary British actor Bill Nighy) the speech employed seems very resemblant to the neoliberal rhetoric present in the country since the beginning of the Thatcher years. Confronted by Gary, Andy, and Steve, the Network replies that their aim to perform in Newton Haven is: "to enable your full potential" (Wright 01:28:12). Leaving no room for imperfection, the aliens intend to replace all the inhabitants with perfect replicas. Thomas Curran and Andrew P. Hill discuss the neoliberal discourse that highlights perfection as an exchange value. "Neoliberalism and its doctrine of meritocracy have combined to shape a culture in which everybody is expected to perfect themselves and their lifestyles by striving to meet unrealistic achievement standards" (413). The striving for perfection, homogenisation, and invasion are elements of the neoliberal credo problematised in the film. As it usually occurs with invasion or infiltration motifs, there is usually a reductive group of rebellious fighters that refuse to comply with the outsider's power, out of morally aspirational and brave reasons. In this case, however, the parodical element of pastiche once again twists the motif. Gary King does not comply with the Network because he disagrees with them or questions their effectiveness but because of what Archer calls "constructive irresponsibility": "their objections are not the stuff of reasoned debate but rather an outpouring of energized anti-rationality" (204). Archer links such irrationality with that exhibited by Brexit enablers: "the people of England – are just too stubborn and idiotic to follow programmes for social organization. 'We just don't like being told what to do,' whines King, three years before the Conservative MP Michael Gove, on the referendum campaign trail for Leave, made a similar statement" (204). Archer is quick to categorise the claim as: "tuned in, uncertainly, to populist ideas of anti-global nationalism" (204). However irrational the claim might be, Gary King's rebelliousness is against a unifying idea of civic Englishness based upon perfection.

The aim revealed by the Network's may be linked with Michel Foucault's ideas about technology, power, and the neoliberal regime. Foucault distinguished between the technologies of power, through which domination would be achieved, and technologies of the self, less coercive and more persuasive: "which permit individuals to effect by their own means or with the help of others a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being, to transform I themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection" (18). Therefore, Gary King is not rebelling against democracy but against Tory Britain and a unifying, reductive, and perfected version of national identity. The film presents Tory Britain as the logical evolution following what Cool Britannia and New Labour so eagerly promoted. The nation's self-image is examined, just like Gary's, as they both live in an idealised narrative of the past.

However, Gary's mates are initially depicted as dead as the blue-blooded robots that replace the inhabitants of New Haven, also trapped in their dull existences. While the film's tone may appear contradictory, it is precisely the articulation of such contradiction through contrasts that provides it with substance and significance. Gary's version of the past and his identity seem unreliable, idealised, and overly nostalgic. In the same manner, the present version of a single, unified national identity is depicted as threatening and problematic, censoring the subaltern details and various specificities that compose national identity. The film employs constant juxtapositions of intertextual references and genres-based pastiche to articulate a defense of the heterogeneity and diversity that compose English national identity.

4. Back to the Dark Ages

As it has been analysed so far, *The World's End* problematises both the populist patriotic and the neoliberal narratives of Englishness, proving them disturbing and inefficient. If the depiction of the past and the Arthurian motifs that conceived the folk version of Englishness appear unreliable, the homogeneous, neoliberal present is represented as an alienating threat. The last scenes of the film make use of the elements from the apocalyptic genre to once more exploit its parodical potential.

The cinematic pastiche structure is articulated through the juxtaposition of different genres and tropes that constitute a temporal structure. The opening scenes depict the past through Gary's eyes, and everything related to it imitates Arthurian romance. Gary is shown to be a careless, irresponsible, and unreliable individual, and so is his vision. The national identity concocted through Gary's vision is one clinging to the idealised past, attached to an unreliable memory that has faded away. The present acquires tropes and motifs of both invasion and action movies, depicting a town taken by robotic aliens with the purpose of homogenising the population through technology and interconnectivity. This part of the film problematises and questions the neoliberal narratives of the nation, invading all areas and trying to colonise all aspects of society. Although some scholars may suggest that the film endorses populists' narratives, both the overly nostalgic and folkloric vision of the past and the dull, alienating present are identified as incomplete and dangerous. In the face of a divisive situation, the film conjures an alternative vision for the future. The challenges faced and undergone by the United Kingdom in terms of identity are no novelty, for the nation has been adrift since the loss of its hegemonic power. As Ismail Adam Patel notes: "Since the collapse of the empire, Britishness has struggled to anchor significance and is in freefall" (109). Already in 2002, Tom Nairn spoke of national collapse and advocated for a reinvention of England "not belatedly, but in a sense *posthumously* […], it may indeed be essential, to save Britain" (38, original emphasis). Nairn, alongside Anderson, had attributed the nation's stagnant advances to a firm class-structured society where

the aristocracy and the bourgeoisie clang to hegemonic narratives and dogmas and implemented gradual social changes that prevented a workers' revolution. In view of the freefall Patel mentions, the film reproduces Nairn's arguments of the need for a collapse to reinvent national identity, where all the non-hegemonic components can be fitted into. Gary's refusal to comply with the technological demands of the Net provokes a massive explosion and a subsequent blackout, where everything fades into black.

No longer is the narration voiced by Gary, but this time Andy is the one in charge of revealing the protagonists' endings to the audience. The final traveling shots depict Andy by the fire telling the story to a diegetic audience. The aesthetics of the scene are resemblant to those of apocalyptic fiction: scarcity, coldness, and an overall crisis. The reluctant heroes have defeated the Net and the blanks, but they all are suffering the consequences of the collapse: "When the network went down, it triggered a pulse that wiped out all our technology and sent us here, back to the Dark Ages" (Wright 01:39:32). Andy's mention of the Dark Ages is no coincidence. The term is both charged with pejorative meaning connoting a time of struggle and it is also a symbol for the nation; since the flourishing of the Anglo-Saxons started with their victories over the Vikings and the several alliances that unified the kingdoms. Janet L. Nelson, while criticising the incompleteness of the term, references the two perspectives on it mentioned above: "The Dark Ages became the sign of Anglo-Saxon exceptionalism […]. The term has always tended either to be mythicised into an ideal 'heroic age,' or, more often, imagined as archaic, primitive" (195–197). In the same manner, the final scenes of *The World's End* reflect an analogous contrast. On the one hand, the collapse is deemed necessary for an identity narrative that was no longer sustainable, and a return to its roots has brought peace and advantages: "Some people say it was better when they were here. I can see that. It isn't easy now, but it is simpler" (Wright 01:39:55). The ironic significance is that the gang and the community have returned to a reimagination of medieval times without, however, a nation glorified or mythical quests. On the other hand, the blackout and the deprivation from technology have impoverished the country and left it isolated from the rest of the world: "Nobody could be sure how many we lost, because we never heard from the rest of the world again. Things aren't connected like they used to be. Everyone got cut off" (Wright 01:39:53). Moreover, the use of post-apocalyptic tropes allows the film to dwell on national division. If during the film there was a clear war between those converted by the Network and the protagonists, it is no longer the case.

Steve Crawford notes an affinity between some tropes of apocalyptic/ post-apocalyptic fiction and the right-wing narratives: "potential comparisons between post-apocalyptic narratives and contemporary right-wing rhetoric. When considering borders in these works, the distinction is a familiar one to us: between the human and the other" (16). Once again, the tropes are reversed and allow the film to debunk such similarities. Initially, the blanks are shown to be vilified by the

rest of the population with graffiti saying, "Blanks go home" (Wright 01:40:43).
The blanks are represented as the immigrants, the other vilified. These scenes alert
the audience to the effects that national divisions and fractures may cause. In con-
trast, inclusion is emphasised by showing Gary traveling alongside young blanks
in perfect harmony. In addition, Gary King exemplifies the inner contradiction at
the heart of the nation, unable to move forward without some identity narratives
but incapable of demystifying them. This time, however, Gary has been able to
include diverse components in his new narrative and he is ready to move forward.

5. Conclusion

Edgar Wright's *The World's End* articulates a cinematic structure of pastiche by
juxtaposing characteristics of different genres and different tropes. Such structure is
turned into a device of parodic and critical reflection that examines and debunks some
of the current narratives concerning national identity and problematises its use. The
combination of elements from different genres may appear random at first, but it is
masterfully structured to reappropriate British cinema and to elicit laughter while also
eliciting a critique. Hence, the mimicry of recognisable elements, such as quests, action
fights, or conquering aliens, seeks to generate identification within the audiences, for
these elements are mostly transcribed from Hollywood but translated into a national
context. However, British horror film has a solid tradition, in which tropes like invaders
or zombies are also notorious and used to denounce the sociopolitical situation; from
Wolf Rilla's *Village of the Damned* (1960) to Danny Boyle's *28 Days Later* (2002).
The reinterpretation of such elements within a national context is both parodic of the
Hollywood cliches and of English habits. Nevertheless, it also provides the film with
a space for reflection through laughter, vindicating the diversity of national identity.
The cinematic structure of pastiche is put together by confronting two main mythical
narratives about national identity: the nostalgic return to a supposedly glorious past
and the neoliberal narrative of homogenisation and manufactured Englishness.
The structure of the film is designed with the purpose of embracing contradictions.
Moreover, the contrast within the temporal framework contributes to enhancing the
pastiche-related qualities since it allows for the contrasting of the different eras as well
as the juxtaposition of the elements from different styles and genres.

   The past is often seen as an unreliable narrative that shapes the identity of
the present. It is depicted through a mixture of Arthurian and medieval romance
and Hollywood tropes of teenage flicks. The combination of these elements, Hol-
lywood, and Englishness, achieves what Hutcheon saw as signalling difference at
the very heart of similarity. It advocates both for a change in identity narratives
and for the cultural continuity of the elements distinctive of national identity. Gary
King, the nostalgic protagonist, represents a part of the nation that believes that
the grass was always greener in the past. The character epitomises why a return

to the past is always going to be both callous and impossible, for the past consists of unreliable memories and denies the nation the ability to change. Likewise, the portrayal of the present is demystified. The vision of a happy, middle-class Britain is shown to be dull and alienating. Globalisation has brought improvements in connectivity that have not been translated into actual closeness but have meant the erasure of all the subaltern or transgressive aspects of national identity, including the faulty, rebellious, anarchic ones – aspects that Gary King embodies. Faced with the dilemma of two controversial national narratives that have been hegemonic in the last decades, the film both warns against and embraces collapse, offering a new re-imagination. By borrowing the aesthetic from post-apocalyptic narratives, the future is portrayed as both regressive to simpler times and as an opportunity to articulate a more inclusive and heterogenous vision of national identity. Far from being depicted as ideal, the future furthers the contrasts and contradictions that are emphasised throughout the film. The *World's End* employs a comedic tone and a pastiche structure whose layering is designed to reproduce and question the ruling narratives concerning national identity. Through the juxtaposition and combination of different elements, the film meditates on the country's relation to its past and future, contraposing the problems and struggles over the conception of the nation. The cinematic pastiche highlights that same contradiction, for it sets forth how a unifying vision can be built from difference and diversity. Pastiche here is not a unidimensional sign of postmodern decadence but a critical device to cogitate on the future of the nation. Wright offers no definitive solution, but his film surely considers the dangers of clinging to a single, uniform vision of national identity.

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Plural Identity and Migrant Communities in Guy Gunaratne's *In Our Mad and Furious City* (2018)

Abstract: This paper explores the complexity of plural identities of the characters living within the sociocultural space of a London community, who define themselves as being from "here" and "elsewhere," in Guy Gunaratne's *In Our Mad and Furious City* (2018). First-generation and second-generation migrants, originally from Ireland, Pakistan, Jamaica, as well as other nations referred to in the novel, give life to the community at the Ends, a housing estate in Northwest London. On the one hand, in this suburban space, fury, neglect and powerlessness are deeply felt by the locals. However, the community also becomes the location for the creation of social habits, cultural patterns, forms of expression and group unity through the interaction and shared experiences of the locals. This dichotomy reveals underlying anxieties that raise questions about otherness, marginalisation and belonging, and how these aspects intersect in the construction of cultural identity. As characters struggle for meaning against a "cancel culture," their individual experiences are what constitutes their plural and fluid identities.

Keywords: literature, migrants, community, identity, plural identities, cancel culture

1. Introduction

Guy Gunaratne's debut novel, *In Our Mad and Furious City* (2018) explores sociocultural practices and manifestations, such as football, slang, body language or grime, through which identity at the Ends, a housing estate in Northwest London, is constructed. It focuses on the community as the place where "the past and the present are inextricably interrelated" (Schülting, para. 5). This is reflected through the characters' shared experience as Londoners, but also as the first and second generation migrants. However, as has been argued by Lawrence Grossberg, it is

not only the past and present which contribute to the formation of identity, but also, as Stuart Hall contends, characters' subjectivity: the location and position from which they act. It is here, in the community, that locals negotiate who they are, where they belong and how they define themselves, against the backdrop of a society that pushes them to the periphery, socially, culturally and geographically. The recurring analogies to parenthood and mongrel offspring highlight characters' subjectivity as Londoners whose motherland appears to want to cancel them and insists on relegating them to the margins. Cancel culture emerged as a way of blocking celebrities or public figures who made racist, homophobic, misogynistic, or other socially and politically controversial claims. However, and as has been argued by Aja Romano, it recently has "spun out of control and become a senseless form of social media mob rule" (para. 4). In the analysis of Gunaratne's narrative, I am using the concept of cancel culture to define how migrants' experience and their voices are "cancelled" and kept from resonating beyond the Estate.

Grossberg claims that "identity has been – and may still be – the site around which people are struggling" despite the "significant advances that such struggles enabled over the past decades" (87). The question of identity and identification is important in Gunaratne's novel, as the characters struggle to make sense of who they are and where they belong, Thus, a number of theories on how identity is constituted may be used in the analysis of the migrant community at the Ends. These theories include Bhabha's "figure of *hybridity*" (Grossberg 91) and the anthropological term of liminality (an in-between cultural space), Spivak's reflections on the subaltern and the representation of identity as resistance, the notions of othering and orientalism as advanced by Said, Rushdie's use of the term "mongrelisation" and Michael Dash's claims on creolisation, as they all prove relevant to this discussion. However, by exploring and interpreting the characters, as portrayed by Gunaratne, I will argue in particular that they are subjects of "unfinished histories" (Gilroy) whose fluid identity "is never complete, always in process, and always constituted within, not outside representation" (Hall 1990, 222).

Identity at the Ends is manifested in the daily social practices of the protagonists of Gunaratne's sonorous narrative which allows the reader to hear the language of the streets. Grime, slang, jogging, footie, and other forms of social expression and interaction the boys engage in, are all important binding factors in the construction of their unfinished history and of their plural identities. What defines them is not that they are different, or other, as migrant children from different cultural and ethnic origins, but how they position themselves within their space of representation and with whom they interact. In this sense, the shaping of identity emerges as a process of ongoing negotiation with the self, the other, the community, and the nation. As Grossberg argues,

> According to Gilroy (1992), such identifications or affiliations, rather than identities, are ways of belonging. They are the positions which define us spatially in relation

to others, as entangled and separated. Similarly, Eric Michaels (1994) argued that people's access to knowledge is determined in part by the places – of conception, birth, death and residence – from and by which they speak, for one is always speaking for and from a specific geography of such places. That is, subjectivity describes the points of attachment from which one experiences the world. (15)

Along the lines of Grossberg's claims, Gunaratne's narrative depicts the interaction between characters of different ethnic origins within a shared socio-political and geographical space and how this results in the emergence of new forms of expression. The creation of a bond, despite ethnic, religious or linguistic differences, is essential for survival against the violence and neglect felt by those at the Estate. Taking into consideration the current and ongoing debates on cultural identity as an unfinished and transformative process, in this paper I aim to analyse the migrant experience of the periphery in *In Our Mad and Furious City.* My main argument is that the representation of the first and second generation migrant subjects in contemporary Anglophone literature is essential to an intersectional approach to identity. In my analysis, cultural identity is perceived as changeable and fluid through the character subjectivity and the experience of time and space. The novel also questions representation and agency: how individuals voice their experiences and the outreach it gets within and beyond the community. Furthermore, the narrative suggests a "reconceptualization – thinking it in its new, displaced or decentred position within the paradigm" (Hall 2011,3) to escape the dangers of a cancel culture that silences and seeks to remove from history the individuals labelled as "the other," "different" or coming from "elsewhere."

2. The Author and His Novel

Guy Gunaratne is a journalist, filmmaker and writer of Sri-Lankan origin who was born in Neasden, Northwest London and currently lives in Sweden. In 2011, he directed and produced a documentary *The Truth That Wasn't There* on post-civil war Sri-Lanka. *In Our Mad and Furious City,* published in 2018, is his first novel, long listed for the Man Booker Prize, and awarded the Jhalak Prize and the International Dylan Thomas Award. It is a novel of two generations of migrants. The younger generation, represented by Selvon, Ardan and Yusuf, who grew up in "drab and broke-down" London Stones Estate (19), and the older generation are their parents who speak of their experience of moving from their homelands. Caroline (Ardan's mother) fled Belfast during the Troubles (the Northern Ireland Conflict) of the late 1900s and Nelson, Selvon's father who migrated from Montserrat (Caribbean) to land in Ladbroke Grove during the Notting Hill Race riots of the 1950s.

Even though Yusuf's parents are characters in the novel, Gunaratne does not provide a first-person account of their experience in the narrative. Selvon, Ardan

and Yusuf, along with their siblings, friends and neighbours were born and raised surrounded by the violence of the city, growing up with it "like an older brother" (2). Despite having "elsewhere in [their] blood" the city where they were born, and the community they have grown up in are also important locations in the construction of their identities. It is through the community that new forms of language and communication have developed, new social and cultural practices, such as grime, have emerged, resulting in a sense of kin between residents of the Ends, the place they all call home. This "double consciousness" (a term used by Du Bois in *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903) to describe the experience of African Americans being both "African" and "American") is also lived by the characters in the novel; being British, but also black, Muslim, poor and marginalised, results in this "double consciousness" that intensifies the fact that they are not easily allowed into mainstream society and, therefore, remain at the margins of the city. However, their identities are shaped by much more than their ethnic origin and British nationality, as I will continue to discuss.

According to Elleke Boehmer, "postcolonial literatures (anglophone, francophone, lusophone, etc.) proliferate and change constantly, even as postcolonial critical studies in the academy continue to grow apace" (214). Through second and by now third generation migrant experience, literature in English moves into a new ground, shedding light on the many ethnic, immigrant and other minority groups and the complex task of negotiating identity in 21st-century societies. English literature has not only metamorphosed in language, content and form since the initial days of postcolonial narratives by Salman Rushdie, Chinua Achebe, Zadie Smith or Wole Soyinka, but is an important vehicle of agency, representative of the multiplicity of voices that characterise the world today. Again, to quote Boehmer, "what began in postcolonial writing as the creolization of the English language has become a process of mass literary transplantation, disaggregation, and cross-fertilization" (226), decentralising perspectives, struggling against a cancel culture and contributing to the decolonial debate.

Gunaratne situates his novel on the margins of the city, the place where he himself grew up. The novel does not romanticise the notions of belonging and longing for the homeland, nor is it aiming for a reclaiming or a rewriting of history from a postcolonial perspective. His "coarser kind of narrative" (144) is, rather, a critique of the colonial and neo-colonial power structures that continue to govern how migrant populations are treated in the UK. More relevant to a 21st century context, the novel might be interpreted as a warning against a cancel culture by redefining the "conditions of existence of a cultural politics designed to challenge, resist and where possible to transform the dominant regimes of representation" (Hall 1996, 442). To cancel migrant subjects is to neglect their right to representation on their own terms, labelling and stereotyping them and, consequently, silencing them. To quote Thomas Chatterton Williams:

Black people have always been cancelled and shut out, or have been on the edge of being cancelled. I'm the son of a Black man who was born in the segregated South. I'm very familiar with the kind of cancel culture that he had to pass through and the ways in which he experienced exactly what they're talking about. But what bothers me and worries me is that the world that we're creating and that's enabled by the Twitter reality that takes hold is one in which we're not actually trying to make everybody as secure as the straight white man who used to be super-secure. We're actually trying to make everybody as insecure as my father used to be, but everybody can catch it now. (n.p.)

In other words, it is not only racial difference that is subjected to a politics of segregation and cancellation, but also ethnic, religious, gender, class and sexual difference (Hall 1996, 444). Agency and the opportunity to voice experience through narrative broaden perspectives and contribute to a more inclusive understanding of historical experience, culture and society against this emergent cancel culture.

3. Migrant Communities at Stones Estate

The Ends, four tower blocks of a housing estate that overlook the street and square, is home to the different ethnic groups which moved to Britain during the 20th century. The different nationalities and ethnicities referred in the novel are Pakistani, Jamaican, Nigerian, Bengali, Ghanaian, South Indian, Somali, Serbian, Polish, Albanian, Chinese, Turk and Irish. According to the narrator, the housing Estate hosts "a young nation of mongrels" and breeds "Proper Commonwealth Kids" (3) who contrast with "those private-school boys from Belmont and Mill Hill" they would spy on and "wonder, how would it have felt to come from the same story? To have been moulded out of one thing and not of many?" (3–4). Yusuf, Ardan and Selvon, as other members of the community of the Ends, identify with one another for they have "richer colours and ancient callings to hear" (3). This complexity of identity as being constructed on multiple "colours" and shaped by a plurality of "callings" rejects the essentialism of racial or ethnic categories. As such,

> In common sense language, identification is constructed on the back of a recognition of some common origin or shared characteristics with another person or group, or with an ideal, and with the natural closure of solidarity and allegiance established on this foundation. In contrast with the 'naturalism' of this definition, the discursive approach sees identification as a construction, a process never completed – always 'in process.' (Hall 2011, 3)

What Williams calls "the fiction of race" is a man-made construction which governs how we see and relate to each other. He goes on to argue "people will always

look different from each other in ways we can't control. What we can control is what we allow ourselves to make of those differences" (26). Contrasted with these differences and categorisations, Selvon, Ardan and Yusuf and others at The Ends, find forms of identification in a common story of coming from "elsewhere."

Using an intersectional approach, marginalisation of individuals at the housing estate occurs because of several factors, including ethnicity, race, class and religion. Intersectionality, a term first used by legal scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989 to describe how oppression is shaped through the intersection of different and unique factors and experiences, may help to understand how the characters make sense of their existence as marginal within the broader paradigm of a dominant society. They carry the burden of their parents' histories of violence, poverty and exile on which their cultural narratives are built, and from which they cannot fully detach themselves in the eyes of society. There is a danger in acknowledging identity as shaped primarily by ethnicity and common ancestry, since it assumes that "enunciation is always produced within codes which have a history, a position within the discursive formations of a specific place and time" (Hall 1996, 446). Their identities are also built on the present: on their dreams of escaping life at the Estate where the "common thread was footie, Estate, and the ill fit [they] felt against the rest of the world" (Gunaratne 67) and against the socio-political geography of the city and nation which is now their motherland.

Contemporary society has become a 'messy' subject, in the sense that it is difficult to define culture and identity as a whole because of the many groups that therein co-exist. Furthermore, culture and identity are in the process of constant change and need to be understood from "their own location within, and implication with, the formations of modern power" (Grossberg 3). Identity is a complex issue and should not be perceived as static or fixed, tied to a specified history or location, as scholars in the field of cultural studies, such as Hall, Gilroy and Grossberg, have been arguing. Therefore, it is worth questioning, as Grossberg does, "to what extent can a society continue to exist without a common, albeit constantly rearticulated and negotiated, culture? What are the conditions through which people can belong to a common collective without becoming representatives of a single definition?" (3). As depicted by Gunaratne, identity in the locals at the Estate is shaped and reshaped through the intersection of multiple experiences that result in plural and fluid cultural identities.

4. Spatial Representation in the Narrative

Gunaratne's narrative is carefully structured. Its layout and mapping of spaces involve a constant return to places which gradually become familiar, allowing the reader to experience life in the Estate, to walk the streets, enter the towers, step into the football pitch, and inhabit the city, either from the characters' perspective or

through a bystander position. The narrative also exposes a hotchpotch of practices, patterns, habits and social interactions between individuals of the community at the Estate. This arrangement of the narrative is meant to represent the housing estate but, according to critic Parul Sehgal, it does not reflect real life at the margins of the city. As argued by Sehgal, "Gunaratne is a very composed, very careful writer. Although interested in the clashing voices of London, of homegrown Grime music, the book itself is as tidy and contrived as a suburb" – the violence and rowdiness of the city is "only rarely staged or subverted" (n.p.). The narrative itself functions as a map of the Estate as the reader follows the characters through August Road, High Road, Market Street leading up to the Square, into the Mosque, on bus rides, into West block, East block, South block, and North block. Market Street leads to the Estate Towers, located at the End and known as The Ends. Spatially, the Estate is located at the end of the road, and although it may allude to a dead end, it is possible to reformulate the narrative and imagine a way out of the Ends. The protagonists in the story, whether from a postcolonial, migrant or diasporic context "now demand the prerogative of 'redreaming' their own lands" (Boehmer 236) and literature provides a space for this representation.

The narrative is organised into three main chapters: "I Mongrel," "II Brother" and "III Blood;" those containing 10 subchapters: Estate, Square, Ends, Fanatic, Shame, Defilement, Freedom, Faces, Fury, Echoes. These are words that are embedded in the grammar and vocabulary at the Estate. My interpretation of these chapter and subchapter titles is that "Mongrel" represents the idea of both belonging and non-belonging. Yusuf, Selvon and Ardan having been born 'here,' are from Britain, but since their parents had immigrated to London from the Caribbean, Ireland and Pakistan, they are also from elsewhere. They carry with them this sense of displacement and the label of minority, black, Muslim, migrant as opposed to white, English or British, as Williams states, "a drop of black blood makes a person black because they are disqualified from being white" (20). "Brother" stands for what unites individuals within the community, regardless of the categorisations of otherness. The narrative, through its chapter titles and content, allows access to the signs, thoughts, and patterns that Boehmer describes as that which gives this ecosystem life and meaning. "Blood" signals the anger and violence which the characters witness and are heavily burdened with. As second-generation migrants, growing up in a housing Estate, it is difficult for them to rid themselves of this stigma, since they are systemically labelled as marginal and violent, regardless of their actions. The opening of the novel reveals the fact that "a black boy had killed an off-duty soldier" in the neighbourhood (1). This event echoes the killing of an off-duty British army soldier, Lee Rigby, in 2013. The shocking effect of this murder, as the first-person plural voice explains, was that "he had just rolled out of the same school gates as us. He had the same trainers we wore. Spoke the same road slang we used. The blood was not what shocked us. For us it was his face like a mirror, reflecting our own confused and frightened hearts" (2). The danger of

this kind of association, made through racial classifications, or by defining people according to where they live, is that it leads to the creation of stereotypes and consequently to systemic racism.

5. Voice in the Narrative and the Uses of Grime

Each of the characters takes turns speaking in the subchapters: Selvon, Ardan, Yusuf, from the younger generation; Caroline and Nelson from the parents' generation. The only exception to this rotation of voices occurs in "Defilement," where Irfan, Yusuf's older brother, is given a voice in this one chapter. It is in this chapter that the reader learns of the 'defilement' Irfan engages in and which leads to the story's climax and some tragic events. The initial and final chapters have no name titles; nevertheless, from the unfolding of the story, the reader assumes the narrator in the last chapter is Yusuf. The first chapter differs from the rest, since the narrator speaks in a plural voice, "We were London's scowling youth. As siblings of rage we never meant to stray beyond the street" (2). This plural or choral voice, which echoes the shared experience of the members of the community at the Ends, has become an increasingly popular form in contemporary literature, according to author TaraShea Nesbit (2014). The use of the first-person plural reminds "the reader of the constructed nature of the story, and by extension, the constructed nature of history. One cannot get narratively comfortable reading these differentiated first-person plural stories: an experience is at first created, and then, as if on a chalkboard, erased, and rewritten by another [woman's] experience" (Nesbit n.p.). Along these lines, Gunaratne's narrative paves the way for a plural history and common struggle through one voice, a form of empowerment of the group identity, which then seems to disperse into separate voices and the construction of individual experiences throughout the narrative. The chapters through which the characters' experiences are voiced decrease in size as we move towards the end of the book, reflecting the idea that "[h]istory [he said] is not a circle but a spiral of violent rhymes" (285). In a somewhat circular motion, the chapters lead to the end or the Ends, back to the collective subject, or perhaps, to the "single story" as defined by Chimamanda Adichie: "So that is how to create a single story, show a people as one thing, as only one thing, over and over again, and that is what they become" (n.p.).

The first-person plural also raises social awareness which, as Nesbitt points out, plays a critical role in narratives of contemporary experience:

> However, this new iteration is perhaps a move away from the character-driven plot of the individual "I." How does one create one's self in relation to the groups we are a part of? Where do our loyalties lie? What gets lost, and what is gained by group membership? This sense of social responsibility and selfhood, as well as uncertainty about how to act on such feelings, describes, in part, our contemporary moment. (n.p.)

The choral nature of the narrative is further emphasised by the language – verbal and non-verbal – common and comprehensible to all who inhabit the Estate and which we as readers get accustomed to hearing and visualising throughout the story. As Gunaratne says in an interview, "Yes, voice was how this novel shaped itself. Writing this book often felt like an act of listening" (qtd. in Leszkiewicz n.p.) although he was not necessarily looking for authenticity, because, as he argues, it "is one of those words that needs challenging. Authenticity in relation to whom? It's a word that needs to be released. I wasn't so concerned as to whether or not the voices measured up to "accuracy." They needed to sound true to the place" (qtd. in Leszkiewicz n.p.).

The oral quality of the novel challenges literary conventions and the dichotomy between oral and written traditions by fusing both. As Teresa Gibert states, "current trends in literary studies are revising and questioning these distinct dichotomies, pointing out that they constitute overly simple categorizations of complex phenomena" (1). In this sense, the aim of the narrative is to decolonise migrant experience through a representation of the self and the community and to deepen the understanding of identity and belonging among London migrants. As Gunaratne himself states,

> there is an interplay between each voice that I was more interested in. The dialects have their own logical internality which then ripple and echo against each other. A word or a phrase used by one voice is then passed over to another, across generations in some cases, which I hope imbues a sense of an inherited multiplicity. That feels like London to me, a place of many voices, many threads of story, all tangled together. (qtd. in Leszkiewicz n.p.).

The narrative also provides detailed and highly visual descriptions of the body language at the Ends, for instance: "I walk up to the bredda and give him a side-hug and palm on the back. Yoos nods, drops his shoulder and lets his bag slip to the floor" (40), "Yoos rubs his face with his sleeve and spits to his side" (42). Along with the body language, throughout the narrative, the reader is also invited into the verbal language of the Ends, becoming familiar with the slang and dialect, which Gunaratne calls "road language" and which forge new spaces of representation in English and in English speaking countries. A new vocabulary and grammar emerge on the streets of London, so that the reader gets the words "Bloods," "Ends," "ennet," "tho," "bredda," "fam," to "clock" someone, among others. Gunaratne further mixes orality and writing through his use of colloquial and slang terms such as, "yuno," "dussed out," "suttan" and "nuttan," and uses the grammar of the Ends in his narration with phrases such as "he don't" and "go footy," immersing the reader in day-to-day life and language at the Estate. The metamorphosis of the English language, its manifestation in speech and music and the spaces of representation that have opened in recent decades, along with the efforts to decolonise and decentralize culture, reflect the shifts in thought.

However, according to book critic Parul Sehgal, "there's plenty of London slang, to be sure, but it's all garnish; the real sounds and deeper rhythms of the novel aren't snatched from the streets but from literature. This book was incubated in a library" (n.p.). In order words, even though the novel situates itself in the streets and echoes its sounds, it keeps its distance from the 'grime' and remains too 'clean' for the reality it is portraying. Nevertheless, the narrative may be seen as a positive depiction of the London suburban scene which leads me to the analysis of Grime in the novel, and to the question of how it contributes to voicing experience and agency at the Estate. Gunaratne claims "you can't write about London today without mentioning Grime. It is so much part of the rhythm of the place. Grime music feels like it plays with rhythm of the city" (2020). Grime plays an important part in Gunaratne's novel since it contributes to the changing and fluid nature of language, and places further emphasis on orality as a form of expression among immigrant groups. Music plays an important role in shaping identity, since it is a means of "self-creation that was formed by the endless pressures of economic exploitation, political racism, displacement, and exile" (Gilroy 115) as well as how migrants of different ethnic origins are "reinventing their own ethnicity" (Sollors 19; qtd. in Gilroy 115). According to Paul Gilroy, "How are we to think critically about artistic products and aesthetic codes that, although they may be traced back to one distant location, have been somehow changed either by the passage of time or by their displacement, relocation, or dissemination through wider networks of communication and cultural change?" (111). Just like language, football and other cultural practices that involve social interaction, Grime is important in the formation and understanding of identity, marginalisation and oppression at the Estate.

Grime is a music genre that "celebrates a heritage and sound that's very specific to inner city London where it was born" (Waters) and several of its artists, hits and samples of lyrics are referred to in the novel. Grime is a very new form of urban electronic music with vocals. It started off as underground and was only played in pirate radio stations. As the name reflects, it originated in London's more "grimy" areas, and the lyrics denounce the chaos and violence of society. Grime, as described by Mykaell Riley, director of the Black Music Research Unit at the University of Westminster, like punk in the 70s, "caused disruption by energising a disillusioned section of youth culture" (qtd. in Holden n.p.). Riley explains how grime challenges contemporary music genres by refusing to do things in a "conventional way." Thus, a new tradition is born through the subversion and reinvention of other pre-existing forms, such as garage and jungle. To quote Gilroy:

> Today, this involves the difficult task of striving to comprehend the re-production of cultural traditions not in the unproblematic transmission of a fixed essence through time but in the breaks and interruptions that suggest that the invocation of tradition may itself be a distinct, though covert, response to the destabilizing flux of the postcontemporary world. New "traditions" are invented in the jaws of modern

experience, and new conceptions of modernity are produced in the long shadow of our enduring tradition. (126)

The references to grime are relevant to this discussion since the music contributes to the construction of socio-cultural identity and identification at the Ends. Ardan, an aspiring rapper spends his days writing bars in his head and "spitting rhymes" (163). As he claims, "We're the ones that started it, the music. Moulded it, not them. Grime is our own thing" (163). He considers The Ends, Neasden, Brooklyn or the Bronx as places of pain, but also places which make rappers such as himself. He hears the noise of the streets, the sound of the buses, the sirens, the doors, the leaves, the birds, Selvon's running, the "morning tempo" (21) and these help him compose his music and write his lyrics. Grime is integral to Ardan's identity, since it gives him a sense of agency. It connects him to a wider group of artists who share his experience and like him can voice it through Grime. When the reader is first introduced to his character, he talks about other boys who are "darked out every day for their hair or their accent and whatever shit music they listen to" only to add "I listen to grime so I'm fine" (23). Grime gives him the security he needs and keeps alive his dream of one day leaving the Estate.

Grime is considered to be a specifically British genre of urban music, which is described by Julie Adenuga, an Apple Music Beats 1 presenter, "as more than just songs that you can buy on iTunes," since it represents a lifestyle. With references to Grime music, lyrics, and artists such as Wiley, Bashy, D Double E, Ghetts, Akala and Kano, "Original street fighters, road rappers, champions" (58), and to their tunes "BowE3" or "How we livin" as examples from the text, grime is equally "celebrated" as part of the oral and musical culture in Northwest London. For, as Ardan says, "Even if the beats are angry, under skuddy verses, it's the same noise as on road. Eskibeat, ennet" (59), Eskibeat being a trademark style artist Wiley created and produced in the early 2000s. Through grime, rappers, or aspiring artists such as Ardan, express or voice the anger and the noise that characterises life at the Ends. And the reader grows accustomed to hearing their narrative and understanding the importance of orality as an identifying factor. To quote Omar Shahid and Robbie Wojciechowski, "grime MCs aren't recalling tranquillity, so much as expressing the everyday hardship, angst and struggle of the inner city, they speak with that spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings" (n.p.). To Ardan "thoughts mingle with rhymes […] Rhymes mingle with the scene [he] see[s] in front of [him]" (164), and he transforms these thoughts and images into rhyme and words:

Like I live like a roach like daily
See me coming, but you don't want wanna see me
Acting like you in a ring with a misfit but I'm gifted
And you dumb to my struggle so I'll just list it
Road dons always jacking me, burka always buoying me. (168)

Grime, a musical form that emerges through cross-mingling and the intersection of styles may also be understood as an example of creolization, if we consider Rushdie's definition, included in his 1990 essay "In Good Faith", for grime "celebrates hybridity, impurity, intermingling, the transformation that comes of new and unexpected combinations of human beings, cultures, ideas, politics, movies, songs" (394). Creolization was and still is a common theory used to describe the emergence of new linguistic and social manifestations born of cultural fusions. It once provided the adequate setting, the "context which, despite its brutal beginnings, permits the artist to rethink old hierarchies, to experience an openness to influences from everywhere, and to explore the emergence of new forms of hybridity" (Dash 51–52). However, speaking of the second-generation and by now third-generation migrant experience, are we still comfortable to use terminology and concepts such as "creole," "creolisation," "mongrel" and "mongrelisation"? The plurality of voices representative of the many ethnic, racial, minority or immigrant groups and the complex task of negotiating identity in the postmodern western society should no longer be looked at through the lens of creolisation, mongrelisation, hybridity, or through the dichotomy of black or white. To quote Williams on race,

> Today that impulse towards unquestioning inclusiveness (as a fully justifiable and admirable reaction to *exclusiveness*) is weakening – our words, however flawed, for people like my daughter – and even myself – gradually drifting out of the vernacular wherever it is terms like "Negro" go to retire. The reason has less to do with black people suddenly forgetting their paradoxical origins, than with the idea of whiteness, and mixed-race non-blackness, continually growing, however reluctantly, less exclusive. With greater than a third of the American population now reporting at least one family member of a different race, and with, since the year 2000, the option of selecting any combination of races on the census form, the very idea of black Americans as a fundamentally mongrel population is fraying at the seams. (n.p.; original emphasis)

As the world changes and power dynamics shift, discourses also change, evolve and adapt. Understanding cultural identity as unfinished helps in moving away from essentialist attitudes which bind migrant subjects to ethnicity, race, location and history.

6. Understanding Community in the Novel

In Our Mad and Furious City addresses the issue of migrant identity from various spatial perspectives and through transformations over time. With its focus on a multicultural community of the first and second generation migrants, it explores the context of displacement and deterritorialization which, as described by Arjun

Appadurai, "is one of the central forces of the modern world, since it brings labouring populations into the lower class sectors and spaces of relatively wealthy societies, while sometimes creating exaggerated and intensified senses of criticism or attachment to politics in the home-state" (301). Central to the novel are issues of religious fundamentalism, as Yusuf is caught in the politics of succession as Imam in the local Muslim community, following his father's death. Important here is the representation of hatred and right-wing extremism threatening migrants at the Estate, because of (though not only) the death of the off-duty soldier.

The narrative constructs the community as the location for the production of identity and identification, the place characters are able to call home. However, it also deconstructs this idealisation of the community, reminding the locals not only of its fragile nature, but also of its potential meaninglessness, as an abstract and changeable concept, permeable to abuse and violence. While communities may emerge in the 'host' country, which has by now become a home country as well, to quote Jeremy Harding, there is still a fear that welcoming migrants will result in "cities eroded by poverty and profit; the cantonisation of neighbourhoods; urban and rural societies doubly fractured by ethnicity and class" (qtd. in Margaronis n.p.). This widespread fear of the foreign – be it in terms of nationality, culture, religion, or skin colour – becomes inexplicably linked to racism, xenophobia and hatred that all lead to marginalisation, crime, rioting, blood and dangerous essentialist attitudes towards race and identity.

According to Kimberlé Crenshaw, "without frames that allow us to see how social problems impact all the members of a targeted group, many will fall through the cracks of our movements, left to suffer in virtual isolation" (n.p.). The same can be said of literature and cultural theory which focuses on the experience of migrants inhabiting the periphery from a social, geographical and political perspective. The danger of identification because of neglect and marginalisation results in a cancel culture that isolates and silences those who are different because of their race, ethnicity or religion. Each of the characters feel this in their own way. As Nelson claims, Britain was "nothing like the postcard image, never" – instead of the city he dreamed of as the place to make a better life for himself, he "was faced with bad air, grey sky and a mad, hustling whirl of a place. Everybody poor, everybody ailing" (73). The city described in this novel is a mad, furious, mean city (adjectives the narrator(s) keep(s) using), a city which keeps migrant groups hidden away beneath towers of estate housing, refusing to acknowledge them as its own. It is important to position characters and understand them according to the intersection of the different aspects that define them, that create or eliminate opportunities for them within power structures. As Crenshaw argues, "socially marginalised people all over the world were facing all kinds of dilemmas and challenges as a consequence of intersectionality, intersections of race and gender, heterosexism, transphobia, xenophobia, ableism, all of these social dynamics come together and create challenges that are sometimes quite unique" (n.p.).

7. Conclusion

Earlier in my discussion, I referred to footie as a social practice which members of the community at Stones Estate engaged in, and the football pitch as the site for interaction. At a specific moment in the narrative, from a bird's eye view, characters from different points of origin and with different stories gravitate towards one specific place – the football pitch. This image reflects Anderson's allusion to 'constellations' when he analyses the construction of nation and nationhood as "cultural artefacts of a particular kind" (123) which can be crafted and recrafted according to different and varying "political and ideological constellations" (124). In the parallel way, critic Shadhiha Bari's uses the same metaphor in her review in *The Guardian* when she writes, "a group of young men gather for a game of football in a dilapidated outdoor sports court, the players taking their places, emerging like a constellation of stars" (n.p.). This constellation that gathers and intersects in a fenced off court is a metaphor for the community composed of different ethnicities, histories, individual stories and experiences that have gravitated in the same direction.

Decolonisation, migration and the emergence of migrant communities in Britain (as well as other nations) have resulted in forging new practices and expressions. These enunciations have occupied and redefined spaces, categorisations and the dichotomies of centre and periphery, mainstream and marginal, "here" and "elsewhere." Gunaratne's *In our Mad and Furious City* voices the experience of migrants, first and second generation, of different origins, who have moved to Britain, to inhabit the housing estates of Northwest London. In these communities, dialects, social practices, music and lifestyles emerge through group identification with one another and with the spaces they have created. These cultural products are all representations and expressions of plural and fluid identities – of how they are shaped, reshaped and expressed within the community and against a power structure of a dominant society.

Rushdie suggests a tradition besides the national, racial history that any writer from elsewhere can write about: "It is the culture and political history of the phenomenon of migration, displacement, life in a minority group" (20) and this gives writers (and those subjects represented in the narratives) the possibility of being part of two or more histories, since, as Rushdie states, "one of the more pleasant freedoms of the literary migrant [is] to be able to choose his parents" (21). But moving forward in time and thought, beyond Rushdie's rationale, there is no need to "choose parents" since, this exercise is reductive and insists on divisions which should no longer be attributed such importance. As Williams defends, "at times, in a twist that I am sure is unusual for an African-American, race recedes from my lived experience and becomes something entirely cerebral, abstract" (n.p.). Yusuf, Ardan and Selvon, born and raised in the Stone housing Estate, see themselves as mongrels, raised in a society which, because of their skin colour, ethnicity or place of origin, neglects them, refuses to accept them, silences, cancels and pushes

them to the periphery. Even though they were born and raised in the UK, they feel the neglect and hence they state: "if this Mother Country is a bitch then I will be a bastard son" (235). But should this be an acceptable conclusion to come to for these second-generation migrants?

Gunaratne was born in London but is of Sri-Lankan origin. However, he says he is a British writer. Like his characters, he also grew up in Northwest London, as the son of a migrant who moved to Britain in the 1950s. And he claims the novel is about London and not about ethnicity, migration or diaspora. This seems to contradict his aims as a novelist writing about migrant communities and plural identities, since he is essentially defining himself according to one specific place and culture. But the novel and the themes it is dealing with are rather more complex, as I have argued. It aims at deconstructing representations of identity as linked to a unique point of origin or history or defined by a fixed location. Through his narrative, Gunaratne attempts to show how intersectionality helps to perceive identity as plural and changeable, its complexity reflecting individual experience. As the narrator in the final subchapter says, "there are parts of this city that create the form of a person, moulds them with its hard wisdom and distant cruelty" (287). But this form is fluid and perceived differently according to the location where the many aspects of cultural identity intersect.

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"Fearing your own queer self": Depictions of Diasporic Queer Experience in Grace Lau's Poetry

Abstract: The intersection of migrant and queer experiences constitutes one of the core motifs of *The Language We Were Never Taught to Speak* (2021), the debut poetry collection by Grace Lau, a Chinese Canadian poet. Through a series of interconnected vignettes, Lau provides an insight into her experiences as both a Canadian and a Chinese immigrant, a lesbian and a failed model child, an aficionado of traditional Chinese culture and an enthusiast of contemporary Western popular culture. The mosaic of experiences illustrates the complexity and intricacy of the author's identity/ies. Through the analysis of three poems ("The Levity," "The Lies That Bind," and "My Grief Is a Winter"), supported with references to the theoretical works on Asian North American writing and queer Asian migrant experience, the article discusses Lau's depictions of queerness and her experiences as a Chinese immigrant in relation to the Canadian LGBTQ+ community, white queer liberalism, and internal politics of the Chinese diaspora. It proposes to see Lau's poetry as an example of biomythography, a form of autobiographical writing showcasing how encounters with different communities shape the subject. In the process of disentangling her complex ties with the Chinese diaspora, the white Canadian LGBTQ+ community and her own family, Lau reveals the impact of her interactions with those different groups as she can finally express her identity as a queer Chinese Canadian.

Keywords: Chinese Canadian poetry, queerness, Grace Lau, diasporic queer experience, diasporic literature, Asian Canadian literature

1. Introduction

In her debut collection entitled *The Language We Were Never Taught to Speak* (2021), Grace Lau, a Hong-Kong-born Chinese Canadian poet, explores the complexity and intricacy of diasporic identity/ies. Using her own experiences as

a blueprint, Lau constructs a narrative that showcases tensions marring the Asian diasporic existence: being stuck between the perpetual foreigner stereotype and the model minority myth; circulating between being accepted and marked as the Other by the host culture; switching between embracing and distancing oneself from one's diasporic community; and migrating between appreciation for traditional culture of the homeland and affection for contemporary Western popular culture. In her poetry, Lau does not shy away from criticizing Canadian multiculturalism, revealing how easily it can be used to control, exploit and commodify immigrants and their cultures. Simultaneously, she delves into the Chinese diaspora and describes its ails: the slow spread of internalised prejudices, the rigidity of convictions, and the paradoxical rejection of those who are different. It is the last of those problems that seems to affect Lau the most – as a queer woman she has experienced it first-hand.

Lau's poetry can be described as an example of auto/biographical writing (Davis 2). As Larissa Lai notes, in the context of diasporic literature, "[w]riting the self, in autobiographies and memoirs, is often seen as a way to 'break the silence,' especially for marginalized subjects and those people who have been rendered invisible through racist exclusion from Canadian cultural life" (37). This strategy of breaking the silence functions as a mode of empowerment, "a first step in liberating subjects excluded from official histories" (Lai 38), allowing the marginalized to articulate their own history on their own terms and shape their own selves. As a result, Asian Canadian autobiographical writing is often described as autoethnographic. According to Deborah Reed-Danahay, autoethnography allows the author to combine "both a postmodern ethnography, in which the realist conventions and objective observer position of standard ethnography have been called into question, and a postmodern autobiography, in which the notion of the coherent, individual self has been similarly called into question"; hence, the term refers "to the ethnography of one's own group or to autobiographical writing that has ethnographic interest" (2). As Mary Louise Pratt notes, autoethnographic writing is a form of resistance used by the colonized when interacting with the colonizer (7). However, Eleanor Ty and Christl Verduyn highlight that as autoethnography relies on the concept of an authentic self/other, it may be problematic "when applied to a heterogenous group of pan-Asian Canadians who are, in many ways, still in the formative stages of developing hybridized group identities" (4). Similarly, Lai notes that self-writing autobiography can, in fact, deepen oppression – the combination of generic conventions, racist stereotypes and "the problem of articulation itself" often plaguing this type of writing "may have the unfortunate effect of retrospectively folding the marginalized subject back into a discourse of national belonging, while actually covering over the violent history of exclusion it was supposed to have expiated" (37).

It is difficult to deny the autobiographical and ethnographic character of Lau's poetry as, in her works, she intertwines her personal experiences of queerness with historical instances of discrimination in Canada in an attempt to understand the

reasons for her complicated relationship with both the Chinese diaspora and the white queer community. However, the references Lau makes seem to be suspended between factual and fictional – her recollections and remarks, whether referring to her own childhood experiences or the construction of the Canadian Pacific Railway, are shaped by her own feelings and emotions. This feature of poetry – resting in the space "between facts and emotional truth" (Miller) and "telling a different kind of truth that supersedes the factual truth" (Thomson) – allows Lau to create her own myths, enabling her to discuss the official history and focus on the marginalised, hidden-from-view histories.[1] This fragmentation manifests itself throughout the whole collection. Each poem presents a different fragment of Lau's identity/ies, whether concerning her connection to the Chinese diaspora in Canada, her complicated relationship with Canadian society in the context of its colonial history, her own status as a post-colonial migrant subject, her queerness or her understanding of her own family history.

The mixture of autobiographical and mythologized representations of events, combined with the exploration of one's identities, points to Lau's poetry being biomythogoraphic in nature. The term "biomythography," coined by Audre Lorde in *Zami: A New Spelling of My Name* (1982),[2] can be defined as "a deliberate amalgamation of autobiographical fact and mythically resonant fiction" (Henke 103) that allows the author to discuss how social and cultural oppression can be internalised as a part of their identity. As a result, it becomes "a method of self-exploration […] not limited to a genre whose validity depends on the authenticity of the content of the narration" (Calle 163). However, biomythography allows Lau not only to move beyond the constrains of autobiography but also to explore the richness and complexity of her subjectivity (Calle 163). Furthermore, the form of biomythography makes it possible to showcase the ways in which different communities, experiences and individuals have shaped the subject (Floyd-Thomas and Gillman 185). This aspect corresponds to Paul Ricoeur's perception of identity as partially "bound up in identification with significant others" (qtd. in Davis 9); as a result, the subject engaging in life-writing finds themselves located within the context of a specific community, such as family or ethnic or racial group (Davis 11).

The aim of this article is to discuss Lau's depictions of queerness and her attempts at connecting them with her experiences as a Chinese immigrant and her relationship with the Canadian LGBTQ+ community, white queer liberalism, and the Chinese diaspora. The analysis of three poems – "The Levity," "The Lies That Bind," and "My Grief Is a Winter" – provides an insight into Lau's reflections on practices of queerness propagated by the white LGBTQ+ community and explores guilt and fear of rejection that accompany her during her interactions with the members of the Chinese diaspora. Furthermore, by approaching Lau's poetry as an example of biomythography, the article addresses the interconnection between personal experiences of the author and experiences of the others.

2. Being Queer and Coloured: The Reality of Queer Migrant Experience

The beginnings of Gay and Lesbian Liberation Movement (GLLM) in Canada can be traced back to the establishment of the first gay organizations in 1964 in Vancouver (Warner 57). Although strongly influenced by its American counterpart, Canadian GLLM is rooted in three events: the introduction of Bill C-150, the decentralization of political system, and the rise of Quebec nationalism (Adam 12). While Bill C-150 decriminalized homosexual acts between consenting adults (Adam 12),[3] the decentralisation of Canadian political system and the rise of Quebec nationalism contributed to the creation of culture of compromise where organizations fighting for gay and lesbian liberation could thrive (Adam 18).

GLLM gained momentum in August 1971 when the first protests for gay rights took place in Ottawa and Vancouver. Just a year later, the first Pride was organized in Toronto, a result of cooperation between the University of Toronto and local gay and lesbian associations (Rau). The 1970s also witnessed the emergence of *The Body Politics* – the first Canadian gay publication – and two legislative changes: in 1977 Quebec prohibited discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and the newly amended Canadian Immigration Act lifted the ban on the immigration of gay men (Rau). The adoption of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms in 1982 further facilitated the fight for sexual minority rights. When Section 15 of the Charter came into effect in 1985, it guaranteed "right to the equal protection and equal benefit to the law without discrimination and, in particular, without discrimination based on race, national or ethnic origin, colour, religion, sex, age or mental or physical disability" (Rau). Although Section 15 did not include sexual orientation, it made challenging discriminatory legislation easier and more successful (Lahey 28). Further legislative changes occurred in the 1990s, the most important of which was the 1995 ruling of the Supreme Court which stated that "Section 15 of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms […] included sexual orientation as prohibited basis of discrimination" (Rau).

At the beginning of the 21st century LGBTQ+ activists focused on the issue of same-sex marriage and trans rights. Their efforts on the first front culminated in the introduction of Bill C-38 on 20 July 2005 which allowed same-sex marriage (Rau). In 2017, the Canadian Human Rights Act was amended "to include gender identity and gender expression as prohibited grounds of discrimination," providing legal protection to trans and gender-fluid people (Rau). In 2018, all Canadian provinces made changing gender on official documents easier and in December 2021 the Canadian government banned conversion therapy (Rau). Although it cannot be denied that GLLM significantly contributed to the fight for equal rights, it also, paradoxically, contributed to the exclusion of queer people of colour. David Eng (4) notes that Western queer activists create a monolithic queer identity which, apart from promoting visibility and outness, leads to the erasure of racialized people. Eng calls this reinforcement of colonial and imperial discourses "queer liberalism"

and claims that it "works to oppose a politics of intersectionality, resisting any acknowledgement of the ways in which sexuality and race are constituted in relation to one another, each often serving to articulate, subsume, and frame the other's legibility in the social domain" (4).

Therefore, through the erasure of people of colour, queer liberalism places whiteness at the centre of queer experience (Eng 4). Shweta Adur illustrates this erasure on the example of queer South Asians in the United States:

> Queer South Asian lives mirrored all the barriers their heterosexual counterparts encountered, except unlike the latter they could not turn to the unconditional support of their family and seek refuge in their co-ethnic communities. On the other hand, unlike white Americans, their integration into the broader LGBT movement was limited. At the interpersonal level, they experienced racism and at the structural level, laws that impacted them were not central to white LGBT movement. (307)

While Adur focuses on the experiences of queer South Asians in the United States, the observations can also be applied in the Canadian context. Similarly, Stephen Hong Sohn notes that, as a result of cultural, structural and legislative oppressive forces, queer Asian North Americans face social death, a type of alienation which disconnects them from both ascending and descending generations (5). In fact, Nate Fuks and colleagues note that queer immigrants in Canada experience "homophobia and racism (a) within interpersonal relationships, (b) in the LGBT community, (c) in their respective ethnic communities, (d) in social service settings, and (e) during the immigration process" (299). This sense of exclusion is extended to other aspects of queer culture, such as media representation or categories of aesthetics and attractiveness (Sohn 5).

Those issues are addressed by Lau in her poetry. The feeling of being excluded from the LGBTQ+ community experienced by queer Asian immigrants stems not only from the lack of positive representation in media, but also from cultural differences concerning practices of performing queerness, including the act of coming out. Western LGBTQ+ culture is characterised by strong emphasis on individualism which contrasts with collectivism and familialism of Asian cultures (Zhu et al. 346). The responsibility to maintain face – to take "performed or planned actions to preserve the reputation and dignity of individuals and the family" (Zhu et al. 346) – forces many queer Asian North Americans to be more clandestine in expressing their queerness, or even conceal their sexual orientation in order to avoid familial repercussions (Sohn 5). This notion clashes with Western practices of performing queerness, especially with that of coming out. The process of coming out is "a key tactic of LGBTQ+ visibility politics" and "an integral aspect of Western LGBTQ+ identity formation" (Patel 24); therefore, in order to be seen as "authentically" queer, an individual needs to "come out of the closet." This notion creates a dichotomy in which coming out is associated with the sense of pride and increased visibility and

the decision to hide one's sexuality – with shame and self-imposed invisibility. As Michelle Tam claims, such a binary depiction of performing queerness

> assumes that refusal or failure to disclose one's identity will result in isolation and shame, and that although coming out to the self, family or others may raise fears of loss or isolation, one should do it anyway in order to be able to live a supposed authentic life of visibility and recognition. This binary illustrates the racialization embedded within the logics of queer liberalism and modern sexuality when it does not take into account the needs of queer diasporic people for social and economic survival as members of culturally and ethnically marginalized communities. (11–12)

Therefore, the process of coming out is often seen by queer Asian migrants as a threat to their sense of belonging: while being open about their sexual orientation may alienate them from their families and diasporic communities providing "necessary comforts within a racist society" (Lai 114), the decision to conceal it often leads to their exclusion from queer communities and spaces.

In fact, many queer Asian North Americans live "double lives – the racial versus the sexual. Many live in silence and secrecy, and often find themselves in situations where they are forced to compromise the multiplicity of their identities" (Sohn 6). This sentiment is reflected in "The Levity," a poem in which Lau describes her experiences of coming out to her mother:

> There really is no good time
> to tell your mother
> you've never liked boys.
>
> Closets do not relinquish
> their grips easily
> but I have always instinctively
> hated dresses.
> So when my mother asked me
> about boyfriends   again
> as we wrenched the tails
> from luscious prawns
> and cracked their shells with our teeth,
> I offered the truth.
>
> She said loneliness is better
> than sin. (44)

In the first three stanzas of the poem Lau describes how, despite her fears, she decides to finally tell her mother the truth about her sexual orientation. The idea of "coming

out" seems to be understood by Lau as a way of freeing herself from both societal and familial gender expectations. Her perception of coming out is, therefore, rooted in Western practices of performing queerness as exemplified by the direct reference to a closet, which has been described by Eve Kosofsky Sedwick as "the defining structure for gay oppression in this century" (68). This is further reflected by the personification of the closet in the second stanza – the iron grip that the closet has on Lau highlights both its oppressive character and the difficulty of freeing oneself from its confines. Lau also ties compulsory heterosexuality with the traditional understanding of gender norms – she uses the word "dresses" as a symbolic representation of patriarchal and heteronormative understanding of femininity and notes her instinctual hatred for such a perception. Furthermore, the reference to dresses reinforces the focus on the oppressive nature of closets, this time through comparing different social constraints that are imposed on women. As Lau depicts a wardrobe filled with dresses that leaves no room for other type of clothing, she underlines that in such an environment there is no place for alternative ways of expressing one's true self.

While Lau claims that there is no good time to come out to one's parents, her own decision to do so seems to be motivated by frustration she feels upon being asked the same question over and over again as reflected by the visual break in the line "about boyfriends again" (Lau 44). Furthermore, Lau decides to tell her mother the truth about her sexuality as they are cracking open prawns – the use of the verb "to crack" implies that the pressure and strain marring Lau's relationship with her mother causes her to finally break and reveal the truth. Therefore, while Lau might not feel yet ready to come out, she believes that she needs to do that for both of their sakes. Finally, intertwining the act of coming out with the mundaneness of preparing food shows that "[t]he lesbian subject is produced in the middle of being, in the middle of the complexity of living" (Lai 120). Although queerness is a part of Lau's identity/ies, it is through coming out that she hopes to be acknowledged and understood and, ultimately, to be born into her true self.

However, the reaction she receives is not the one she hoped for as her mother, while not outright rejecting her, brandishes her as a sinner. The decision to make her mother's response a separate stanza not only draws readers' attention to it, but also shows how big of an impact it has on Lau herself. The response sounds almost like a sentence passed by a judge as it lacks empathy and understanding. In fact, Lau's mother refuses to directly and openly address her daughter's sexuality, instead choosing to focus on religious repercussions. Furthermore, such a response may point to fear being the main reason for Lau's reluctance to come out to her mother. Lai notes that fear can be seen as one of the factors stopping queer people of colour from coming out as "[t]o break through not only one's own fear, but the fear of privileged others […] does constitute a heroics" (114). While Lau's mother does not enjoy the same level of privilege as the members of the host society, both her sexual orientation and her religious beliefs place her in a much better position than her daughter.

As a result, in order to come out Lau needs to not only overcome her own fear of placing herself in a vulnerable position, but also that of her mother's potential negative reaction. Hence, the response she receives not only fills her with shame, but also may hinder her future attempts of coming out to others. Although Lau understands the motivation behind her mother's comment, she is still traumatised:

> In my dreams I am a child.
> I am always fleeing the cold
> of my parents' house, always
> the same way:
>
> Lock self in room.
> Force open window
> to reveal a thousand mesh screens.
> Push them back push them back push them back.
> Sometimes I make it out, sometimes
> I am trapped forever.
>
> *And ye shall know the truth,*
> *and the truth shall make you free.* (44–45; original emphasis)

The sudden switch from the domestic kitchen scene to the description of dreams in which Lau desperately tries to escape her parents' house recreates the feeling of emotional distress caused by a traumatic flashback. Interestingly, Lau uses the word "house" rather than "home" to describe her parents' place of residence – such a word choice indicates that that it is not a space where she feels comfortable or where she belongs. The coldness of the house mentioned by Lau seems to not only further reinforce the alienating character of the place, but also reflect the emotional coldness of her parents, reminiscent of the coldness with which her mother reacted to her confession. Hence, for Lau, as a marginalized subject, "the return [to home] does not have the luxury of apparent stability" (Lai 122) as the home itself "is made unstable for the queer Asian North American who dares to come out of the closet" (Sohn 18). Instead, it becomes another site of oppression, a place where the act of coming out transforms itself from one performative statement into "a life-long journey" (Lai 122).

This unstable and oppressive character of home is reflected in the Lau's dream as she once again employs the motif of being locked in a confined space and attempting to escape it. The house itself becomes the symbolic extension of the closet with Lau's parents religious beliefs and emotional coldness acting as oppressive forces that simultaneously suppress her from being true to herself and honest with others and motivate her to try and free herself from their grip. The act of escaping is not, however, an effortless one. Mesh screens that Lau encounters in

her dream serve as a symbolic representation of everything that hinders her escape while the chant-like repetition of "push them back" reflects the desperation and panic she feels upon realising that freeing herself from the oppressive confines of her parents' house is not going to be easy. Furthermore, as indicated by the last two lines of the stanza, not all attempts at escaping are successful, suspending Lau in the space which deprives her of the freedom to be herself. The need to flee the house is equated with the act of coming out and the struggles Lau experiences in her dreams reflect the difficulty – and sometimes impossibility – of revealing her true self to her parents. Her own experiences, therefore, contrast significantly with those of her white Canadian peers – she does not feel free, more independent or authentic after coming out to her parents. This sense of entrapment is reflected in the final couplet, taken directly from John 8:32: "And ye shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free." The inclusion of this particular Biblical quote can be seen as a bitter and ironic statement as it highlights the dissonance between what Lau was told would happen and her own experiences.

This focus on Christianity and Christian values is not incidental. For a person who grew up in the small community of the Chinese Canadian Christians, as Lau did, the act of coming out constitutes a threat to her sense of belonging, leaving her confused and vulnerable. This vulnerability is reflected in the last stanza of the poem:

> I twisted the prawn's head
> from its body,
> ran my finger along its belly,
> split it clean. (45)

The vivid description of prepping the prawn serves as a representation of Lau's emotional state and a re-enactment of the treatment Lau herself has just received: as she told her mother the truth about her sexuality, metaphorically removing her own shell and showing her soft interior, she is met with a reaction that leaves her in a state of turmoil. Although subdued and emotionless, her mother's comment seems particularly cruel to Lau – already vulnerable as a result of her coming out, the young woman feels even more exposed and defenceless upon hearing it.

In "The Levity," Lau highlights that the act of coming out, depicted in the Western queer culture as a foundation of one's future happiness, is not always a moment of celebration. She focuses especially on the promise of freedom that coming out should bring, contrasting it with the sense of vulnerability and defence-less that accompany it instead. Lau notes that in certain communities openly performing queerness is difficult and the fear of becoming rejected for it can serve as a deterrent. Therefore, according to Lau, the desire to adhere to the expression of queerness labelled by queer liberalism as universal can become a source of trauma for coloured postcolonial subjects.

3. Queerness and Diaspora:
The Reality of Queer Chinese Diasporic Experience

One of the main functions of a diaspora is to serve as a frame of reference for its members. Through preserving cultural values and norms of the abandoned homeland, it provides immigrants with a safe space, easing the process of adaptation into a new environment (Strier and Roer-Strier 439). Furthermore, it serves as the foundation for building a new identity while maintaining the connection with the homeland (Délano and Gamlen 176–177). Other functions of diaspora include: aiding and easing the process of dealing with institutions of the host country and providing its members with a sense of stability (Dahinden 54–55). Hence, maintaining the connection with a diasporic community becomes an important aspect of life in the new homeland.

Preserving the bond with a diasporic community is even more essential in the case of those diasporas that used to be a target of persistent legal, social and political discrimination. Chinese immigrants to Canada were subjected to anti-Asian prejudice and hostility as "[t]he least popular and […] the most harshly treated" (Tan and Roy 3). The discriminatory actions undertaken by the Canadian government and directed at Chinese migrants resulted in the emergence of Chinatowns which "provided a refuge from the harsh conditions of life in larger society [as well as] social, emotional and material support and, at times, protection from racial hostility" (Li and Li 8). The tendency to separate themselves from the host society exhibited by many Chinese migrants was seen as a proof of their outright refusal to assimilate, which only fuelled anti-Chinese prejudice and, in consequence, "prevented many Chinese from considering Canada as their permanent home" (Chan).

Although the situation of Chinese Canadians improved significantly after the Second World War, the fear of becoming a target of prejudice once again remained deeply ingrained in the community. Consequently, the Chinese diaspora has tried to avoid any behaviours and actions that would draw the attention of the host society to themselves. This process of becoming socially invisible would entail not only modifying cultural practices in accordance with Western norms, but also putting greater emphasis on behaviours and characteristics deemed 'normal' by the host society and rejecting the abnormal ones. One of such 'normal' features is heteronormativity (Zhu et al. 345). While the idea of performing heteronormativity – "the execution of cultural, systemic, and individual practices that normalize opposite-sex attraction and behaviours" (Zhu et al. 345) – is not exclusive to diasporic communities, it is often described by queer Asian migrants as necessary for survival. In her study, Tam (41–44) highlights that her respondents draw a strong connection between performing heteronormativity and maintaining harmony in their homeplaces,[4] being it the family or the diasporic community.

The tension between those two notions is addressed by Lau in "The Lies That Bind," where she draws a parallel between two secrets that plague her family – the real age of her grandmother and Lau's sexuality:

We don't know how old Grandma is.
She stole a few extra years
in Toishan to work in Hong Kong –
an early birthday
gift for a hungry house.

Now her age is another secret
with no answer, like
what's really
in her delicious jellyfish sauce
and why have I never brought a boy home. (16)

The beginning of the poem provides the context for the first of those secrets. Lau reveals that the confusion about her grandmother's real age is caused by the lie the older woman told the officials when immigrating from Taishan to Hong Kong to find employment and provide for her family. The lie is depicted as necessary as it ensures the survival of the whole family. However, as Lau notes, it is not the only secret that her family keeps – she lists the rest of them, including the truth about her sexuality. Through placing her "secret" alongside other family secrets, Lau not only highlights how common it is for her family to keep secrets, but also contrasts her potentially life-changing secret with the more mundane and harmless ones kept by her family.

In the last stanza of the poem Lau again connects her grandmother's lie with her own:

She asks   again
when she will get to eat beng,
if I've met any
good men,
when she will have her cup of cha.
I wonder if the truth
would scald or soothe
I try to remember if she's 91
or 92;
I think of the woman I love
and say,
Soon, Grandma. Soon. (17)

While Lau understands that her grandmother's old age and poor memory are the reasons for her constant questions, she feels slightly frustrated and exasperated about it as reflected by the visual break in the first line of the stanza. Just like earlier in the poem, Lau once more uses enumeration as she reports questions asked by

her grandmother. This time, however, the questions focus on Lau's future (and heteronormative) marriage as the older woman alludes to *hay beng*, "traditional Chinese pastries that are gifted by the groom to the bride's family" (Lau 75), and a tea-serving ceremony, "one of the most significant parts of a traditional Chinese wedding [during which] the bride and groom express their gratitude to each other's families by offering tea" (Lau 75). While the questions asked by her grandmother are ordinary and common, ones that are often directed by elderly family members at their nephews or grandchildren entering a marriageable age, Lau knows that if she were to answer them truthfully, she would have to reveal her secret that would affect the normalcy and peacefulness of her grandmother's life and, in consequence, their relationship.

Just like her grandmother before her, Lau decides to lie when asked about her personal life. While the lies told by two women differ in terms of circumstances in which they have been made, they have the same purpose – to protect the loved ones from physical or emotional harm. According to Junfeng Zhu and colleagues (347), the need to protect emotions of family members is one of the factors motivating queer Asians to mask their sexual orientation and adhere to heteronormative models of behaviour. Yet, in "The Lies That Bind," Lau highlights that she lies to her grandmother also to protect herself. Tam (58) notes that some queer Asian migrants see keeping their sexuality secret as the only way of maintaining harmony in their families and ensuring the peaceful coexistence of all members.

However, Lau keeps wondering what would happen if she came out to her grandmother. In the lines "I wonder if the truth would scald or soothe," Lau likens revealing the truth to drinking tea, the beverage her grandmother mentioned in one of her questions. The reference to tea does not seem to be accidental as the act of spilling tea during a formal tea-serving is considered a breach of etiquette which may result in hurting others with hot liquid. Furthermore, the phrase "to spill the tea" is also used informally to refer to "secret information or rumours of a scandalous nature," such as information about one's sexual orientation.[5] This metaphor is extended further as Lau wonders if revealing the truth – or spilling the tea – "would scold or soothe." "Scold" and "soothe" are used by Lau to label the possible outcomes of telling her grandmother the truth as it can result either in more pain, just like spilling hot tea may result in an injury, or comfort and support as tea is also used to lessen and remedy physical ailments and psychological distress. It is this state of uncertainty that prevents Lau from being honest with her grandmother, at least at that moment.

Similarly to "The Levity," "The Lies That Bind" can be described as a poem about coming out. This time, however, Lau focuses on the reasons that deter queer Asian migrants from being open about their sexual orientation. Lau's decision not to come out to her grandmother is connected to her status as a Chinese immigrant; her position as a marginalized Other, combined with the racial discrimination that her community faces, forces her to carefully "navigate everyday dilemmas within

[her] family, the Chinese community [and] the Chinese Christian community"
(Tam 58). Through avoiding answering her grandmother's questions about her
love life, Lau protects both herself and the older woman while preserving family
face. Therefore, the process of negotiating queer Chinese immigrant identity "takes
into consideration not only the self and self-expression, but also family and com-
munity" (Tam 63).

The decision to protect family and diasporic community – one's homeplace –
at the cost of the freedom of self-expression does not imply that said space is not
oppressive (Johnson 149). Lau addresses this issue in "My Grief Is a Winter," a
poem describing her troubled and tense relationship with her homeplace embodied
by her Chinese Christian family and the Chinese diaspora as a whole. Each stanza of
the poem lists a feature of the shared homeplace that prevents Lau from expressing
herself freely:

> My grief is a winter loss that lives
> in new-snow silence. It breeds in the dead
> air of questions
> that Christian parents ask gay kids,
> in the distance between being
> loved and being accepted,
> in the blood between skin and bone.
> Our griefs go round and round. (26)

In the opening lines of the poem, Lau links her grief over not being able to openly
and honestly communicate with her parents with winter, a season commonly
associated with loss, death, harshness and struggle. Furthermore, she refers to her
grief as if it was a living, breathing creature, dormant but ready to multiply and grow
stronger. Grief, as Lau highlights, intensifies during "the dead air of questions," an
uncomfortable and awkward silence caused by parents asking their children about
their private lives. This tense atmosphere allows the negative emotions to flourish
as Lau knows and she and other "gay kids" are unable to answer those question
without risking being rejected by their parents as the threat of social death looms
over them (Sohn 5). As the stanza progresses, Lau lists other circumstances that
fuel her grief and sadness, such as the paradox of "the distance between being
loved and being accepted" or the blood ties between her and her family members.

Lau's focus on religion, motivated by her own experiences with her Christian
parents, highlights how it may transform a homeplace from a safe space into an
oppressive one – as the questions concerning their love lives remain unanswered,
queer individuals start to realise that, while they are loved by their families, they
will never be fully accepted because of their sexual orientation. This epiphany
becomes a source of distress and anxiety, fuelling the fear of rejection and possible
expulsion from the safety of the shared homeplace.

The stanza ends with a rather ominous statement "Our griefs go round and round," a phrase that Lau repeats three times in the poem. This repetition itself seems to replicate the meaning of the phrase – "go round and round" – while emphasising the existence of the vicious circle of grief that is impossible to break. Faced with a dilemma of preserving family harmony at the cost of their self-expression or being rejected, queer individuals often choose the former, unknowingly contributing to the said vicious circle. Furthermore, Lau's use of the pronoun "our" suggests that grief and sadness constitute a common experience for queer people, one that bounds them together while providing a sense of kinship (Eng 16) and becomes the foundation of their community.

The second stanza focuses on Lau's complicated relationship with the Chinese diaspora. It begins with Lau acknowledging that her current position – all the privileges of growing up and living in the Western country she enjoys – would not be possible to achieve without the sacrifices made by not only her family, but also other members of the Chinese diasporic community:

> I am all the deaths of my blood
> laid to rest in this body's
> grieveyard, dressed by memory
> in a richer cloth.
> I'll never be able to repay my parents and aunties
> in the currency they are owed.
> How do one's ancestors receive
> a blood debt? A sweat debt? A life debt?
> Our griefs
> go round and round. (26)

However, this knowledge becomes the source of another internal struggle as it fuels Lau's guilt caused by the inability to repay her ancestors for their sacrifices. This notion is reflected by the first line of this stanza where Lau declares herself as "all the deaths of [her] blood," suggesting that she is the product of the actions of previous generations and that decisions made by her ancestors still affect her. The grim implications of the connection between Lau and her predecessors is further emphasised by the phrase "this body's grieveyard." This portmanteau implies that the grief and sadness that Lau already feels are deepened by the belief that she has to pay back her ancestors – as she is constantly reminded of their deeds by her own existence, she becomes unable to escape the sense of guilt.

As the stanza progresses, Lau realises that the repayment of the said debt would require another sacrifice, this time made by her. However, three rhetorical questions posed at the end of the stanza – "a blood debt? A sweat debt? A life debt?" – underline the helplessness and frustration that Lau, haunted by the hungry ghosts of her ancestors. feels as she still tries to determine how to appease them. Finally,

she realizes that only through partially relinquishing her right for self-expression (including being open about their sexual orientation) can she ensure the survival of the diaspora and repay the debt she owes to the previous generations. Lau's decision to placate the ghosts of her ancestors can also be attributed to "a complex sense of moral obligation" (Davis 12) characterising diasporic communities. According to Rocio Davis, the aforementioned sense of obligation not only leads to "the acknowledgement of a cultural debt to [one's] family" (13), but also emphasises the connection between individual identity of the subject and their family history and the need to repay the said debt through preserving the communities as well as stories and narratives they create.

In turn, Sohn highlights that the pressure experienced by Lau is connected to the model minority myth and the need to reproduce it:

> the heterosexuality of the Asian or Asian North American parent exists only as a function of raising the model minority child from birth to overachieving adulthood. In this sense, the model minority plot implicitly precludes the possibility of the queer subject, while promoting the centrality of the monogamous, heterosexual marriage and nuclear family formation. Not surprisingly, model minority progeny must adhere to a rather strict regime when it comes to sexuality. (29)

The successful reproduction of the model minority myth becomes the simplest way of achieving success and, through that, reinforcing the positive image of the diasporic community, even at the cost of personal sacrifices. However, the strict adherence to it has numerous side effects, such as substantial emotional and cultural stress or higher rates of depression, suicide and suicidal thoughts, and substance abuse (Chou and Feagin 21–22). Lau seems to be aware of those negative consequences. In the last two verses of the stanza, she notes that making sacrifices would only prolong the vicious circle of grief and guilt as the next generations would also feel pressured to ensure that the personal sacrifices of their ancestors were not pointless. Therefore, this time the repeated phrase – "Our griefs go round and round" – serves as a reminder of intergenerational character of grief and trauma, passed from one generation of racialized subjects onto another.

The pressure that Lau feels only fuels her grief and sadness, transforming them into trauma she is unable and unequipped to deal with. As noted by Sohn (19), such a response is not unusual as psychological distress caused by the fear of social death is particularly severe among young queer Asian North Americans. In order to numb her pain, she turns to alcohol, which only deepens her self-loathing as she identifies her queer self – her 'abnormal' love for women and her inability to be a model daughter for her parents – as the source of her suffering. Even Lau's attempts at finding a more positive outlet for her negative emotions through tattooing only result in deepening the rift between her and her mother. Historically and currently, tattoos are seen in Chinese culture not only as a punishment for criminal

behaviour but also as an offense to one's parents as, according to Confucian tra-
dition, "the basis of filial piety lies in avoiding injury to the skin, hair and body
that is received from one's parents" (Reed 364). Hence, Lau's covering her body
in tattoos is seen by her mother as bringing shame onto their whole family. The
final repetition of "Our griefs go round and round" at the end of the penultimate
stanza unveils another site of circulating negative experiences, this time within
the familial context.

The final stanza of "My Grief Is a Winter" describes the clash between the two
spaces important to Lau – her homeplace and the queer community:

> My grief is summer
> –born. We celebrate it every year
> when my parents see the Pride parade dance across the
>   TV and ask,
> "What do those people have
> to be proud of?" (27)

Interestingly, this stanza presents a temporal shift as this time Lau ties her grief
and sadness with summer, or, to be more precise, June or the Pride Month, a period
dedicated to the celebration and commemoration of the LGBTQ+ community. This
association proves that Lau identifies the inability to come out as the source of
the grief she is experiencing. The paradox of celebrating her grief illustrates how
difficult the situation is for Lau. Instead of celebrating who she is, she is forced
to hide her sexual orientation and listen to her parents' homophobic comments.
Furthermore, the use of plural "we" once again implies the communal character of
the experience, whether it is something she shares with other queer people unable to
come out to their families or something she has to endure within her familial circle.
The question posed at the very end of the poem reinforces the fact that Lau's grief is
rooted in her relationships with her closest family and the diasporic community as
a whole. Although she is not accepted and is denied happiness and even the sense
of pride, she is also expected to adhere to familial and community expectations
as a way of paying back for the sacrifices of the previous generations. Ending
the poem with a rhetorical question seems to reflect the mixture of helplessness,
resignation, frustration and sadness that Lau feels upon seeing her family's reaction
to the existence of the LGBTQ+ community.

The inclusion of references to both ancestral sacrifice and the Pride also illus-
trates how deeply those two groups – the Chinese diaspora and the LGBTQ+
community – influence Lau. While she highlights that the suffering of her ancestors
indebts her to them, she acknowledges that their sacrifices have been glamour-
ized – "dressed by memory in a richer cloth" (Lau 26) – and serve as a source of
pride for her parents. Yet, the same can be said about the Pride as it is a way of
celebrating and thanking generations of LGBTQ+ activists who paved the way to

more inclusive legislation, often at the very high personal costs. Furthermore, Lau uses the binary oppositions of "celebration-grief" and "summer-winter" to illustrate two different approaches to remembering and commemorating sacrifices of the previous generations: while the Pride becomes the celebration of freedom attained as a result of those struggles, the diasporic community pushes its members into a vicious circle of grief and guilt, pressuring them into making their own sacrifices. Those different approaches to dealing with cultural debt lead to a paradox: although Lau's parents themselves experienced struggles as a part of their migration experience, they seem to be unable to sympathise with queer people who also have had to face discrimination and prejudice.

Lau highlights that stigmatisation of homosexuality by her parents has an enormous impact on her – it not only prevents her from coming out and being open about her sexual orientation, but also becomes a source of distress, contributing to her fear of rejection. Zhu and colleagues (346) note that experiences of stigmatised homosexuality – "negatively connoted actions and beliefs toward queer behaviours and identity" – are one of main factors deterring queer Asian people from being open about their sexual orientation. Furthermore, such attitudes towards homosexuality often push queer individuals to perform heteronormativity in order to "protect their parents from experiencing stigma" (Zhu et al. 346). Lau does not voice her hurt to her parents but instead chooses to suffer in silence; this decision can be seen as another sacrifice, a painful solution to the tragic choice between expressing herself at the risk of rejection and remaining a part of the community at all costs.

4. Conclusion

In her poetry, Lau depicts the precarious position of queer Asian – particularly Chinese – immigrants in North America who often find themselves trapped in an impossible-to-solve dilemma. With the white LGBTQ+ community on the one hand and their diasporic communities on the other, they feel forced to choose one and exist in accordance with its values. Consequently, as Lau notes in her works, they end up stuck in the vicious circle of shame, guilt, grief and fear of rejection. Unable to make a choice, they sacrifice their freedom of self-expression to ensure their own safety.

The poems included in the collection provide an insight into Lau's experiences with both the LGBTQ+ community in Canada and the Chinese diaspora. These encounters serve as a catalyst for the (re)evaluation of her relationships with those two communities. In her works, Lau addresses the faux inclusivity of the white queer community and its limited understanding of performing queerness. Drawing from her own experiences, she comments on the supposed universality of expressions of queerness, highlighting that the white LGBTQ+ community often does not acknowledge the existence of cultural differences that make performing

queerness – especially being open about one's sexual orientation – very difficult or even impossible for people of colour. Poems like "The Lies That Bind" or "The Levity" depict anxiety, distress and vulnerability that Lau experiences when faced with the dilemma of coming out to her family and ethnic community at the risk of being rejected by them.

While Lau's critique of the white queer community focuses mostly on its limited perception of queerness which often results in the exclusion of people of colour, her discussion of the Chinese diaspora is centred around the ideas of maintaining face and ensuring harmonious coexistence of its members. Although she acknowledges the role of the diaspora as a safe space providing respite from the prejudice and discrimination of the host society, she also notes its oppressive character. Through referring to her own experiences, especially her relationship with her parents, Lau describes how she has to negotiate her queer Chinese immigrant identity while navigating between expressing herself, maintaining harmony in her family and the Chinese diasporic community, preserving family face and protecting her loved ones from the stigma associated with homosexuality. All those actions are accompanied by the deep fear of rejection and the sense of guilt stemming from her 'abnormality,' her inability to adhere to gender and sexual norms of the host society and the diasporic community.

Torn between the two communities and feeling she does not truly belong to either of them, Lau finds a different solution for her predicament. In her poems "3 a.m. Communion" and "Red and Yellow," she describes finding acceptance in a community comprised of queer people of colour. It is within this space that she can not only feel the "elation of […] discovering the meaning of family" (28), but, more importantly, heal and escape the vicious circle of guilt and grief. The creation of this third community, founded in the shared experiences of discrimination and rejection, finally allows Lau to fully express herself and reshape her identity as a queer Chinese Canadian. However, the creation of this third space becomes possible only when Lau acknowledges that her story – and, by extension, her identity – is the amalgamation of different influences, all having roots in different communities and their experiences. In "The Lies that Bind," Lau continues to draw parallels between her grandmother's story and that of her own, indicating how her own self is shaped by the past experiences of the older woman and how she needs to "draw upon the stories [of her grandmother] to complete her own" (Davis 11). Simultaneously, the figures and events that Lau describes in her poems are given almost a mythical status. The mystery shrouding her grandmother's real age is presented by Lau as a secret that, when uncovered, would transform her perception of the world as she knows it. Similarly, the dream sequence in "The Levity" is used by Lau to emphasise how crucial and fundamental the experience of coming out to her parents is to her.

The poem that best showcases the biomythographic character of Lau's work is "My Grief is a Winter." As she processes and works through her emotions, Lau

slowly reveals how different groups and experiences shaped her as a subject. She describes the fear of parental rejection and negative emotions caused by it as an experience shared by many queer people that simultaneously influences them and binds them together, creating the sense of kinship. Simultaneously, as a diasporic subject, Lau acknowledges how the lives of her ancestors shaped her and how she is indebted to them for their sacrifices. The cultural debt that she mentions and the search for the best way to pay it back are experiences that not only influence Lau's identity/ies, but also connect her with other members of diasporic community who face similar problems. Finally, through providing brief insights into her parents' – and especially her mother's – lives, such as their religious beliefs, attitudes to the LGBTQ+ community, opinions on body modifications or desires to raise a model child, Lau shows how her interactions with her parents moulded her into the person she is today. Although the experiences Lau describes in the poem are negative and, to a certain extent, even oppressive, they are nevertheless essential for the development of her identity and the creation of the aforementioned third community.

Notes

1   Myth is understood here in Barthesian terms as "a type of speech chosen by history [that] cannot possibly evolve from the nature of things" (94). According to Roland Barthes, despite being rooted in history, myth makes it possible to question it through unveiling it exclusionary character (102).
2   Lau mentions Lorde in two of her poems: "Solidarity," a poetic exploration of the sense of solidarity shared between representatives of different marginalised communities, and "Remedy," where the quote from Lorde's poem "Meet" is both used as an epigraph and incorporated within the poem itself. Those references to Lorde suggests that Lau knows about her works, including biomythography.
3   The introduction of the bill was the consequence of a public debate sparked by the case of Everett Klippert. In 1965, Klippert was sentenced to three years in prison for gross indecency after revealing that he had engaged in sexual activities with male partners. His sentence was indefinitely extended after he was described as "a dangerous sex offender" by a forensic psychiatrist. Despite his appeal to the Supreme Court of Canada, Klippert remained in prison until 1971 (Warner 46).
4   A homeplace should be understood here as a site of resistance within the confines of which marginalized groups can "freely construct the issue of humanization" (Hooks 42).
5   The motif of spilling secrets appears quite often in literary works created by North Americans of Chinese descent who spill the secrets of Chinatown to the white mainstream. However, as Lai notes, the existence of such a trope is

problematic as it not only reinforces racist expectations about Chineseness, but also "places the second-generation narrators who disclose the 'secrets' in the dubious position of traitor (to their first-generation parents), interpreter, and assimilated-but-marked Canadian subject" trading the secrets of Chinatown for the sense of national belonging (58). Interestingly, in her poem Lau reverses this trend as the secret she hopes to reveal in the future comes from beyond the borders of Chinatown and threatens her belonging within the Chinse community.

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Patrick Gill, ed. (2023). *An Introduction to Poetic Forms*.
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What *An Introduction to Poetic Forms* introduces is something more than a list of the standard forms and patterns of poetic expression. It in fact assumes that such forms are somehow culturally, or perhaps archetypally, present in readers' minds, though without necessarily being recognized or named by them. If, for Plato, forms were archetypes of all phenomena and their formative principle, their poetic expression was seen as already imitative. Modified by the adjective "poetic" and thus translated into "poetic form," Plato's form becomes opened to imitation, an imperfect repetition which, established as a pattern or a matrix, gives birth to even more imperfections. In the introduction to *An Introduction to Poetic Forms*, poetic forms figure as invitations to repetitions and variations, to the imperfection of the coexistence of "constraint and freedom," which coexistence inevitably brings in "the sense of continuity within human culture" (3). Though the book does not refer to Plato's expulsion of poets from the ideal state, it claims that poetic forms, however changeable, are patterns of human creativity in which the tether of repetition is loosened by art, by variation through *poiesis*. What any study of poetic forms may thus reveal is not their rigid categorization and unchangeability, but "culture's foundational impulse" seen as "the continued communication of ideas and imagined concepts across space and time" (3). What poetic forms do is a provision of "frameworks of references" which enable works by different writers and from different periods of time to be put "into fruitful dialogue with one another" and thus to activate "an additional level of meaning" (4). Forms are seen in the book as taking part in the construction of poems' senses and meanings, and the book's contributors do not take an "encyclopaedic approach" to the subject, but rather offer insights into "how a form shapes the topics that are treated in it" (5). Each chapter of the book does begin with an encyclopaedic definition of the kind of poetic form to which it is devoted, but what follows such a definition is its problematization which constitutes an invitation to the readers to construct their own responses.

The first section of the book is titled "Elements of Form" and introduces relevant terminology, simultaneously bringing in a general view on the mode of existence of poetic forms without classifying them into literary genres. The five chapters of this section discuss rhyme and meter, enjambment and caesura, persona and performance

of poetry. The discussion of rhyme with which this section opens raises the question of the dependence of text comprehension on the text type and the role of rhyme in the construction of senses. Another question connected with rhyme which the book discusses is the restrictive aspect of rhyme. As a "self-imposed constraint" (16), rhyme limits the freedom of choice of words, which limitation serves a few functions absent in what might be called free use of language. Though meter is a less constraining element of poetic form, its detailed discussion in the volume shows that its treatment as a "poem's heartbeat" too strongly naturalizes it, and that it should be viewed as a "set of shared conventions between poet and reader" (36). The categories of enjambment and caesura are also exhaustively presented and discussed in this section as extralinguistic effects of "line-breaking" designed to prevent monotony and underline poetic argument. The discussion of persona included in the volume is in fact a reminder of the fact that the narrator of a poetic text should not be identified with the voice of the author. The concept is shown as "essential to poetry as a human action," and yet one which can be always suspected of wearing a mask. Also seen as "the most significant concretization of poetry," the persona is always a matter of the readers' interpretation. Poetry in performance is an opportunity of an alternative interpretation of persona. The reading poet, seen as a "living medium for the poem" (62), is also a figure of embodied poetry speaking to the audience which allows for full appreciation of the dialogic quality of performed poems.

The elements of form are clearly presented in this part of the book, and constitute a foundation for the second part in which poetic forms appearing in the English language and literary tradition are taken up and discussed. This part – titled "Poetic Forms" – is in a way again returning to an encyclopaedic form as its chapters are in fact alphabetically listing the names of poetic forms in usually short articles which may be compared to long dictionary entries. The choice is, as it seems, dictated by an attempt at avoiding hierarchization of the poetic forms as one of the effects of the book is to show their mutual dependence and negotiability of their strict categorization. The effect of a strict order evoked by the alphabetic ordering and the system of cross-referencing is thus weakened through "complicating the story and illustrating how shifts in culture or individual artists have changed the form under discussion" (5). Though encyclopaedia seems not to be a poetic form in itself, the spirit of its poetics which Vincent Descombes saw as going around its subject and create an effect of totality speaks through *An Introduction to Poetic Forms* regardless of the relative shortness of the text. The chosen form of the book makes it easy for the reader to find particular categories within the text.

The choice of poetic forms discussed in the book is not limited to those whose names are the headings of the particular chapters ("The Ballad," "Blank Verse," "The Blazon," "Concrete Poetry," "The Dramatic Monologue," "Ekphrastic Poetry," "The Elegy," "The Epic," "Free Verse," "The Heroic Couplet," "The Long Poem," "Mock-Heroic Poetry," "The Ode," "The Prospect Poem," "The Sestina," "The Sonnet," "The Villanelle") as numerous other poetic forms are taken up in the

discussions within the articles themselves. I will not discuss all of them here, just mentioning a few, so as to show the originality of the idea of the book and its usefulness as an introductory reading for students of literature and literary scholars, as a source of both the knowledge of poetic forms and as an inspiration to their original uses in interpreting poetic texts taking into consideration those meanings whose generation may be ascribed to their poetic forms. What this kind of approach as it were suspends is the traditional division of forms into prescriptive (like the ballad or the sonnet) and non-prescriptive form governed by internal argumentative structure of poems, so that the study of poetic form ceases to be a matter of counting syllables and recognizing kinds of rhymes. What thus also comes to the fore in the book is the cultural dimension of the meaning-generating potential of poetic forms and their social and political significance. The ballad, for instance, is presented in the book as a form whose easy memorability endows it with the democratizing power "employed by multiple generations for sharing content with each other" (75). The form of the ballad enabled regional identity to live also beyond published poetry, and as stemming from the familiar and recognizable, "to reveal something about regional identity and a sense of place" (75). Numerous examples of ballads given in the article devoted to them come from different times and places, and the variety of their sometimes transformed forms proves their still lasting possibilities without the "blind allegiance" (82) to their standard form. Be it the popular broadside ballads, or the poetic ballads of Wordsworth and Coleridge, the form of the ballad is their meeting point which proves the falsity of this traditional dichotomy (78). The article, like all the articles in the second section of the book, provides readers with encyclopaedic and traditional academic definitions of the ballad, simultaneously, in accordance with the general scheme of the *Introduction*, problematizing the term and showing sometimes divergent uses of the form of ballad in literary tradition. At the end of the article readers are directed to further readings linking the ballad with other poetic forms. This is also a part of the general scheme of the book which underlines its introductory intentions, where introduction means not only a beginning, but also an invitation and inspiration to further studies.

Though introductory, the book offers numerous original insights into the role of poetic form in literature. The chapter titled "The Blazon," for instance, offers a feminist perspective on this form which "consists in cataloguing the physical attributes of a subject, usually a woman" (94). Enquiring about the violent nature of such a cataloguing, and exemplifying it with texts by Petrarch, Shakespeare, Spenser, Campion, Rosetti and Swinburn, the chapter shows that the violent male gaze involved in dividing and splitting the body was sometimes critiqued by poets themselves through the use of this very form. This chapter, like most of the chapters in the book, shows that interpreting poetry through its form may be a truly enjoyable activity, which simultaneously reveals social aspects of the choice of the form by the poet. The blazon is also a kind of ekphrasis in which parts of the body are translated into a poetic expression. In the chapter on ekphrastic poetry, however, the idea of the

possibility of translating an image into a text is questioned. "The gap between the visual object and its poetic representation" (125) is never fully bridgeable, and the article illustrates this dilemma analysing John Keats's *Ode on a Grecian Urn* and Algernon Charles Swinburn's poem *Before the Mirror*. The article reads ekphrastic poetry as "an inevitable failure to speak for the visual source by which it is inspired" (130) and proves Swinburn's poem to be a reinforcement of the differences between them. Ekphrastic poetry is a non-prescriptive kind of poetic form, and the fact that it can take the form of an ode (as in Keats) makes it into a kind of writing depending on the source of inspiration in which the visual can be broadly understood, and though the author of the article does not state it, it also may well involve seeing with one's mind's eye. Keats's choice of the form of ode in this respect is quite telling, as he is not really describing what he sees, but rather writing about the silence of the urn which, in turn, is the poetic voice of the Greek culture. The chapter on ekphrastic poetry thus sends the reader to the chapter on the ode ("The Ode").

Such cross-references are, I think, a strong point of the book which does not offer an expert vision of the ways in which poetic forms work, but allows for wandering among the problems posed by their uses (and abuses) in various texts throughout literature's historical changes. Since the authors of the entries/articles come from different countries and represent different theoretical attitudes to literary studies, it seems to be assumed by the editor that a uniform and a perfectly coherent view on poetic forms is really unthinkable. Doubts and uncertainties put academic research in motion, and one does not have to accept all the arguments and excurses of the particular chapters, and still become engaged in the pursuit of the possibilities of the proposed direction of reading poetic forms. If we go to the article "The Ode," which already in the first line compares the ode to tragedy and elegy, we will read that on top of its standard sense of a meditation on some "worthy object" (184), it also has a meta-poetic dimension derived from its Greek sense of the song. The term synecdochally stands for "what we today call lyric poetry, and 'poetic speech' in general" (184), thus possibly positing the odist as a general figure of the poet who is licensed to choose the objects worthy of praising. Horace's Ode IV:7, written in praise of life and nature, introduces the problem of the shift of odes' 16th- and 17th-century imitations to a new form given to the ode by John Milton in *The Nativity Ode* seen as a transposition of the form into a Christian context. A brief presentation of the history of the ode in this article draws attention to the fact that canonical odes were written by "white men who, on account of their gender and race, spoke from a position of privilege" (191), then giving a few recent examples of reclaiming the form for less privileged ethnic and gender positions (Anaïs Duplan, Robert Colecott, Sharon Olds). One of the suggestions for further reading proposes to look at 18th-century parodies of odes as movement toward mock-heroic poetry to which another article in the book is devoted. That chapter ("Mock-Heroic Poetry"), in turn, discusses Alexander Pope's *The Rape of the Locke* and *The Dunciad* as texts illustrating the passage from subtle irony to

harsh satire in the reading of the political and social reality of the Augustan Age. The heroic warfare of Homer's *Iliad* and Virgil's *Aeneid* is turned into a critique of greatness and heroism which is made possible by the power of the mock-heroic poetic form to diminish the alleged and politically constructed magnitude of the state, its institutions, and its arts. Showing mock-heroic poetry as a strong tool of political criticism, the chapter interestingly suggests a possible affinity between the "apocalyptic ending" of *The Dunciad* and the gloomy atmosphere of T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*, and inviting the reader to consult the chapter on the long poem.

Through such cross-referencing, *Introduction to Poetic Forms* informs its readers that there is always something more to say about the categories and notions it discusses, and for this reason it is also a highly useful guide to creative academicism. Though each of the articles is an example of an advanced individual research, each of them also underlines the necessity of academic modesty in which the work of others constitutes a crucial aspect of academic research. Perhaps in line with John Dewey's conviction that "the educational process is one of continual reorganizing, reconstructing, and transforming" (Dewey 54), *Introduction* itself is an example of such an attitude, simultaneously positing transformation of poetic forms, rather than forms in themselves, the relevant issue of study. Above I have tried to outline the scope of the book through a brief summation of only a few chapters in order to show why the book can be useful in further studies of the poetic form. On the whole the book is inspiring and insightful, but first of all, as I have already noted, it is an introductory guide to original ways of reading poetry which can be of value in academic writing, and in academic teaching of literature in general.

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Jeremy Tambling, ed. (2023). *The Bloomsbury Handbook to Literature and Psychoanalysis.*
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On the cover of the book we can see Michelangelo's sculpture of Moses. This paratextual presence hints at the complexity of the possible relationships between psychoanalysis, art and literature made even more complex inside the book. As we learn from Jeremy Tambling's "Introduction," Freud wrote about this sculpture in *The Moses of Michelangelo*, but also about the biblical Moses in *Moses and Monotheism* about which he wrote to Arnold Zweig in 1934, before the publication of the final version of the text in 1939, that he was writing *ein historical Roman*, a historical novel (5). Freud's Moses was "actually two people," one of whom was not a Jew, but the Egyptian monotheist who led the Jews out from captivity. The other was "the figure of the Jews after Moses was murdered by them, in a primal slaying of the father" (5). Judaism thus cannot claim any single originary identity, a split which may also be standing as a vague beginning of psychoanalysis as a response to "a sense of splitting which is imposed upon the subject" (5).

Though the figures of Sigmund Freud and Jacques Lacan have been given a lot of attention in this handbook, and their undeniable role of founders of two schools of psychoanalysis in the 20th century is fully admitted in it, what the 37 texts included in the volume reveal is that by the 21st century those schools have generated numerous new ways of thinking about literature and culture, as well as approaches to their readings and theorizations in various places of the world from which the authors of the texts included in the book speak to us. The relationship between psychoanalysis and literature has been always mutual and has lasted for enough time to make it possible to speak of their inseparability. In the "Introduction" to the book Jeremy Tambling hints at literature as the Other of psychoanalysis, thus signalling that literary languages inevitably bring in much more than stories or histories told in them in different styles and forms. One might say that it is through a psychoanalytic dimension that otherness is brought to human discourses. The book is divided into five sections whose thematic content, however, frequently overlaps. What helps the reader find particular problems and issues in the text is the exhaustive and comprehensive index, to which the editor

sends the reader with the exclamation mark: "the reader ultimately must have recourse to the Index!" (15).

The first section of the book ("Forms of Psychoanalysis") investigates various forms and modes of addressing psychoanalysis through which it may itself be seen as a literary creation, a language construct which seemingly offers a kind of scientific discipline, but in fact is a reflection on language's weakness in expressing things to which it frequently points through word plays and ambiguities. This is the case of the irreducibly split idea of the "uncanny" (*unheimlich*), perhaps Freud's most poetic term, which brings in possibilities of re-reading the broadly understood homeliness or domesticity as crucial themes for literature. Home is also a word which puts in motion economy (*oikos*) and desire, possession and being possessed which may take the form of dreams as well as the form of their analysis which, strongly linked with the name of Freud, is a literary theme archetypally informing not only literature, but also philosophy. Linguistic playfulness of psychoanalysis is discussed and illustrated with examples juxtaposing it with literary texts in the chapter opening this section (e.g. Freud/Heine, Lacan/Poe, Deleuze/Carroll) and titled "When Psychoanalysis Plays with Words." The already mentioned "uncanny" is not only a matter of a wordplay, and in the chapter on Frankenstein and the uncanny various psychoanalytic attitudes to uncanniness are linked with the idea of the Other and its potential in literary interpretation. Dream interpretation, so strongly associated with the name of Freud, is addressed in one of the articles included in this part of the volume through Arthemidorus's divination of dreams from quite a long time ago as a psychoanalytic trait which then became befitted in Freud, also feeding some ways of thinking in Foucault and Derrida. If dreams are appearances, then the question of "what it *means* that appearances have meaning" (57) is the fundamental question not only of psychoanalysis, but also of philosophy and literature.

Another question raised is the next chapter of this section goes away from Freud toward Lacan, and concentrates on fragmenting and divisibility of reality and the construction of wholeness which is also a crucial trait of Lacan's attempts at showing himself as an avant-garde writer, which he revealed in his dispute with Derrida on the idea of atomystique (a kind of desire to infinitely divide) in the context of Edgar Alan Poe's *The Purloined Letter*. There are four more chapters in this section, illustrating different forms of approaching psychoanalysis. One of them recalls the figure of Charles Mauron, who is read as "a polymath and pioneer" of the critical turn which "made psychoanalytic reading a staple feature of literary studies in France" (73). Gilles Deleuze and *Félix* Guattari are brought in to the book through projecting their complex writings on desire and the idea of body without organs on Mary Shelley's novel *The Last Man*. The theme of sublimation in Freud and Laplanche is discussed in the next chapter, while the last chapter of this section takes up the theme of the uses of Chinese culture and script in Freud and Lacan.

The second part of the *Handbook* is titled "Reading Texts," and what it

concentrates on are ways of reading of amalgam of literature and psychoanalysis with their mutual inspirations and textual cooperations. This section of the book introduces psychoanalysis and literature as interrelated kinds of writing which are crucial for understanding various roles of contemporary literary criticism in which specialization is giving way to a more imaginary ways of interpreting texts, the ways which also demand new methodologies of reading and writing where literature is not exposed as a form endowed with unique and typical characteristics. Charles Dickens's novel *David Copperfield*, one of Freud's favourite books, is shown in the article opening this section as a text whose numerous elements became patterns mimed in his life and which were also projected on his theoretical ideas. The replacement of the figure of Oedipus with that of Antigone is analysed in the next article as a change in psychoanalytical ethics and in the writings of Jacques Lacan, Michel Foucault, Slavoj Žižek and Judith Butler. Jacques Lacan returns in another article in this section as the interpreter of Lewis Caroll's *Alice Books*, reading them in terms of a clash between the mathematical and the real where "the mathematization of language" ends up in the subversion "the logician's conservative ideals" thus demonstrating "the real as impossible" (158–159). The next chapter suggests that Dennis Potter's TV series *The Singing Detective* is a near-encyclopaedic work "engaging with different traditions of crime fiction and psychoanalytic thought" (161). Jungian, Freudian and Kleinian analytical categories turn out to be useful tools for an insightful reading of the film. William Shakespeare's plays are the subject of two subsequent chapters which introduce Freud as a careful reader of the Swan of Avon and discuss Jacques Lacan's reading of *Hamlet* as a way of "manoeuvring […] between literary analysis and clinical practice" (189). The last article in this section addresses poetry and poeticity in psychoanalysis through Lacan's claim that Freud's frequent use of philological references and linguistic analysis augments the involvement of the unconscious in his writings.

The third part of the book is titled "Psychoanalysis and Modernism" and gathers readings of Modernist texts of Marcel Proust, Virginia Woolf, James Joyce, T.S. Eliot, D.H. Lawrence, and Samuel Beckett as significant commentaries on psychoanalysis with whose "great wave" they are contemporary. The near simultaneous birth of modernism and psychoanalysis seems to be indicating their inseparability – the prevailing theme of the book. The concerns of writers and artists can be treated as literary symptoms of psychoanalysis – the phrase used in one of the chapters of this section with reference to James Joyce. This part of the book consists of five chapters on literary works and one on surrealist art, with Max Ernst and *Salvador Dalí* providing inspiration to an elaborate analysis of image and visuality in psychoanalysis. This central part of the book brings in literature and psychoanalysis as an amalgam of forms of expression of the modernist concern with language and expression of the intuitive, of what is beyond the surface of things, of ways of overcoming the narcissistic increment of the ego. The nuanced

readings of literary texts and contexts offered in this section demand a lot of concentration and attention on the part of the reader but, especially for students of literature, they may be rewarding.

Part four of the book ("Psychoanalysis, Feminism and Gender") considers the role of psychoanalysis in feminist and gender studies, and in women's writing. The first chapter in the section discusses hysteria in the light of Freud's case study of it ("Dora Case") which stimulated feminist critique and deployment of concepts brought by psychoanalysis "as a way to challenge the oppression of sexual difference in life and in thought" (306). Julia Kristeva's reading of George Bataille is discussed in the next chapter as an incitement to thinking of the relationship between art and abjection and their power of exposing to radical otherness and of expressing radical negativity. An analysis of Djuna Barnes's *Nightwood* proposed in the next chapter concentrates on the possibilities of reworking psychoanalysis towards theorizing the queer sexualities and genders which were emerging in Barnes's time. What follows then is a reading of Elizabeth Abel's reading of *Mrs. Dalloway* in which Melanie Klein's criticism of Freud and the replacement of the Oedipal father with pre-Oedipal mother plays the central role. The near absence of the mother in Woolf's novel (she is mentioned only once in it) is read in the chapter as expressing "a desire for a masculine woman" (343). The chapter "Lacan, the Feminine, and Feminisms" is devoted to Jacque Lacan's fascination with the female sexuality which became explicitly the focal point of his investigation long after its implicit presence in his early writings. What this fascination is linked with are the ideas of vanishing, absence, incompleteness, linguistic inexpressibility and undecidability, which dislocate the ego and give to a different from phallic kind of pleasure. The last chapter of the book concentrates on the ways in which "cinema's reliance upon the disparities of sexual difference" (367) has been critiqued from the perspective of feminist and lesbian film theories and theorists. One of the questions raised in the text is how to create what is called "counter-cinema" addressing female viewers who might engage in "cross-identification, same-sex desire, negotiation, self-conscious appreciation of cinematic address, and fantasy" (368).

The final part of the book goes beyond literary studies toward other forms of art and, more generally, toward the cultural significance of psychoanalysis in artistic expression and in its role in the world of new technologies. It also, and importantly so, goes beyond the European cultural hegemony toward other culture addressing the (post) colonial transfer of psychoanalysis to other than Europe places of the world. The initial two chapters of this section ("Psychoanalysis and Cultural Theory") take up the theme of music which "has remained curiously resistant to psychoanalytic inquiry" (381). This may be an effect of Freud's declared unmusicality which the first chapter of this section ("The Battle for the Voice") confronts with Theodor Reik's, Freud's colleague's, embrace of music as a vocalization of language which may broaden the scope of psychoanalytical insight. What Freud saw as a limitless oceanic feeling carried by music, one's submersion

in this ocean may be seen as sound bath which "connects music to the presymbolic" (387), a perspective opened in psychoanalysis by Lacan. The other chapter related to music ("Sibling-Incest in Wagner") reads Wagner's mythic heroes as immersed in a "perpetual fantasy of rivalry with the father" (395), which Oedipal theme is elaborated on the example of the complex relationship between Sigmund and Sieglinde in the *Valkyrie*. The next chapter ("The Creature…Was…a Man!") sends us to animal studies and concentrates on Freud's two kinds of approach to animals in his writings. One of them is a hermeneutic suspicion in which the animals appearing in his patients' thoughts are treated as encrypted anxieties. Animals in this case stand for something else. The other approach is based on speculation, and it concerns the possibility that humanness begins with bipedality which is associated with significant psychic consequences, one of them being the shift of libidinal excitements from the nose to the eyes.

The book then takes us from animals to technology and the technological production of pleasure ("Steve Jobs and the iGadget in the Economy of Jouissance") through "gadgeting" the world with objects which become extensions of the body. Interestingly mixing Steve Jobs's biography with Lacanian uses of the Name-of-the-Father and Jacques-Alain Miller's notion of externalities in ordinary psychosis this chapter offers an insight into the complexity of shaping delusive objects of desire. The next chapter takes up possible affinities between psychoanalysis and posthumanism, claiming that psychoanalysis may also be seen as "posthumanism *avant lettre*" (453), which proto-posthumanism is rarely noticed in posthuman studies. Briefly having discussed various approaches to the ideas of the posthuman and transhuman and Donna Haraway's idea of our becoming of cyborgs, the chapter offers an insightful analysis of Spike Jonze's 2013 film *Her* from the perspective of transhuman fantasies of technological increment of pleasure and Lacan's writings on love and jouissance.

The four final chapters of this section, and of the book, relate psychoanalysis to colonial and postcolonial discourses. The first of them reads Freud's view on religion as illusion as the illusion's extension to phantasm and hallucination in colonial contexts, finding in psychanalysis a possibility of going beyond the hallucinatory to something that "exceeds us … but also makes us" (473). Making use of Slavoj Žižek's version of Lacanian psychoanalysis, the author of the next chapter ("(Post)Colonialism and the Persistence of Psychoanalysis") claims that psychoanalysis is "the *only* theory to effectively deal with the (post)colonial present and subvert colonialism's shattering effects upon what is perceived as non-Western, subaltern, underrepresented" (476; original emphasis). Since postcolonial discourse 'failed miserably' in dealing with stereotyping and creating false universalities, psychoanalysis may reintroduce a different ethical dimension to our constructions of identity hinted at by Žižek's idea of sabotaging one's interests. The next article discusses Frantz Fanon's and Octave Manoni's visions of decolonizing the mind, showing that Fanon's faulting of Manoni's alleged seeing colonialism as a response

to "a need for dependency" (490) was open to challenge. Focusing on "the psychic scars of centuries of colonialism" both thinkers brought attention to "the structural organization of beliefs, assumptions, and prejudices imbibed across generations" (496). The chapter closing the book takes us to Martinique and its colonial history through an analysis of Suzanne *Césaire's* writings in which she "psychoanalyses Martinicans, deciphering through their behaviour their thought-mechanisms" (506). Seen as living outside authenticity, Martinicans have replaced Freud's dreams opting "for tales to project the depth of their inner self" (506). The article also discusses Edouard Glissant's psychoanalytic theorization of the Caribbean and his linking of poetry with the unconscious and his "uses of psychoanalysis to stir a revolution magnifying independence" (515).

What follows then are 24 pages of the already mentioned Index. The index is detailed and well-constructed and can be of much help in orienting the reader within this wide-ranging book. The concerns, concepts, terms and proper names which the book addresses are plentiful, and the above outline of what I have found to be the main themes of the particular chapters is highly fragmentary. The variety of subjects and approaches of the particular papers is another feature of the book which carries the word "handbook" in its title. In some older sense of the word, this book is not handy, it is big, thick and heavy. However, I think it would be good to keep it ready-to-hand, as Heidegger would have it, and see in it a useful tool in academic studying and learning, both as a source of information about literature and psychoanalysis, and as a source broadening one's understanding and vision of them. Though devoted to literature and psychoanalysis, the book does not offer a singular position towards them, and gives the reader the possibility of choosing from among quite numerous attitudes, styles and forms of academic writing, themes and topics to be thought about. Needless to say that it does not contain everything, there are no books which could not be supplemented, and it fact its diversified and cross-disciplinary dimension invites supplementation, be it in writing or in thinking. Rather than announcing a final truth of psychoanalysis and literature the book promises advancement not only of what Jeremy Tambling calls "newish readers" (1), but of any reader taking up studying literature and its place in the contemporary world.

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