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Joanna Matyjaszczyk
https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7282-3434
University of Łódź

Struggles with Dramatic Form in 16th-Century English Biblical Plays

Abstract: The aim of the article is to pinpoint how 16th-century biblical drama tried to appropriate its genre and medium to carry the reformist message and in what sense the project turned out to be a self-defeating one. The analysis of selected plays from reformed biblical cycles (*The Chester Mystery Cycle*, play iv; and "The Norwich Grocers' Play") and newly composed drama (John Bale's plays, Lewis Wager's *Life and Repentaunce of Marie Magdalene*, the anonymous "History of Jacob and Esau"), supported with an overview of the criticism on the matter, reveals some common tensions in the dramatic texts which may have had their roots in the reformist need to eliminate any room for doubt that a theatrical performance could leave. The conclusion is that, in its attempts at striking the right balance between dramatizing and overt sermonizing, engaging and distancing, as well as providing an immersive experience and discouraging it, post-Reformation Scripture-based drama oscillated between being more effective as a performance or as a carrier of the doctrinal message, with the resulting tendency to subvert either the former or the latter.

Keywords: biblical drama, mystery cycle, Reformation, Chester cycle, Norwich cycle, John Bale, Lewis Wager, Jacob and Esau

1. Introduction

There is some evidence for as many as fifty biblical plays being produced or offered for acting for the first time in the 16th century, with the texts of half of them still known today (Blackburn 7). However, the tradition of dramatizing the Bible did not continue – at least not as a mainstream form of entertainment – beyond the 16th century (Blackburn 8; O'Connell 90–91). The present study analyses the form and medium of 16th-century biblical drama to demonstrate how it turned out to be

problematic as the carrier of post-Reformation piety. It focuses on how both the genre and, more broadly speaking, the very medium of dramatic performance could hinder the promotion of the newly emerging and evolving reformed beliefs, and how the plays distanced themselves from the theatrical context to try to overcome those difficulties.

The medieval invention of enacting the Bible and thus teaching a religious and moral lesson was utilized by the early modern proponents of the reformed religion in two ways. One was to compose new plays adapting Scripture-based material; another – to revise some of the already existing pre-Reformation mystery plays in the spirit of the new doctrines. The discussion that follows draws examples from both the former and the latter practice and points out a common tendency of the emergent drama to reveal some unease with dramatization as a means of propagating the Bible and with an immersive theatrical experience as an efficient way to teach new doctrines. The unease may have been related to the fact that the genre and medium of a mystery play employed by the reformers had a potential to produce doubt. As Erin E. Kelly argues, the pre-Reformation mystery plays were prone to embracing it both on the level of their content and form (2012, 52–55). The 16th century Biblical drama, in turn, did not seem to be inclined to accept any room for its audiences' confusion or doubt that would disturb the intended religious message. The post-Reformation Biblical plays tried to eliminate any potential confusion through various means that were supposed to grant a more objective, informed, and unambiguous understanding of their message. One method was overt sermonizing or summarizing used on top of, or in place of, dramatizing; another such strategy was to distance the audience temporarily and emotionally from the represented worlds of the plays. The latter could mean departing from the mystery-style engagement of the audience in the performance altogether or using some distancing strategies alongside those employed to involve the spectators. The resulting oscillation between dramatizing and sermonizing, engaging and distancing, and providing an immersive experience and discouraging it could lead to the inner tensions being palpable in the plays. The case studies to follow explore such tensions emerging from the attempts of the plays at finding a compromise between the inherited form and new agendas to follow.

2. Reformed Cyclic Plays and Bale's Reformist Cycle

One example of rewriting a pre-Reformation play in the spirit of the new teach-ings is "The Norwich Grocers' Play," representing the Fall of Man episode, which survives in two versions: an incomplete "A" text, which we know was in use in 1533, and a "B" text, "newely" revised in 1565, "accordynge unto the Skripture," as a note preceding the play indicates ("The Norwich Grocers' Play" 11; Harty 84). The latter, according to Roberta Mullini, "presents some features that manifest

the anonymous playwright's desire to adapt an old tradition to the new Reformist episteme so as to turn a Catholic text into a Protestant (if not Puritan) one, but at the same time not to renounce certain dramatic conventions of the theatre of the past" (125). The mixture of the said conventions involves, on the one hand, a standard enactment of the biblical scenes from the Garden of Eden, and, on the other hand, an addition of figures that serve as commentators and allegorical conveyors of the postlapsarian state.

The most prominent difference between the pre- and post-Reformation version of the play is their disparate ending. After Adam and Eve are expelled from paradise, the "A" text concludes with a lament sung by them:

> *And so thei xall syng, walkyng together about the place, wryngyng ther handes.*
> Wythe dolorous sorowe we maye wayle and wepe
> Both nyght and daye in sory sythys full depe.
> N.B. These last 2 lines set to musick twice over and again, for a chorus of 4 pts. ("The Norwich Grocers' Play" 11)

As both the lines spoken by Adam and Eve and the stage directions imply, the ending is supposed to have an emotional impact achieved through the piteous lyrics and melody of the song as well as the characters' gestures. A detailed account for the year 1534 in *Grocers' Book* lists a charge that the guild paid to an organ player, among other performers in the play, and one for borrowing the instrument (accounts qtd. in Davis xxxii), so we know that the 1533 spectacle was enriched with organ music accompanying the song. The "B" text also incorporates a song – this time a laudatory one – but the pageant ends on a more didactic note. It draws closer to a morality play at that point (a conflation popular in 16th-century biblical drama at large), since Adam becomes everyman and there appear the characters of Dolor and Myserye, who stand for the condition of mankind in the postlapsarian world, as well as the Holy Ghost, who explains how the belief in Christ is a remedy to the sorrowful condition that Adam found himself in. The Holy Ghost teaches Adam that his armour and weapon against sorrow and misery shall be "the brest-plate of rightousnes," "the shylde of faythe," "the hellmett of salvacion," and "the sworde of the Spright, which is the worde of God" ("The Norwich Grocers' Play" 17, lines 139–142). The comfort that Adam derives from the Holy Ghost's speech and from the idea of death being overcome by "forepredestinacion" ("The Norwich Grocer's Play" 17, line 149) has clear post-Reformation overtones.

The *Grocers' Book* accounts mostly give just a total sum that the staging of the "Pageant" cost a given year, so they do not provide an opportunity to follow the changes in what the money was spent on in a systematic way, but an inventory of items related to the Pageant from 1565 lists one telling prop not mentioned in the 1534 or any other account – a "face" for "the Father" (Davis xxxv), i.e. a mask for God, probably used in order to avoid representing God on stage with an

actor's face. That may have been a nod to objections concerning impersonating the deity that the reformers must have started voicing around that time in the context of Biblical drama. The latter were also addressed by the Chester cycle, whose post-Reformation Banns instruct the players that "all those persones that as godes doe playe / in clowdes come downe with voyce, and not be seene; / for noe man can proportion that Godhead, I saye, / to the shape of man–face, nose, and eyne" ("The Late Banns….," lines 196–199).

Some post-Reformation overtones are also revealed in a speech opening the "B" version, delivered by the Prolocutor. The first of the two variants of the prologue to the "B" text (i.e. one that was to be used when the play was performed without any other episodes preceding it) ensures that the plays which the Fall of Man episode used to follow "with the Skriptures most justly agree," and both variants refer the audience to the biblical chapters as the sources of this or the preceding play ("The Norwich Grocers' Play" 11, 12). The Prolocutor then outlines the play and comments on the significance of the events that are about to unfold in an appraising tone, interpreting them before the audience has a chance to see them staged:

> [Prologue 1]: The Lord did create woman owte of a ribbe of man;
> Which woman was deceyvyd with the Serpentes darkned myste;
> By whose synn owr nature is so weak no good we can;
>
> [Prologue 2]: And here begyneth owr pageant to make the declaration,
> From the letter C. in the chapter before saide,
> […]
> And of the deavilles temptacion, diseaivinge with a lye
> The woman, beinge weakest, that cawsed man to tast. ("The Norwich Grocers' Play" 12)

Apart from expounding the meaning and the consequences of the events that are about to be performed and providing a reference to the biblical verses the play is based on, the remarks seem to be aimed at dispelling any potential confusion on the audience's part. While in the "A" text the Serpent just appears on stage in the form of an angel (from what we can infer from Eve's comment later in the play: "An angell cam from Godes grace" ("The Norwich Grocers' Play" 10, line 74)), thus possibly confounding the audience and Eve simultaneously at first, in the "B" text the potential puzzlement is dispelled by the Prolocutor, who unmasks the Serpent's deception before the play even begins, and then by the expository speech given by the Serpent himself before he engages in a conversation with Eve. Overall, the "A" text relies on showing the action on stage and the "B" text leans to a much greater extent towards telling the audience what is happening in an explicit way. The former makes the audience identify with the characters of Adam and Eve by first making

them share Eve's confusion and then empathize with the characters, who sing their disheartening song that conveys their despair. The latter contains the emotional involvement by distancing the audience from Eve, who they have advantage over having listened to the prologue and to Satan's speech, and then by stimulating the audiences' intellectual rather than affective response to the episode at the end.

Another cycle that underwent post-Reformation revisions is that of Chester. Yet, we can only infer what the process of reforming it looked like based on external evidence as set against some clues in the manuscripts, since the whole cycle does not survive in pre- and post-Reformation copies that could be collated in a similar manner to those of "The Norwich Grocers' Play."[1] The fact that all manuscripts postdate the last performance of the cycle does not mean that they are fully revised Protestant versions that consistently promote the new doctrines. The cycle is, as Paul Whitfield White puts it, an "unevenly reformed" one (2008, 113). In the light of Chester's palimpsestic nature and the lack of any single performance text that we could safely assume was staged in the form in which it survives, we can only speculate on both what the pre- and post-Reformation performances looked like and where the numerous revisions were heading before the project was abandoned in 1575, with the last recorded performance of the cycle.

One extra-textual indicator that some post-Reformation revisions must have been made to the Chester cycle late in its history is Christopher Goodman's 1572 letter to the archbishop of York in which he complaints about some explicitly Catholic references in the text of the cycle, such as, for example, bread becoming Christ's flesh through the words and gestures of a priest. That had to be revised later since the manuscript versions of the fragment referred to by Goodman read "becomes my fleshe through your beleeffe" (Mills 1998, 181–182). Pre- and post-Reformation versions of the Banns, that is, an announcement of the performance delivered publicly in the year when the cycle was to be staged, shed some more light on the revising process. While the Early Banns are a simple description of the pageants that particular guilds had to prepare, the already quoted Late Banns, composed and revised most probably between 1548 and 1572 (Clopper 240), and clearly post-Reformation in character, are a mixture of an apology for some elements of the ensuing performance that have remained unchanged and an emphatic announcement of certain changes to come. In other words, they both signal some rewriting of the cycle and, as Heather Hill-Vásquez notes, try to remodel the audience's response to those fragments that have not been revised (19–20).

A revision implied by the Late Banns could have been made to the text of the Last Supper episode. The Banns emphatically explain that the producers of the play should stick to the text and utter the exact same words that Christ used, namely that bread and wine should be a memorial:

> And howe Criste our Savioure at his laste supper
> gave his bodye and bloode for redemtion of us all,

> yow Bakers see that with the same wordes you utter
> as Criste himselfe spake them, to be a memorall
> of that deathe and passion which in playe after ensue shall ("The Late
> Banns…," lines 131–135)

One more point at which the Banns are so emphatic when it comes to adhering to the text – arguably to signal that it has undergone some revision – is when they introduce what we now know as play iv. In the extant manuscripts, this play consists of three episodes – a meeting of Abraham, Lot, and Melchizedek; God's promises given to Abraham; and Abraham's sacrifice of his son Isaac – which are interspersed with explanatory speeches given by the figure of the Expositor. The pre-Reformation Banns only mention the Abraham and Isaac episode, while the Late Banns also mention the Melchizedek episode:

> The sacrefise that faithfull Abraham of his sonne should make,
> you Barbers and Waxe-chandlers of antiente tyme
> in the 4th pagente, with paynes ye did take,
> in decent sorte sett out – the storye is fyne.
> The offeringe of Melchesadecke of bread and wine
> and the preservation thereof sett in youre playe.
> Suffer yow not in enye poynte the storye to decaye. ("The Late Banns…,"
> lines 78–84)

According to Lawrence T. Clopper, the last three lines "raise the possibility that this is a late addition to the cycle or that it called for some defence because of the Catholic interpretation of Salem's king as the prototype of the priest" (237). In other words, either the whole episode could have been an addition to the already existing one revolving around Abraham and his son, or the Expositor's explanation of its significance could have been added or modified to counter the Catholic reading of the scene, with the Banns signalling the revision by asking the actors to render that defence faithfully.

In general, the consensus is that the figure of the Expositor was incorporated into the cycle at some point during its revisions in the 16th century. Peter Travis argues that the Expositor could have been added when the cycle was moved from Corpus Christi to Whitsuntide, which happened sometime in the first decades of the sixteenth century (47–48). Paul Whitfield White discerns a Protestant colouring to some of the Expositor's parts, believing that the extant versions of his speeches may have their origin in Edward's reign "when tensions over the Eucharist were at their highest in England" (2012, 130). Mills' analysis of the Expositor points to him propagating a clearly reformist message (2007) and Heather Hill-Vásquez speculates that it could have been right before its last performance in 1575 that the Expositor was added to the cycle (28). There is no conclusive evidence on the

matter, given that there are no manuscripts pre-dating the last performance that would preserve the plays featuring the Expositor and that, as Mills points out, we do not have access to the company accounts for those particular plays that would shed some light on the figure (2007, 314). There are, nonetheless, several indicators that the Expositor's speeches in play iv, as preserved in the extant late 16th- and early 17th-century manuscripts, could have been a post-Reformation addition or revision.

Play iv, although it combines three episodes removed in time, is nonetheless unified thematically, since the Expositor interprets all three episodes (Melchizedek and Abraham, God's promises to Abraham, Abraham and Isaac) as foreshadowing the three pillars of Christian life: the sacraments of Eucharist and Baptism as well as the obedience to God's "moste holye word" (*The Chester Mystery Cycle*, play iv, 78, line 477). While such emphases by no means counter Catholic doctrines, the focus on the only two sacraments recognized as such by the reformers, paired with an emphasis on the holy word of God, that is on the Scripture, may imply that the speeches given by the Expositor were added or edited to grant the play a reformist overtone.

Secondly, the Expositor sees Melchizedek as a prefiguration of neither Christ nor of a Catholic priest making a real offering during the Mass *in persona Christi*, which was the traditional interpretation of the Old Testament passage, but rather as a prefiguration of someone who symbolically commemorates the Last Supper. Melchizedek's offering of bread and wine is explained by the Expositor to be the opposite of the actual animal sacrifice popular at the time when the episode is set. That Melchizedek's actions are interpreted by the Expositor in a post-Reformation vein is implied by his phrasing and its emphasis on remembrance and the symbolic role of the act: "in bred and wyne his death remenber wee," "as nowe done wee, / in signification" (*The Chester Mystery Cycle*, play iv, 62, lines 126, 129–130) (Mills 2007, 315). The statements refer back to an analogous emphasis on remembrance in the Last Supper scene as prescribed by the Late Banns. Both fragments may be seen as attempts at differentiating the new understanding of the sacrament of Eucharist as a symbol of Christ's sacrifice and a form of its remembrance from the old, Catholic one, according to which the transubstantiation of bread and wine is an actual sacrifice made by Christ each time anew thanks to the words and gestures of a priest (Mills 2006, 222–224; White 2012, 130). Apparently, Goodman still found the reformed understanding missing when writing his letter of complaint back in 1572.

Finally, a comparison of the Expositor's speech after the Abraham and Isaac episode with its counterpart in the Brome version of the story is also quite telling. We know that the dramatic form of the Abraham and Isaac episode predates the rest of play iv since it is a rewriting of the Brome play of Abraham and Isaac (Mills 2007, 317). Chester does not diverge from its original substantially in terms of the dramatic qualities of the episode, but the concluding speech is changed

substantially. Among other modifications, while the Brome Doctor mentions adhering to God's commandments ("The Brome Play of Abraham and Isaac" 57, line 460), the Chester Expositor talks about the adherence to the holy word of God (*The Chester Mystery Cycle*, play iv, 78, line 477), putting emphasis more explicitly on the importance of the Bible at large.

The Expositor's interpretations add structure to the material presented, but the whole play remains heterogenous in terms of its theatrical qualities, which in itself may be an indicator of the palimpsestic character of the preserved text of the play. The episode with Melchizedek is a heavily dialogue-based post-climactic exchange of gifts that seems to be there only to lend itself to the figurative reading by the Expositor. The Abraham and Isaac episode, on the other hand, is very dynamic, with short exchanges between the father and son building tension and leading to a resolution. Props (sword, wood) are used and the action on stage is not limited to the characters talking to one another, but also includes Abraham binding Isaac, so both dialogues and physical action involving the bodies of the characters constitute the performance. The fragments in which the Expositor takes over the stage display yet another kind of performance aesthetics. His long speeches stand in contrast with Abraham and Isaac's short exchanges and they make little use of the variety of modes employed by performative arts.

The emotional impact produced by the characters' focus on their own and each other's feelings (e.g. "[Abraham:] O my harte will breake in three!"; "[Isaack:] But why make yee soe heavye chere? / Are ye any thynge adread?"; "[Isaack:] Father, I am full sore afrayde" (*The Chester Mystery Cycle*, play iv, 68, lines 253, 259, 265)) is reduced by the Expositor presenting the story as a figural representation of the New Testament events (Christ's sacrifice) rather than an actual story of a father attempting to kill his own child. When Isaac elicits from his father the true purpose of their journey up the hill, he begs Abraham not to kill him – he first suggests his father beats him instead if the killing is to be a form of punishment and then invokes his mother who he is sure would save him were she there (*The Chester Mystery Cycle*, play iv, 70). While Isaac's pleas for Abraham to spare him are aimed at evoking pity in his father and, by extension, also engage the audience, the Expositor builds a distance between the past story and its present significa-tion.[2] The postponing of the execution by Isaac, who keeps coming up with new distractions once he learns what his father is planning to do, may be tragicomic in tone, but it nonetheless prolongs both his and his father's suffering, of which the audience is reminded time and again by Abraham, who expresses his heartache several times. The Expositor's shift away from the affective quality of the episode is clearly visible once his speech is compared to the speech delivered at the end of the Brome play of Abraham and Isaac. Where Brome's Doctor capitalizes on the affective power of the play and actually asks its audiences to put themselves in Abraham's shoes to bring home his moral ("The Brome Play of Abraham and Isaac" 56), the Expositor in Chester deflects the audience's attention from that

quality of the play. Unlike the Doctor from the Brome version, the Expositor does not focus on the actual human suffering of parents that lose their children to make use of the audience's ability to identify with such an emotional state. He rather explains, in a methodical manner, how to read the episode figuratively and what lesson in piety it teaches.

The Expositor plays an analogous role to the Late Banns, but the overall effect produced by both differs substantially. The post-Reformation Banns are an extra-textual attempt at modelling the audiences' response to the plays and drawing their attention to the significance of words spoken by the biblical characters, at the same time deemphasizing the spectacle (Mills 1998, 142). The Expositor, who seemingly tries to do the same,[3] but this time from within the play, ends up remodelling not only the response to the performance, but also its very format, making it less of a spectacle and more of a sermon.

One could argue that the tensions present in the cycles that underwent revisions in the 16th century are the result of the very process of rewriting. The attempts at reforming an already existing work could account for the resulting contradictions and the heterogeneous form of the texts. And yet the same kind of tension is to be found in the newly composed 16th-century plays written with the reformed religious message in mind. It is, in fact, the defining characteristic of the biblical drama of John Bale, whose uneasiness with the form of dramatic performance has been widely recognized in criticism. "The Chief Promises of God into Man (God's Promises)," with its neat, symmetrical structure designed to deliver its doctrinal message in a clear way, has been referred to as sermon-like (Blackburn 51) and "almost anti-dramatic" (Taylor 68). Thora Balslev Blatt states that Bale's biblical plays are only "dramatic to the extent that the account in the Bible on which they are based is dramatic" (qtd. in Taylor 79); Cathy Shrank diagnoses them as "explicitly aligned against spectacle" (186) and Peter Happé sees Bale as sharing the "Protestant suspicion of the speciousness of theatrical illusion" (7). James Simpson argues that Bale's plays are "driven and dissolved" by the paradox of them being drama "designed to kill drama stone dead" (109). Tamara Atkin observes that it has now amounted to a critical commonplace to recognize Bale's "deep ambivalence about drama as an artform reliant on embodied action" (244).

One way in which Bale's plays control their doctrinal message is through employing the expositor figure of Baleus Prolocutor, Bale's onstage persona whose speeches frame his biblical plays: "God's Promises," which is a series of dialogues of God with biblical characters, "John Baptist's Preaching in the Wilderness" and "The Temptation of Our Lord." Baleus' prologues and epilogues expound the meaning of the works and point out the corrupted nature of the Catholic faith. But even when the Prolocutor is not there to give his commentary, Bale's biblical plays oftentimes boil down to the characters debating onstage, providing elaborate argumentation, and backing it up with the authority of the Scripture (Shrank 186–187). The plays thus govern the audience's understanding of the events unfolding and encourage

"active thinking about their belief" and "a personal scrutiny of the Word" (Happé 10). The tendency, similar to that in the Norwich Fall of Man and the scenes with the Expositor in Chester, is for Bale's plays to frequently resort to explaining instead of just showing and making the audience interpret the events for themselves.

Bale's Prolocutor and his other characters interpret the events presented in the plays and lay out the doctrine that stems from them, but their preference for telling over showing also manifests itself in their summarizing of the events that are not part of the performance, their role being in this respect once again analogous to that of the Expositor from the Chester Cycle, who is sometimes employed to abridge and link the biblical episodes in his speeches (Mills 2007, 318–319) or to the Norwich Prolocutor, who summarizes the preceding events at the beginning of his play to put it in a broader biblical context. Bale's "God's Promises" spans the whole Old Testament and part of the New Testament, and while each of the seven acts has one biblical figure as their focal point, the character of God (and sometimes also the character that God converses with) opens the subsequent parts with summarizing the biblical events that are supposed to have happened in-between the acts, thus granting continuity to the story told. Bale refers to the process of writing the play as "compiling" in a note at the end, thus emphasizing that the play is supposed to be a faithful rendering of the compiled biblical material more than its creative rewriting (Shrank 183). Bale aims at chronological accuracy even if, or perhaps precisely because, that involves giving up on the spectacle and just overviewing a large time span in a single monologue, which distances the audience from the represented world through underlining the temporal gap between their present and the biblical past.[4]

3. Bale's "Three Laws" and Wager's *The Life and Repentaunce of Marie Magdalene*

The distancing of the world of the audience from that presented on stage deemphasizes the role of the plays as an adaptation of the scriptural material into a different medium, one that re-enacts the events and makes them unfold in real time, inviting the audience to be part of those events now and again, as mystery plays did. Instead, the plays are made to resemble a homiletic form of biblical paraphrase and commentary. This is aimed at settling Bale's, and by extension the audiences,' doubts concerning the effectiveness of the dramatic form in disseminating the word of God. Conversely, the moments when the plays lean toward the traditional modes employed by their late medieval dramatic counterparts bring those anxieties to the fore. Atkin and Simpson both illustrate that with an example from "Three Laws, of Nature, Moses and Christ," a play drawing more from the tradition of the morality play than of the mystery play, but still closely related to the Bible as its allegory expresses the rightful role of the Old Testament (represented by the characters of

The Law of Nature and The Law of Moses) and the New Testament (The Law of Christ) in Christian faith. In the play, the character of Infidelity devises some theatrical tricks to fight its opponent, The Law of Christ, and instructs its minions on how to perform those. We know that Bale himself impersonated Infidelity when the play was staged, but even without the connection between the chief Vice of the play and its author and director having been underlined in this way, the disturbing analogy would still be quite self-evident – the role of a playwright and director that Infidelity assumes is associated with creating deceitful and manipulative illusion (Atkin 254; Simpson 112, 119).

An analogous disapproval of some aspects of the theatre is conveyed when the play exploits the convention of boys' cross-dressing on stage "to denounce sexual relations between men associated with that very transvestism" (White 2008, 101) or when Infidelity sings his entrance song, most likely to an "upbeat tune breaking the auditory monotony of a performance that had until that point consisted only of formal dialogue about commandments," instantly making himself "the most compelling and likable character onstage" (Brokaw 328). The song and the following exchange with Natural Law casts Infidelity in the role of a street peddler who is willing to palm others off with anything, including Catholic devotional items – such as "paxe" or "ymage of waxe" (Brokaw 328). Infidelity, as peddler and performer, uses the allure of the song to achieve its dubious goals. The question then arises how to distinguish Infidelity's devious use of a song as a bait from Bale's use of that same song to win his audiences' attention.[5] By presenting Infidelity as a deceitful, manipulative entertainer and associating the character with the Catholic faith on the one hand, and by using metatheatrical allusions linking Infidelity with the role of playwright and director on the other hand, the play reveals some suspicion towards theatre as reformers' tool to disseminate new beliefs.

Perhaps one exception to the rule that anything theatrical would undermine itself or confuse the doctrinal message could be Bale's use of signs in "God's Promises." As Happé notes, a tangible sign is mentioned in each episode that is to symbolize a covenant, and at least one of those, a dove, could also be a stage prop (10). This approach to stage props as signs also within the represented world of the play may be seen as a way of circumventing the confusion as to whether representation on stage is true or false – since the role of the dove both within the represented world of the play and on the level of its use as a prop is the same (it serves as a symbol of something else in both cases, i.e. it signifies something), the problem of the inherent falsehood of onstage representation is bypassed. In other words, in this case the resort to a performance-related mode indeed supports the message instead of confusing it or going against it. The question remains as to what extent such a fine conceptual (and structuralist) differentiation between props standing for real objects and props standing for other signs could be clear to the audiences, especially when set against the explicit criticism of any kind of theatricality, with no such subtle distinctions, in "Three Laws."

Another potential exception, also to be found in "God's Promises," is the inclusion of seven antiphons, that is, pieces of musical performance that add variety to its otherwise monotonously repetitive structure of long, information-loaded exchanges between God and biblical characters. On the one hand, the use of the antiphons may be argued to prove "that musical ritual grounded in clear scriptural understanding is consistent with the principles of Protestant reform" (Brokaw 345). On the other hand, one could contend that it is not in fact an exception because we are dealing here with "Catholic-leaning liturgical music" (Brokaw 345), which, arguably, proves Bale to be "only able to produce the old faith's sounds almost exactly," exposing a "gap between the reformed ideal and the little changed prac-tice" (Brokaw 346), thus once again making an element enhancing the performance undermine the play's reformist agenda. While agreeing with Happé that Bale's dramatic method helps "to drive home the doctrine" (10), and recognizing that there may be single exceptions to the overall tendency as to what this method consists in, I join most critics who believe that its essence is not to "enhance the theatricality of the plays" as Happé has it (10), but actually to supress it, and that when it is not supressed, it confuses the doctrinal message.

The tension between the need for an entertaining performance and for a clear didactic message is discernible in other reformist plays, for example in Lewis Wager's *The Life and Repentaunce of Marie Magdalene*, published in 1566, though most probably Edwardian in origin (Carpenter 28). That the right doctrine would be delivered and well understood was supposed to be granted by many expository speeches by allegorical characters that made Mary Magdalene into a negative exem-plum first and then made sure her transformation would be appreciated (Carpenter 30–31). All that is set against the scenes of Mary Magdalene's erotically charged interactions with Vices or her trying out different fancy costumes. White recognizes that the intention of the play, as is the case with Vice comedy in general, could be to expose the audience to the same temptations that the main character was subject to, to later evoke the feelings of guilt and repentance in them, but he casts some doubt as to whether the final effect achieved in the performance and the audiences' response to it could indeed be controlled to such an extent (2008, 100). Just as it would require an already in-depth knowledge and reflection on the part of the audience to contemplate the complex nature of Bale's props as signs referring to signs rather than real objects, so here the play would need to set its expectations on the implied audience very high to count on this kind of self-reflexive response. Overall, rather than a successful incorporation of spectacle to promote the Protes-tant message, White sees the play as illustrating "the potential disjuncture between the theory and the practice of religious propaganda on the stage, a disjuncture in which the intended 'message' may have been subverted by elements within the text itself and by the interpretation that text was given in performance" (2008, 101).

4. "The History of Jacob and Esau"

While some post-Reformation plays, such as Bale's "The Temptation of Our Lord," prioritize the non-confusing expounding of the doctrinal message over the attractiveness of the dramatic performance, and others, like *The Life and Repentaunce of Marie Magdalene* or "Three Laws," give up their coherence to oscillate between the edifying sermonizing and entertaining spectacle, "The History of Jacob and Esau," a school play published in 1568, takes yet another direction. Its doctrinal affiliation is proclaimed in the prologue, which states explicitly that the story to follow illustrates the doctrine of predestination:

> But before Jacob and Esau yet born were,
> Or had either done good, or ill perpetrate :
> As the prophet Malachi and Paul witness bear,
> Jacob was chosen, and Esau reprobate :
> Jacob I love (saith God) and Esau I hate.
> For it is not (saith Paul) in man's renewing or will,
> But in God's mercy, who chooseth whom he will ("The History of Jacob and Esau" 3)

Yet, the play is not only to demonstrate how predestination works in practice, but also to "delight" the "eyes and ears" of the audience (3). Indeed, the drama is designed to be an engaging and attractive performance: the actors are instructed to wear period costumes (the characters are "considered to be Hebrews and so should be apparelled with attire" (2)); the play is interspersed with songs that require vocal and performative skills on actors' part (White 2008, 102); the plot is well developed and not a mere pretext to expound the doctrine; and all of the above, together with the "engaging realism of the play," with its "naturalistic characterization" (Carpenter 33), point to the experience of watching the play as a potentially immersive one. The immersion is also facilitated by there being no expositor-like figure or other character intruding into the play itself to disrupt the action on stage and comment upon the events unfolding. The prologue does interpret the meaning of the whole story beforehand, but then, apart from slipping in the idea that God's ways are beyond human understanding in songs and Isaac's remarks, the play needs to rely on the characterization and dramatization of the events to convey its doctrinal message of predestination and to prove that the Poet who delivered the Prologue was right (Carpenter 32).

According to Sarah Carpenter, the shift away from the neutral tone of the biblical account encourages the audience to make judgments about the eponymous brothers (33). As the events of the play unfold, Esau emerges as a "loutish and inconsiderate figure, roughly dismissive of his brother and despised by most of the community for his antisocial behaviour" and Jacob as "pious and submissive" (33). White sees the division as a clear-cut one: Esau "is as wicked as Jacob is

unswervingly righteous" (2008, 103). Yet this kind of presentation, as Carpenter argues, obscures the doctrinal certainty of the prologue (33). If it is Jacob's actions that are supposed to help the audience see him as the elect one, and if Esau's behaviour is supposed to prove he deserves to be condemned, then the play could as well serve as an illustration of salvation by works. Were it not for the explicit interpretation that opens and closes the play, its doctrinal affiliation would not be that easy to determine.

An alternative approach is suggested by John E. Curran, who argues that the play indeed "goes well beyond the Bible in casting the elect Jacob as pious and innocent and the reprobate Esau as wicked and blameworthy" (285), but does so only superficially to eventually prove the point made in the prologue. The message of the prologue is conveyed, according to Curran, by means of making its characters either models or antimodels of the perception of Jacob and Esau and of the play at large. The servants and neighbours who judge Esau based on his actions are such antimodels, as is Jacob and Esau's mother, Rebecca, who is right in accepting God's plan for Jacob to receive his father's blessing, but wrong in trying to find a justification for that plan in her sons' merit or lack thereof (Curran 292–296, 299). A character that in turn truly understands the will of God is the boys' father Isaac, who is literally blind in the play, but also metaphorically blind to his children's good or bad disposition. Rather than relying on his judgment of who deserves his blessing more, he leaves the decision to God's providence, passively submitting himself to whatever is going to happen (Curran 295–298). This reading leads Curran to conclude that the play not only teaches a general lesson in trusting the divine plan and not trying to understand predestination through the prism of human moral judgments, but is also, at the same time, a metatheatrical commentary on the appropriate reception of the play itself.

That lesson is, however, problematic to put in practice. On the one hand, the audience should not be like Rebecca or one of the servants in trying to analyse the actions of the characters and then to root for whichever they sympathize with more based on what they learned about them. The alternative, however, which is following Isaac's suit, comes down to not trusting this, or any theatrical representation at all. Jacob dresses up as his brother, plays his role in front of his father, and even uses props (food that is supposed to imitate the meat that Esau would procure, since he as a hunter brings his father venison when he sees him). If we read Jacob's performance as a play within a play, metatheatrically representing the play "The History of Jacob and Esau," and if we assume, after Curran, that Isaac is a model recipient of the play, then the scene becomes a commentary on the efforts of the theatre that are, in fact, in vain. Jacob makes some attempts at a spectacularly realistic representation of his brother through his hairy costume that is to imitate the feel of Esau's body and the tasty, aromatic food he brings. Given that the decision is not Isaac's but God's, Jacob's efforts are effective and yet unnecessary, because irrespective of what he may have done, he would have received his father's blessing.

This is because Isaac is as little dependent on the stimuli from his other senses as he is on his impaired vision. Isaac is not sure which son he is talking to – he feels that he is hugging Esau and smells and tastes the food that seems to be brought by him, but says he can hear Jacob's voice – and yet he does not bother to determine which elements of what we as the audience know to be Jacob's performance are true and which are his mistaken interpretation. Instead, he ignores them all, because apparently he does not trust his judgment of the situation anyway. If one draws Curran's reading to its further logical conclusion, the legitimacy of any attempts that the play "The History of Jacob and Esau" makes at realistic representation and characterisation, as well as at effective spectacle and at conveying the true doctrine, are thus undermined by the play itself. The ultimate aporia of this reading of the intended message of the play is that while it is supposed to discourage the audience from making judgments about Jacob's merits and Esau's lack thereof, it still presents the viewers with anti-models they should recognize as such and a role model, Isaac, whose actions in the play need to be judged and deemed right in order for the conclusion that we are in no position to make such judgments to be drawn. To put it in yet another way, we need to figure out when the play tries to deceive us and when it gives a true lesson in order to understand its message, but then we need to know the message of the play beforehand in order to determine when the play is misleading.

The two alternative paths are to either see the play, after Michael O'Connell and Patrick Collinson, as a revival of the genuine mystery cycle tradition (O'Connell 104) that does not reveal any unease with its medium (Collinson 98), or, following Curran, as problematizing its theatricality after all. However, no matter whether one follows the more straightforward reading which assumes that the audience can tell which of the brothers deserves their sympathy based on their characterization in the play, or a subversive one, according to which the whole point of the play is to convince the audience not to make such judgments as humans are in no position to do so, the emerging conclusion is that theatre can hardly be reconciled with the doctrinal message that the prologue to the play conveys.

5. The Medium is the (Doctrinal) Message

While both pre- and post-Reformation biblical plays adapted the Scripture into the medium of dramatic performance, they did so with a different attitude to their source material. Compared to the late medieval cycle plays, post-Reformation biblical drama went to great lengths to underline its direct links with the biblical text. The new emphasis put on the plays' close adherence to their source material was related to the changing attitude to the role and model reception of the Bible itself. Carpenter sees the latter shift as one from encouraging a more affective and devotional attitude to a primarily intellectual one (17). These two different

positions from which the laity was to approach the Scripture are reflected in the biblical drama itself, as are the changing circumstances of assimilating it, i.e. the shift away from the Bible as part of the communal ritual and towards a more private experience stemming from individual responsibility (Hill-Vásquez 20). Pre-Reformation cycle plays indeed used biblical content to promote affective piety and to serve the communal needs, and post-Reformation drama, although deriving from that same tradition, was very much preoccupied with granting their audiences' understanding of their theological message. Plays such as Bale's "God's Promises" or the "B" version of "The Norwich Grocer's Play" tend to make the experience of watching them more like reading the Scripture or a commentary to it than taking part in a ritual.

Based on the analysis of what the parcels, that is copies of parts to be learned by a given actor, would look like for selected characters from the Chester Annunciation and Nativity, Margaret Rogerson argues that affective piety may be considered as the acting method for the players in the pre-Reformation Chester cycle (93). She notes that the practice of affective piety encouraged casting oneself in the biblical stories as a side character who observes the events in close proximity. This applies to the characters played by the Cestrians, but also to the viewers of the Chester plays as well as of the other pre-Reformation biblical cycles, who were cast in that exact position of eyewitnesses by the plays. Affective piety may thus be considered the "method" for medieval actors, as well as a model for the reception of the plays by the audiences, the latter being a well-established link in the scholarship on the mystery plays, as Rogerson shows (101–102). In this sense, affective piety, a form of late medieval piety, is the foundation for the experience of participating in the cycle, either as an actor or a member of the audience.

Rogerson analyzes how the parcels for actors impersonating the confounded Mary during the Visitation or Salome, a doubting midwife assisting in Christ's birth, encourage emotional engagement and in this way demonstrates that such an engagement would involve and actually embrace doubt and confusion as facilitating identification and involvement. Isaac in play iv can be added to the list of the characters from the Chester cycle that embody distrust towards the legitimacy of actions of the holy figures on-stage. As Isaac starts inquiring what his father's plan is, demands answers, and becomes more and more frightened and confused as to his father's intentions, his doubts become the focal point of the play. In the spirit of affective piety, the doubting characters on-stage reveal the plays' openness to an analogous journey from doubting and confusion to insight on the part of the audience. A major consequence of the post-Reformation need for biblical drama to elicit an intellectual response and to promote the correct understanding of the significance of the Bible as the source of the new doctrines was that such an expectation left no room for any kind of doubt on the part of the participants. The side effect of the post-Reformation attempts at eliminating doubt was, in turn, a shift away from some essential elements of the dramatic performance.

One obvious feature of dramatic performance that intensifies the uncertainty is the real-time unfolding of the events. The performance, unlike, for example, a narrative told by an omniscient narrator who signals to the reader that they already know the story, produces a sense of immediacy and thus increases suspense (Berry; qtd. in Mills 2007, 316). The suspense serves well to engage the audience emotionally but runs the risk of them making wrong assumptions without having the full picture from the start. The post-Reformation plays discussed above, such as the "B" text of "The Norwich Grocers' Play," *Marie Magdalene*, or "The History of Jacob and Esau," make sure to eliminate that risk by revealing the endings and morals of the plays already in their prologues.

Yet another measure taken in the plays discussed is to distance the audience from the events enacted with the use of the figures of interpreters that clearly mark the distinction between the two time planes with their intrusive commentaries and summaries. Apart from the pragmatic issue of time constraints, the resort to compiling and summarizing instead of acting the events out may have been driven by the need to give primacy to the written word of the Bible over spectacle (Simpson 120), as well as by the newly emerging emphasis on the historicity of the biblical events that carried with it an obligation to report them faithfully and chronologically. The translating of the new approach to the Bible as a chronicle into Scripture-based plays produced "a temporal gap between the present of performance and the biblical past" (Taylor 61–62), adding to the distancing effect evoked by the very presence of a figure mediating between the represented world of the plays and their audiences. Pre-Reformation biblical drama did the exact opposite when it selectively chose single biblical episodes and then, when enacting them, drew the represented world of its plays anachronistically close to the reality of its viewers, placing the creation of communally shared participatory experience over the historical (i.e. biblical) accuracy. The examples of that technique vary and include the conflation of the biblical past and the audiences' present in the portrayal of the characters and their conditions (like in the Towneley "The Second Shepherds' Play") or making the audience part of the performance (like in the York address of the crucified Christ to the crowds or in the Chester speech of Moses which casts the medieval audience in the role of the people of Israel).

The zeal with which the Chester Expositor and the speaker in its post-Reformation banns emphasize the role of the Eucharist as remembrance hints at the relationship between the shift in the doctrinal interpretation of the sacrament of the Eucharist and the more and more pronounced distancing of the audience from the biblical plays. As Taylor observes,

> where the mass was also traditionally thought of as a "miraculous" recreation of past events, Zwinglian or Swiss reformers replaced notions of the Eucharist as the ritual re-sacrifice of the Real Presence with the historical contingency of Christ's death, once-for-all in a temporal as well as theological framework. (83)

The audiences' "real presence," i.e., their atemporal participation in the biblical events seems to be deemphasized once the new understanding of the Bible as a chronicle and the Eucharist as remembrance are more and more widely adopted.

A source of doubt even more fundamentally linked to the very medium of biblical plays and not only their genre is the fact that anything represented on stage has the same status – a representation and not the actual thing being represented. This is regardless of whether a play wants to depict something as true or false. The depiction of falsehood on stage actually draws attention to the fact that the same kind of illusion is used to represent truth. This issue has been explored by Kelly in her insightful case study of the 16th-century allegorical play *Conflict of Conscience*, which brings her to the conclusion that "early modern writers ultimately became aware of the tendency of theatrical performances of religious experience to highlight the instability of religious identity" (2014, 390). This is because "the nature of dramatic performance means that staging religious subject matter always raises questions about the significance of ritual, prayer, and other outward shows of faith, whether undertaken by Catholics or Protestants" (2014, 405). In other words, if an anti-Catholic treatise condemns Catholic rituals as a spectacle devoid of true faith, that point may be fairly taken, but if a performance stages "false" faith as a mere theatrical show, it puts into question its own theatricality and its ability to ever tell the truth (2014, 413; see also Kelly 2012, 59–63). Theatre that teaches new doctrines, that is new truths, at the same time enacting the falsities of the old ones, like Bale's drama or *The Life and Repentaunce of Marie Magdalene*, by definition subverts itself since it is unable to make the distinction between the true and rightful and false and condemnable representation from within its own medium, where both have the same status. It is therefore not able to contain the potential for doubt in its reception. "The History of Jacob and Esau," which aims at postulating a new, Calvinist model for the production and reception of theatrical performance of religious content, ends up postulating nonparticipation in such drama.

6. Conclusion

The post-Reformation biblical drama of the 16th century was both a continuation of, and a departure from, the tradition of the late medieval mystery play. By the look of it, the genre of biblical drama could seem tailored to promote the Bible in the vernacular and teach new doctrines derived directly from the interpretation of the Scripture. However, post-Reformation plays, in their attempts at appropriating the genre to pursue its reformist, didactic goals, encountered a great challenge, since it was not only the content but also the form of biblical drama that was designed to serve a different purpose than the one envisaged by the reformers. Thus, trying to cash in on the popularity of cycle drama, playwrights faced a fundamental obstacle – the defining features of both its genre and its medium worked against, and not in

support of, the new doctrines. That resulted in some attempts at modifying the genre and negotiating the use of the medium of theatrical performance, but with the plays revealing their "unease with the stage as a forum in which to address the Bible" (Carpenter 12), the project eventually turned out to be a self-defeating one.

The general pattern emerging from the analyses undertaken and summarized in the present study seems to be that the more successful a play is in carrying the doctrinal message, the further it departs from the genre of the mystery play and the less effective it tends to become as a performance. Conversely, the plays that are satisfactory as theatre become confusing in terms of their intended doctrinal message. This is hardly surprising given that the format of a Scripture-based play was devised when a different doctrine shaped its content, but another thing is that biblical drama was designed as one ingrained in an already well known and popular form of piety, and so it was not expected to convince and convert. This may be one of the reasons why it turned out to be less effective as a tool of disseminating entirely new sets of beliefs and forms of religiousness, irrespective of which particular reformist thinkers and denominations the playwrights or revisers strove to promote. As one 16th-century anti-theatrical author argues, if a group of university students found a play they watched to be a chastening experience, "it came more of somewhat which they brought thither, then which they found there" (qtd. in Kelly 2014, 416). Pre-Reformation biblical drama relied on what the audiences brought with them and thus could afford more doubt and uncertainty than the reformers were perhaps willing to accept in their plays. However, while biblical drama may have proven to be unsatisfactory as a tool to disseminate the new teachings and contain the accompanying doubts, that is, to prescriptively summon up the new spirit of its times, it definitely helps to understand and describe the actual, confused nature of 16th-century popular piety in England and of the still unformed religious *Zeitgeist* in transition.

Notes

1   The extant manuscripts include: Hm Huntington Library manuscript 2 (1591), A BL Additional 10305 (1592), R BL Harley 2013 (1600), B Bodleian Library, Bodley 175 (1604), H BL Harley 2124 (1607). Apart from those, there are four surviving manuscripts preserving single plays or fragments (Lumiansky and Mills 1974, ix–xxvii). The manuscripts exhibit some minor, though at times telling differences, for example MS R missing lines that would indicate that one of the characters saved during the last judgment is a pope (White 2012, 126–127), or MS H being the only one that contains Mary's speech about her special role and her willingness to die and be with her son (i.e. a reference to her Assumption) (Lumiansky and Mills 1983, 37–38). However, no systematic pattern emerges as to any single manuscript being consistently

more post-Reformation in character than the others. Lumiansky and Mills' theory is that alternative versions of the differing fragments were there in the Exemplar – a copy from which all the surviving manuscripts of the entire cycle originate – and the differences stem from either conscious or unconscious editorial choices of the scribes rewriting it (Lumiansky and Mills 1983, 23, 85).

2   The temporal and emotional distancing of the audience from the plays by the Expositor has been discussed by Walter, Mills (2007), Hill-Vásquez, and Christie.

3   See Hill-Vásquez 25–50 for an in-depth discussion of how the Expositor reshapes the reception aesthetics of the cycle.

4   See Taylor for an in-depth analysis of the relationship of Bale's biblical drama with history.

5   See Brokaw 329–331 for more examples of the use of songs in the play that serve to mock Catholicism and so undermine the legitimacy of singing as part of a "truly" religious play.

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JOANNA MATYJASZCZYK completed her PhD in literary studies at the University of Łódź, where she teaches medieval and early modern English literature. Her doctoral thesis focused on English and Scottish popular ballads. Her research interests include medieval and early modern religious poetry, religious drama and popular literature. She is a member of the University of Łódź Centre for Studies in Medieval and Renaissance English Literature.

Paweł Stachura
https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4847-8594
Adam Mickiewicz University, Poznań

Matter as the New Wilderness: Cognitive Obstacles, Radium, and Radioactivity in British and American Popular Fiction from the 1910s

Abstract: At the beginning of the 20th century, the radical paradigm shift in atomic physics and chemistry attracted attention from non-scientific culture, and provided a new set of imagery in literary representation of matter, particularly in popular fiction. The article presents a number of texts whose themes and plots were rooted in a peculiar manner of writing, featuring a radical and consistent projection of emotions and desires onto literary representation of matter. The theoretical background has been derived from recent discussion of cultural materialism, and from Gaston Bachelard's psychoanalysis of the scientific mind. The selection of literary texts covers popular novels and short stories published in Britain and the United States between 1880 and 1918. The conclusions present a somewhat surprising link between the new developments in atomic theory, and the tradition of frontier settings in the American adventure romance.

Keywords: cognitive obstacle, cultural materialism, radium, radioactivity, popular science

1. General Outline: The American Frontier and the Frontier of Science

The discovery of radioactivity, and the consequent development of new models of the atom, have brought on a strong cultural response, which amounted to a craze in the first two decades of the 20th century. There was a similarly strong response in fiction, especially in popular fiction, ranging from thematic interest in new rays and elements, to the mood of anxiety and enthusiasm engendered by the scientific revelations that matter is somehow linked to radiation and electricity, and that

matter was unstable, susceptible to explosive disintegration. Matter, in many of the literary texts discussed here, could no longer be taken for granted, as it was becoming less solid and more dangerous. Representation of matter in such terms can be described as a distinct mode of realism, the realism focused on matter, which is characterized by a specific choice of sensational themes and plots. The realism focused on matter can be defined in terms proposed by Gaston Bachelard in his psychoanalytical discussion of pre-scientific thinking. Most generally, as observed in the conclusions, this mode of realism focused on images that blurred the distinction between mind and matter, and presented them in sensational plots and images of violence, physical strain, dynamic movement, and bodily suffering.

2. Theoretical Background: Gaston Bachelard, Jane Bennett, and the Myth and Symbol School of American Studies

The present study is a historical survey of the figuration of radioactivity in English and American popular fiction from the 1890s and the 1910s; this mixture is justified because many of the texts and authors seem to have functioned in both countries simultaneously. Theoretically, the discussion is based on Gaston Bachelard's notion of the cognitive obstacle, which he presented in *The Formation of the Scientific Mind* (1938). The literary texts under discussion are treated as reflections, echoes, if not explicit thematic representations, of an epistemological crisis which challenged earlier ideas about matter among scientists and, more importantly, among members of the general audience. The dramatic effects of radioactivity challenged common sense, utilitarian views of matter, popular perception of materialism and idealism, religious opinions about science. Most importantly, the crisis was discernible on a practical level of direct, everyday experience represented in fiction: the representation of a character's body and soul, of material objects, was affected by confusing news from the world of science. The challenge will be discussed in Bachelard's terms, as challenge to epistemological obstacles.

In science, an epistemological obstacle is a way of thinking "badly" (Bachelard 2002 [1938], 25), that is in a scientifically unproductive way. Bachelard identifies everyday life as the source of epistemological obstacles, which is perhaps similar to the contemporary notion of cognitive metaphor, in that an epistemological obstacle is often a metaphor derived from everyday experience, such as the absorbing sponge (2002 [1938], 72) or the digesting stomach (2002 [1938], 172). It is possible to understand sponge-soaking and digestion scientifically, and both are complex bio-chemical systems. An epistemological obstacle occurs, however, when someone thinks of sponges and stomachs as simple phenomena, which can be used as simplifying metaphors (e.g. in teaching or in popular science writing) for explanation of physical processes and chemical reactions, for instance by saying that a liquid absorbs gas like a sponge, or that an electric circuit is 'fed' electricity from a power source.

Bachelard claims that such metaphors are doing more harm than good in science, particularly in teaching of science, and he dismisses their use in general "opinion" (general discourse) as irrelevant. In fiction, however, cognitive obstacles can become central premises, themes, and patterns of imagery used in representation of settings and characters, or even as patterns of plots. In other words, the present discussion is based on the idea that material world in fiction is largely made of cognitive obstacles. When cognitive obstacles were radically challenged by new scientific developments, when many of them became untenable and useless in science, there was hypothetically at least some corresponding upheaval in fictional worlds, in fictional representation of matter. The following interpretative passages will focus on representation of materiality in terms of cognitive obstacles. It is assumed that writers could explicitly identify and mention some "old" cognitive obstacles, but at the same time, while dealing with new, confusing scientific evidence, they also implicitly met "new" cognitive obstacles, falling back on easy, generally accepted metaphors and ways of thinking, to create stable and understandable material settings. As the texts suggest, in the 1910s, this process was occurring with a great intensity, displaying an interesting variety of images, metaphors, and themes.

What seems to be the crux of Bachelard's writings is the confrontation that brings about the cognitive obstacles, the confrontation between realistic imagination of objects and an active experimental search for relations:

> Both science and poetry create a "presence" of possibilities, the one mathematically conceived, the other verbally imagined, before any link to physical reality is established. As Bachelard sees it, both science and poetry can be said to project a particular reality rather than merely to reflect it. […] Bachelard examines this projective quality of science in light of the matter–radiation, wave–particle, determinism–indeterminism contrasts of contemporary science. [...] The constructed phenomena of science, such as electron spin, have no meaning in isolation. One may imagine the spin of an isolated electron, for example, but one does not think it. Thinking, in the science of second approximation, depends on mathematical relations. Without these relations the phenomena of science cannot meaningfully be said to exist. (Smith 2016, 28)

Consequently, the imaginary construction of matter results from attempts to translate mathematical relations into words and images: commonly used phrases, metaphors and images can form cognitive obstacles, instead of explaining mathematical relations. Bachelard discusses this process psychoanalytically, as projection of confusing images or verbal concepts onto an active work of scientific imagination: many of his examples suggest that matter is mainly a manner of speaking, a set of widespread metaphors and turns of phrase. Smith, in his monograph on Bachelard, wrote about "seduction of words and the images they evoke" (36), and the variety and intensity of those images, as they formed the world in which

whole nations lived, was recorded in Bachelard's best known works. He wrote about visual and substantialist images used in everyday speech: cognitive obstacles emerge when visual images of objects dominate human understanding of empiricist observation, for instance when matter is conceived as porous sponge, as bunch ravenous animals, or (perhaps most commonly) as a clod of microscopic marbles that stick together. This is how atoms often work in everyday language: various material phenomena (colours, opaqueness or transparency, firmness or softness, temperature, specific heat etc.) are explained as underlying qualities of atoms, which have the function of internal "caskets" in which qualities are stored and hidden; matter's qualities can be hidden in the "caskets" because the caskets are invisible by virtue of their small size. Bachelard describes this semi-logical reasoning as substantive obstacle: "explaining a phenomenon by reference to a supposed underlying substance" (2002 [1938], 107). More generally, the substantialist obstacle of is an "obstacle of immediacy," an outcome of what Bachelard calls the "Harpagon complex" (2002 [1938], 54), a forced preservation of imaginary substance at the cost of ignoring empirical evidence: in semi-scientific versions of matter, what is at stake is the preservation of its materiality, that is creating an image of atoms endowed with qualities of matter known from everyday experience (as rigid, hard, "material" marbles). This habit of thought is perhaps the most widespread and persistent one of all Bachelard's epistemological obstacles, constituting much of the life of the scientific mind in everyday language and in many popular-science texts or in fiction.

It would seem that the semi-scientific interest in materiality, observable in the literary texts analyzed here, would be best visible in science fiction, and indeed most texts under discussion belong to this genre, and were written in a period that is seen as a crucial early stage of its development (Moskowitz 1968; Stableford 2003). However, there is no intrinsic reason to exclude other genres from the analysis; it would seem that any material setting will do. Perhaps all of realist fiction was, to some extent, affected by changing and confused views of materiality at the beginning of the 1910s. Thus, some of the examples do not belong to science fiction, but other popular genres (detective fiction, melodrama, Western fiction).

Other than Bachelard, the present study is theoretically related to more recent discussions of materialism in cultural criticism, as exemplified by the essays collected in Anna Malinowska and Karolina Lebek's *Materiality and Popular Culture: The Popular Life of Things* (2017). In a representative essay from Malinowska's collection, "The Secret Life of Things: Speculative Realism and the Autonomous Subject" (Czemiel 2017), Grzegorz Czemiel discusses the "de-anthropocentric tendency" of cultural materialism, which leads to "overturning the absolute monarchy of humankind in culture" (42). The reference to speculative realism springs from the idea that matter can be endowed with something that amounts to agency and rights, that matter takes part in a debate: matter strikes back, surprises people, undermines human assumptions. A similar conclusion is reached in John Storey's

article from the same collection, on the relationship between the popular and material culture: in spite of the attempted total commodification of matter, it invariably regains its independence from commercialized popular culture, when it turns into garbage or raw material for bricolage, and becomes a wilderness or a common, a freely available, unregulated resource (20–23).

Earlier, these ideas have been comprehensively proposed, as a philosophical project, by Jane Bennett in *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (2009). Referring to Henry David Thoreau, and his treatment of the American mythology of the wilderness, Bennett observes on the multiple aspects of the "thing-power":

> The idea of thing-power bears a family resemblance to Spinoza's conatus, as well as to what Henry David Thoreau called the Wild or that uncanny presence that met him in the Concord woods and atop Mount Ktaadn and also resided in/as that monster called the railroad and that alien called his Genius. Wildness was a not-quite-human force that addled and altered human and other bodies. It named an irreducibly strange dimension of matter, an out-side. (2–3)

While the wild thing-power influences people, there is also an opposite process at play: the taming of the Wild is comparable to scientific endeavour, understood as a struggle between human agency and non-human agency: the "not-quite-human force" is forcing human thought to change, redefine, but then, human thought is also trying to redefine and demarcate matter, civilize it, utilize it, and appropriate it on the fundamental, microscopic level, by claiming and owning (rights to) newly defined (discovered) elements, particles, reactions. In particular, human agents try to neutralize matter by reducing its "vitality" to a "dead and thoroughly instrumentalized" status (Bennett, ix) of a natural resource. This, conversely, strikes back at human self-definition, causing anxieties about the non-existence of the soul, non-agency of human beings, and reduction of humanity to the status of "human resource" (with the word "human" added by employers by way of a superficial, but legally non-binding courtesy). There is also a religious angle about it, as many Christian denominations attach negative meanings to the word materialism. Thus, to save human agency, even as it tries to seize control over matter by defining and understanding it, some sort of material agency and independence must be recognized, which Bennett describes as vitality. This mutual definition, a dialectic struggle that seems quite unpredictable and very interesting, is often thematized, implicitly, in the texts discussed here.

Returning to Bachelard, who never makes this claim explicitly, a challenge to cognitive obstacles can be seen as a sort of action by matter performed on people, i.e. on human ideas; matter is forcing people to change their views. In literary fiction, this is a very interesting possibility, because it corresponds to the process of character development, and to various structural and thematic elements commonly met in literature, such as tragic recognition, passage from innocence to experience,

or, in the American context, the frontier experience. The interaction between matter and cognitive obstacle is analogous, or at least similar, to the interaction between the character and the setting and the background, in that the setting and the background can be represented as factors (agents) that force the character to change, evolve, reorient, humble down or shape up.

In American fiction, the interaction between the character and the setting was often thematically linked to the historical experience of the American frontier. In particular, the frontier adventure was important for author of the American romance in the first half of the 19th century, exemplified by James Fenimore Cooper, Robert Montgomery Bird, and William Gilmore Simms. Closer to the texts discussed here, there is of course the early phase of Western fiction, exemplified by Owen Wister and Zane Grey. By extension, Western settings in well-known mainstream fiction by Bret Harte, Ambrose Bierce, and Jack London, also features the natural frontier setting as an important factor in character development. Below, in the discussions of literary texts about materiality, some notable similarities will be noted, particularly in American texts, between adventures in the Western frontier and adventures on the frontiers of science. Arguably, this similarity is related to Richard Slotkin's claim that the frontier experience was "the structuring metaphor of the American experience" (1974, 5). Slotkin, in *Regeneration through Violence* (1974), describes the metaphor as an extended one, a skeleton plot used and reused by many authors, which includes images of solitude, solitary communion with wild nature, violent struggle against adversaries, and eventual experience of physical regeneration and spiritual rebirth. At the end of the 19th century, this structuring metaphor was recognized as the source of American national identity, and was often combined with references to racial and social Darwinism. This is the traditionally accepted critical view which goes back to Frederick Jackson Turner's seminal formulation of the frontier thesis in 1897, and has been developed in American studies, beginning with seminal work by Henry Nash Smith (1950, 240), subsequently developed by Burton (1962; 1965), Cronon (1987), or the recent essays in Jada Ach and Gary Reger's collection (2020), and by Stephen J. Mexal's *The Conservative Aesthetic: Theodore Roosevelt, Popular Darwinism, and the American Literary West* (2020). When this structuring metaphor is applied to a scientific theme or image in fiction, it appears to operate in a manner similar to Bachelard's cognitive obstacles, and the similarity will be discussed with reference to specific texts.

3. Cultural Reaction to the Discovery of Radioactivity: Existing Research in History of Ideas and Literary History

The cultural context of the cultural formation of matter was discussed in Spencer R. Weart's studies on nuclear fear (2012, 22–32; 1988, 3–54), and most specifically by Andrea Candella in "The Radium Terrors: Science Fiction and Radioactivity

before the Bomb" (2015). Candella lists a number of thematically related popular science texts and fiction from the first three decades of the 20th century, most importantly H.G. Wells's *The World Set Free* (1914) and a number of popular-science publications by the physician Frederick Soddy, an Italian novel by Emilio Salgari (1907), *Le meraviglia del Duemilla* [The Wonders of the Year 2000], and Albert Dorrington's *The Radium Terrors*. The texts discussed by Candella include speculations about political and historical change brought on by radium as weapon and inexhaustible source of energy. Candella provides an extensive discussion of Dorrington's novel, commenting on the variety of imagery used to describe radium, "inspired by religion, mysticism, and spiritualism" (2015, 336), and on international popularity of the novel (337). Candella also discusses texts from the 1920s and 1930s, such as an Austrian 1936 novel by Rudolf Brunngraber,[1] and better known novels by Karel Čapek, *The Absolute at Large* (1922), and *Krakatit* (1922), as well as Soviet pop novels by Alexey Nokolayevich Tolstoy, published in the 1920s. The common denominator of these works, as Candella observes, was the general interest and anxiety caused by the fact that "[r]adioactivity appeared to exist in opposition to every known natural phenomenon and even to the basic laws of physics" (342). Importantly, Candella observes that the texts (often the same texts in translation) were published in various countries almost simultaneously, which amounted to a sort of international craze, spanning across political borders and cultural differences. The present inquiry, in comparison with Candella's astute article, will cover a similar number of texts and perhaps a greater thematic variety of responses, but the selection will be limited to texts published in the United States in the 1900s, and focusing on new speculations about matter, and on what was, arguably, an emerging new kind of realistic imagery.

The democratization and commercialization of the atomic theory of matter in popular science was discussed by Matthew Lavine in *The First Atomic Age* (2013), about American cultural responses to radium and X-rays in the first half of the 20th century. In particular, Lavine comments on the intriguing speculations that new rays were opening the doors to spiritualist mysteries, enabling telepathy or communications with the dead (130–135), seeing this as part of "vulgarization of radiation" (140) and the general commodification and democratization of imagery related to the new rays:

> By the end of the 1920s, the wholesale commodification of x-rays and radium had made them ubiquitous. Nonscientist Americans could and did interact with them physically, intellectually, and rhetorically. Some were indifferent, and many had retained through those first few decades the vague dread or acute fear that had been part of the spectrum of reactions from the start. (144)

Thus, it seems that the new rays were perhaps among the more sensational and attractive themes in popular science, possibly because of the newness and tentative

quality of quality. The new rays, because they were new and unpredictable, became frequently used symbols of free play of imagination, and served, symbolically, as fertile new grounds for easy speculation, unmitigated by the prosaic and the unremarkable. This quality was recognized by contemporary commentators already, as observed by Lavine: "Benjamin Gruenberg, a textbook author and social commentator, argued in 1935 that such speculation in science popularizations was a 'rich source of aesthetic satisfaction' precisely because 'the pursuit of the not-yet-known […] also meets a human need quite as truly as do other forms of play' in ways that already realized technologies might not" (122). Consequently, reactions to new rays had a wider cultural meaning as controversy over playful use of imagination: some negative reactions "might also be due to a wounded sense of Victorian propriety, a reaction against a new physics that seemed daily more metaphysical, or a manifestation of the broader antimodern sentiment that had not only Soddy in its sights but also Joyce, Stravinsky, and Picasso" (145). Lavine also observes that the general interest in radioactivity and new elements was a brief phenomenon, which waned in the 1920s, only to be renewed in 1945, with the advent of nuclear weapons and power plants (123).

Apart from the general interest in new rays, there was a limited but growing awareness of the change in the atomic theory of matter. At the time of popularity of stories about radium and new rays, scientific descriptions of atom were transitioning from the "plum pudding model" by J.J. Thomson to the "planetary" model developed by Ernest Rutherford (and other physicists) in the first two decades of the 20th century. The "ten original papers" which presented new models of the atom were compiled by Lakhtakia, and three of them (by Thomson, Rutherford, and Niels Bohr) are particularly important as the distant background for the literary texts discussed here (1996, 233–308). The importance of Thompson's and Rutherford's models was that they presented the atom as a composite object and a site of violent movements and forces in a state of dynamic equilibrium; they theoretically divided the atom into parts to account for various physical observations, whose dramatic nature attracted popular attention. The spectacular effects included the emission of electrons from a metallic surface in a Crookes tube, the X-ray images of skeletons and internal organs, radioactivity and damage it caused to the human body, the discovery of previously unknown, radioactive elements, the tremendous amounts of energy produced by radioactivity (Lavine 12–47). In the first decade of the 20th century, there was a number of popular discussions of the rapid change in the atomic theory of matter; those discussions were related to the general interest in radioactivity at the same time. Among the general and accessible contemporary presentations of new developments there were Marion Erwin's *The Universe and the Atom* (1915), F.B. Venable's *The Study of the Atom* (1904), Ernest D. Wilson's *The Structure of the Atom* (1916), and above all the English translation of Jean Baptiste Perrin's *Les Atomes* (1916). Those were general presentations of the new image of matter created by Thomson, Rutherford, Moseley and Bohr. They all

presented a comprehensible picture of how the new atom models were influencing other sciences, chemistry in particular, and how they were changing the entire texture of scientific materialism. Although they were addressed to the general reader with some knowledge of physics, their impact seems to have been limited, with the exception of Perrin's book (the French chemist was presenting the research on Brownian movements, for which he would be awarded Nobel prize in 1926). Nevertheless, the literary texts discussed below were often based on the idea that the new nuclear physics was not only a study of new rays, but that it created a new concept of matter, a new imaginary texture of the world. As it will be demonstrated below, most texts presented this new texture as an unstable, unpredictable and dangerous one.

Nearly seventy novels and short stories about radium and radioactivity are listed in Everett F. Bleiler's monumental bibliography of early science fiction published before 1926. Many of the texts, because of their poor, amateurish quality as literature, are examples of the democratization and vulgarization mentioned by Lavine, as popular responses to new science, and as documents of a craze. The bibliography lists fewer texts on radioactivity than on radium, suggesting that the newly discovered phenomena of radioactivity, confusing for scientists as they opened new roads in atomic theory, were perhaps even more confusing for the general public, as they blurred the cultural boundaries between chemistry and physics, between matter and radiation, between the material and the immaterial. Radium, on the other hand, seems to have been more manageable as a theme and source of literary imagery. Thus, when Bleiler (910) breaks down radium-fiction into thematic subgroups, he lists fictions on radium "as healing substance," as "source of antigravity," and more: radium "erases personality," "in bloodstream produces X-ray vision," and in very numerous works it prevents aging. Notably, several short stories feature radium as currency. Radium was probably the last wonderful element that was perceived in terms of non-nuclear chemistry, as a sort of new gold, in the sense that popular culture could refer to radium without having to absorb the language of nuclear reactions. This seems to be important because nuclear physics would later bring on images of transformation of one element into another, something that had been previously described in terms of alchemical magic, a subversive procedure that could undermine the relative values of elements, make rare ones readily available, make the mysterious ones less mysterious, and the common ones less obvious. More notably, nuclear physics would blur the distinction between matter and radiation, matter and energy, demonstrating that rays can be described as pieces of matter, and (perhaps more disconcertingly) matter as waves, or as somehow frozen energy. Nuclear synthesis was obviously a hard bit of a paradigm shift, not only in physics, but in popular ideas about matter as well. The popular image of radium, however, was initially still anchored in chemistry, and its special qualities were only harbingers of the paradigm shift brought on by nuclear physics in the first half of the 20th century.

The texts discussed in the present inquiry suggest that the formation of matter in popular science, early in the 20th century, was an international phenomenon, occurring in parallel between Britain and the United States. This was partially because popular culture market was organized in this way; there was a lot of cooperation and opportunity for reprints or simultaneous publication on both sides of the Atlantic. Another important aspect was the international quality of science (and popular science) related to radium, x-rays, and the new models of the atom; Lavine mentions the popularity of American lecture tours by French, German, and British scientists, who were enjoying the status of minor celebrities among non-scientific audiences. Consequently the texts described here are both British and American, and were often published in both countries.

The popular response discussed here is paralleled (but not anticipated) in highbrow literature by "The Dynamo and the Virgin," the well-known 25th chapter from *Education of Henry Adams* (1918). In the chapter, Adams describes his meeting with Samuel Pierpont Langley at the World Exhibition in Paris in 1900. As they are both watching steam engines and dynamos, Adams is disturbed by the difference between combustion engines, which he can understand, and various electric machines, which he cannot. Langley, however, announces the advent of a more disturbing problems:

> Then he [Langley-PS] showed his scholar the great hall of dynamos, and explained how little he knew about electricity or force of any kind, even of his own special sun, which spouted heat in inconceivable volume, but which, as far as he knew, might spout less or more, at any time, for all the certainty he felt in it. To him, the dynamo itself was but an ingenious channel for conveying somewhere the heat latent in a few tons of poor coal hidden in a dirty engine-house carefully kept out of sight; but to Adams the dynamo became a symbol of infinity. […] No more relation could he discover between the steam and the electric current than between the Cross and the cathedral. The forces were interchangeable if not reversible, but he could see only an absolute fiat in electricity as in faith. Langley could not help him. Indeed, Langley seemed to be worried by the same trouble, for he constantly repeated that the new forces were anarchical, and especially that he was not responsible for the new rays, that were little short of parricidal in their wicked spirit towards science. His own rays, with which he had doubled the solar spectrum, were altogether harmless and beneficent; but Radium denied its God – or, what was to Langley the same thing, denied the truths of his Science. The force was wholly new. (380–381)

As it is known from history of science, and from commentators on Adams's text, Langley is referring to radioactivity and the enormous amount of energy emitted by the sun, two phenomena that had no explanations before the imminent advent of nuclear physics. Langley's "own" rays were electromagnetic ones, as he had done research in infrared rays, and won scientific and non-scientific fame as the

inventor of the bolometer, an extremely sensitive detector of thermal energy carried by electromagnetic waves. Langley's experiments, in which he could mysteriously detect the heat of a cow in a distant field, measure the temperature of the moon, or find an absorption line in an unknown and invisible part of electromagnetic spectrum, probably contributed to the popular imagination of wonderful invisible rays discussed below. Unlike popular imagination, contemporary scientific record solemnly assures that there was nothing very disturbing about those experiments to a physicist of the time (Walcott 1912, 249–251). In Adams's text, too, the new fields of physics are still assumed to be unbroken in 1900, still relatively isolated and localized in chemistry, as a problem of radium and the surprising amount of energy it emits. Langley, however, understands the subversive quality of radium (and radioactivity in general) and talks about anarchy, parricide, denial of God, and denial of science. This anxiety was also present in popular fiction of the time, in stories about radium and mysterious rays, often relating them to spiritual phenomena, electricity, and in one case to the energy of the sun.

4. Psychoanalysis of Realism in Selected Works of Fiction about Radium

Among the popular novels and stories listed by Bleiler, most feature radium as a secondary device, or a functional prop that can be replaced by an equivalent one (a means of transportation, or a coveted treasure). Those are often imitative repetitions of well-known formulas, such as lost-race novels styled on the originals by H. Rider Haggard and Edward Bulwer-Lytton, or invasion novels (popular speculations about future war), or various imitations of H.G. Wells's work. The texts seem to be evenly distributed between British and American publishing markets, either as book or magazine publications. As suggested by Canella's discovery of Italian translations, some of the texts could have been republished in translations in European magazines, so it would seem that radioactivity was an international theme, perhaps reflecting the internationalization of stock themes in popular fiction. Thus, radium is often a weapon, a treasure, a means of transportation, or a source of power, which testifies for the popularity of radium as a cultural phenomenon late in the 19th century, and which can be interpreted in terms of the psychological mechanisms discussed by Bachelard.

For example, as already mentioned with reference to Bachelard, the substantialist and animalist obstacles makes it possible to infuse matter with hidden content, such as desire for agency in vivid images of explosions (2002 [1938], 44–47), or desire for possession and control in images of treasures hidden in matter (2002 [1938], 136), which Bachelard describes as valorisation of matter: "any trace of valorisation is a bad sign in knowledge that is aiming at objectivity. A value here is a mark of an unconscious preference" (2002 [1938], 72–73). Frontier settings are usually valorised in terms of civilization and wilderness, light and darkness,

rationality and madness, or peacefulness and violence. Some of the most striking examples of valorisation in frontier setting are the negative ones, such as Robert Montgomery Bird's *Nick of the Woods* (1836), William Gilmore Simms's *The Yemassee* (1835), and later, the Gothic Western stories, such as Ambrose Bierce's "The Stranger" (1893) and "The Damned Thing" (1893). In these texts, the valorisation is negative, construing the frontier as the site of madness and death (Winston 1984; Bryant 1966). Bird's and Simms's romances were polemical imitations of Cooper's successful frontier romances, such as *The Last of the Mohicans* (1826), whose protagonist (Natty Bumppo) would occasionally utter triumphant comments about the regenerative and purifying power of his solitary, nomadic life in the frontier wilderness. Bird and Simms both changed the valorisation, but preserved the plot structure: protagonists immerse themselves in the wilderness, go through a series of bloody episodes, and re-emerge as changed people in the civilized world.

This pattern of valorisation would be recycled in later Western fiction as a formulaic plot (Cawelti 194–215), in Owen Wister's or Zane Grey's fiction, with the same valorisation and symbolic treatment of the setting. As Cawelti observes, a Western author "each in his own way develops and elaborates the same quasi-allegorical landscape of town, desert, and mountains and the same social and historical background" (233–234) which all contribute to the image of "the West as challenge and regeneration" (237). For Wister, in *The Virginian* (1902), the frontier was a forging ground of a new American aristocracy, whereas for Grey, whose novels fall just off the chronological range of the present study, the frontier was often the scene of a melodramatic plot, a personal fulfilment through release of romantic passion, understood to be a natural force whose intensity would not be possible in the civilized territory (Cawelti, 236, 238). In any case, as in the earlier frontier romances, a civilized outsider visits the frontier and after an initial shock, is transformed by the regenerative force of its rough, wild nature.

The structure of the American wilderness setting in earlier frontier romance was analysed, among others, by Daniel Peck, who concluded that Cooper's adventure episodes were interlaced with numerous references to the ideal of pastoral harmony (1977). Donald A. Ringe wrote a general, synthetic treatment of the setting in "the pictorial mode" in works by James Cullen Bryant, Washington Irving, and Cooper (1971). Edgar Allan Poe, too, could be included in this list, with occasional landscape pieces such as "Landor's Cottage" (1849), "The Domain of Arnheim" (1846), "Morning on the Wissahiccon" (1844), and the unfinished Western novel, *The Journal of Julius Rodman* (1840); these works were discussed by Gerhard Hoffman's article on Poe's symbolic space (1979). More general, ideological background for the combination of beautiful landscapes with violent episodes was described by representatives of the myth-and-symbol school of American studies, especially by Henry Nash Smith (1950), Leo Marx (1968), and Richard Slotkin (1973). Recently, the ideological combination of landscape art with Western expansion was discussed, among many other critics, by Fresonke

(2003) and Mexal (2021). The texts discussed below suggest that the pervasive and ubiquitous Western mythology served as source of imagery for the construction of cognitive obstacles in fiction about radium, or more generally in fiction influenced by the new scientific ideas about matter.

With an added reference to a radium treasure, the valorisation of the frontier can become closely related to valorisation of matter, as in John Brisben Walker's "A Modern 'Swiss Family Robinson'" (1905), the polemical imitation of Wyss's novel, whose theme is the distribution of wealth in a social utopia set up by a representative group of castaways. Walker, the distinguished early editor of *The Cosmopolitan*, was advocating a more efficient system of economic distribution, a sort of committee-based technocracy, in the long novella that combined scientific speculation about matter with the theme of frontier settlement and adventure. Radium is one of the treasures found on the desert island, but the treasure is guarded by local "savages" led by a Japanese engineer, and presented in a peculiar, subterranean setting. The radium ores are found in "an extraordinary cave" (450), into which a protagonist has to creep through narrow passages which "lead indefinitely beyond" (451) and, in the deepest chamber of the cave, finds an abode and laboratory run by a solitary Japanese scientist who accumulated a scientific treasure of "considerable piles of ores" (452), which include radium, a mineral "more valuable than gold – that has marvellous properties – that will revolutionize the mechanical world in many ways" (451). The cave is illuminated by radium, whose "mysterious" light is subject to much amazement and long description. The Japanese scientist intends to keep his discovery "a secret that I do not intend any living man, except these natives, shall possess" (451). Bachelard's idea of "Harpagon's complex," whereby matter is treated as a cache full of hidden value, is visualized in the image of a cave, filled with the glowing deposit of radium, and controlled by the Japanese enemy, who, however, quickly surrenders. The discovery and surrender mark the turning points in Walker's story, because the castaway community begins to thrive on the radium. "From day to day new riches were discovered, until it became a standing joke that if you did not see just what you wished, you had only to look carefully to discover it" (560).

This sudden wealth leads to revival of frontier way of life, which was apparently still in living memory of the collective hero: "There was also revived the ancient custom of Americans who first went into the backwoods; that is, the log-raising bee" (560). The discovery of radium ore, and the chemical isolation of the pure metal, is thus incorporated into the general prospector activity, settlement, and struggle against the natives, who could not understand and exploit the hidden wealth of their land. What makes the imagery remarkable, more than a mere example of the hidden-treasure story, is the underground laboratory where radium is not simply extracted, but purified and researched. Psychoanalytically, in Bachelard's terms, this is an example of what he calls the realist imagery of matter:

[R]ealism can rightly be called - and this is not in our view a recommendation – the only innate philosophy there is. To see this properly, we need to go beyond the intellectual level and understand that the substance of an object is generally accepted as being a personal possession. People take mental possession of it in the same way that they take possession of some obvious advantage. Hear how realists argue: they have an immediate advantage over adversaries because, they believe, they have a hold on reality and possess the riches of reality while their adversaries, the mind's prodigal sons, chase empty dreams. In its naive, affective form, the certainty realists feel has its origin in a miser's joy. (2002 [1938], 136)

As Bachelard observed, commenting on the animist cognitive obstacle (FSM 44–50), the object of realist desire is not limited to material treasures, but can take more powerful and elaborate forms, such as explosions, immortality, or mind control; Bachelard interprets this as an unconscious desire for direct control, by sheer willing, over matter and people.

For example, an elaborate system of fantasies about powers and treasures hidden in matter can be found in Clifford Smyth's *The Gilded Man: A Romance of the Andes* (1918), a lost-race novel by a distinguished magazine editor. The novel is mostly set in an underground pre-Columbian empire, with radium performing similar functions as Bulwer-Lytton's "vril": an enormous lump of radium provides heat and light, as a sort of underground sun, and radium-related research has led to wonderful discoveries and inventions, clairvoyance, remote control of mind and matter, and healing. At the end of a convoluted plot, the decision is made to unveil those discoveries to the outside world, and the queen of the underground empire decides to leap into the burning lump of radium in an act of self-sacrifice that is barely explainable, other than as an imitation of the ending of Haggard's *She*. In Bachelard's terms, the wonderful usefulness of radium, its placement in a hidden underground empire, and its ultimate destructive power in the conclusion of the novel, are all examples of introjection of subconscious content into matter:

Our present task is not however to study the psychology of the self but rather to follow thought as it wanders in search of an object: we need to follow reverie as it attributes inwardness to objects. Although the aims are different, the processes are homologous because psychologists of inwardness and naive realists are beguiled by the same seductive charm. This homology is so clear that characteristics could be exchanged: realism refers essentially to inwardness just as the psychology of inwardness refers to reality. (2002 [1938], 105)

In adventure narratives, this kind of thinking corresponds to the imagery of hidden treasures and palaces in isolated, distant settings, as in lost-race narratives, hidden either underground or in secluded valleys. Traveling to those locations is often the central premise of a work of fiction, and the characters who reach the hidden place

are usually rewarded with a supreme boon. Of course, such imagery is related to mythic quest narratives, but in the Western frontier context the imagery assumes the role of a geographical curiosity, a place to be discovered, a place where the treasure of the West is stored. This was often a secondary theme in frontier romance fiction, visible for example in the settings of James Fenimore Cooper's *The Pioneers* (1821) and *The Prairie* (1827), where characters speculate about treasures hidden in caves and mounds (Clark 1986; Walker 1984). The substantialist treasure can be small enough to be hidden without the need for an unusual geographical setting, whereas the animist treasure is attainable through a quest, by moving about. The effects of the operation of both obstacles, however, can be combined in the same text.

In Smyth's novel, the initial chapters involve scientific research into ghosts, which are assumed to be something like stray thoughts, and which can be "captured and measured by electric apparatus" (30–31). This is where the inwardness of realism, as discussed by Bachelard, leads to a curious combination of psychoanalysis and ghost story with a quest adventure in exotic settings, and finally to fantasies about hidden properties of matter. As one of the protagonists claims, both physical factors, such as food, and mental factors, such as thoughts and ghosts, cause electric "mental ripples" (32) which can be detected by the apparatus. During the examination, the subjects (David and Una, who will be the protagonist in the following chapters) play the game of free associations, when suddenly a ghost makes a "mental ripple" in David's mind, and sends in a number of clues about an Eldorado in the Andes. David and Una decide to go, and after many chapters of adventure it turns out that the clues were broadcast, like mental waves, into David's mind by means of radium hidden in a radiant cave, where a lost-race society occasionally invites adventurers from the outside to visit.

This comparison between thoughts, food, radium, secret caves, all united as "mental ripples," suggests some of the concepts proposed by Bennett, notably the "geoaffect of material vitality" (61) invoked by Bennett, when she discusses assemblages of human agency, human body, food, and external physical objects: the philosopher compares "[h]uman intentionality" and food "as a self-altering, dissipative materiality" which is "also a player" as "[i]t is one of the many agencies operative in the moods, cognitive dispositions, and moral sensibilities" (51). Of course, in Smyth's novel the operation of the material agency is fantasized by means of the strange apparatus and the dialogue about ghosts, but it is, nevertheless, explicitly a material operation, not a supernatural one.

Inspired by the experiment, David and Una go to South America to follow the clues and find the Eldorado. Thus, David and Una's enquiry into mind-matter interface is transformed (or extended, as continuation) into a dangerous and daring expedition into the Andes. The protagonists (there are more of them than David and Una) find out that the way to Eldorado leads into a deep, uncharted system of caves and corridors. At this moment, the novel becomes symptomatic of Bachelard's idea

that non-scientific, "realist" understanding of matter is based on images of con-cealed, solid, valuable objects, as with treasures in cellars and caves. The first object "of untold value" found in the cave is the "Black Magnet" (192) which attracts only gold. But more than money value, the protagonists discover the valuable "brilliance" and "atmospheric vitality" (239) in the cave, the force of rejuvenating and invigorating rays projecting from the ceiling of an enormous cavern, the abode of a lost race.

As in Walker's novella, valorisation of matter is visualized by means of a mysteriously illuminated cave: the source of light is described as "ceaseless energy similar to that of a gigantic dynamo whose emanations are produced by a con-centration of power as yet unattempted by man" (281). Soon, it turns out that the underground sun is made of radium, and some members of the expedition immediately estimate its price, as the most expensive thing on Earth (329). But its value is even greater: the radium-sun is the "life giver" not just for the cave, but for the entire Earth (332), and also the source of supreme knowledge. "It is really the eye of the cave – and sometimes the arm. […] It can carry an electric force, an irresistible current, without using wire" (333), and thus it can control organic life and human thoughts in the cave, and all around the world as well. Again, Bachelard's psychoanalysis of materialism becomes useful here, because the fantastic properties of radium are, in his terms, extensions and magnifications of human willing: Smith's novel is a fantasy of wish fulfilment, visualized as something possible through discovery of a mysterious property of matter. For Bachelard, an important image of this kind was an explosion, whereas in Smith's novel the imagery is more complicated, as the radium-sun can create new, fantastic forms of life (flowers, edible plants), can move objects about and propel fantastic machines (described as marvels of crystalline beauty), can read human minds and control human behaviour. In the conclusion, there is also a big explosion, as the radium-sun is used by Sajipona, the queen of the underground nation, to destroy herself, the cave and the lost race in it.

Other examples include narratives about the influence of radium on health, aging, and mortality, on sources of mechanical power, and as weapon. For instance, in Richard Dehan's[2] scurrilous short story, "Lady Clanbevan's Baby" (1915), the protagonist has her son rejuvenated with radium, so he remains forever a baby. Her purpose is to keep the fortune that the son would control after coming of age. In the closing lines it turns out that the baby has a moustache. Similarly, radium is a convenient device in "The Current Locker" (1910) by William Harold Durham, a story of a wronged inventor, who uses a mysterious radium box to stop electricity and thus force US government into redressing his wrongs. In George Glendon's *The Emperor of the Air* (1910), a master-of-the-world novel, radium only provides heating and power for the emperor's base on the North Pole, but in similar stories and novels it was sometimes used as a device that gave an individual, or a small group, the upper hand in a struggle to establish a better world-order. As those works

were imitations of Jules Verne's novels about Nemo and Robur, improved airplanes or submarines were the usual device. This is related to a crossover device, that is airships improved with radium, e.g. in J.U. Giesy's *All for His Country* (1915), where an inventor helps win a future war against Mexico and Japan.

Returning to the theme of rejuvenation and health, in Edgar Mayhew Bacon's "Itself" (a competent commercial work published in *Black Cat* magazine in 1907) is a simple invention story about a devotional painting that heals persons with various ailments; the rational explanation is provided, that the painting was impregnated with radium. Thus, the story is another example of understanding radium in terms of divine power: where Langley saw radium as something that defies God, Bacon's story presents it as a rational, material equivalent of the will of God; in both cases, radioactivity is seen as a divine power, as opposed to the qualities of ordinary elements, which are presumably more natural. From the chemical point of view, this is an important quality of radium as a cultural phenomenon: with radium it was possible to attribute divine qualities and powers to the materiality of the setting; radium was a visible material *fiat*, or a sort of chemical pathetic fallacy. In more interesting texts, the divine agency of radium is represented in terms of mystery and enchanting quality of matter as such, a sort of exhilaration caused by the bare existence of nature, known from the opening of Emerson's *Nature*. as The animist introjection of human desire for freedom and rapid movement is evident in Frederick L. Keates's "The Man in the Air" (1906), a sort of compressed backyard version of Wells's *First Men in the Moon* (1901): an inventor defies gravity with radium, decides to try flying in this way, and the story revels in physical descriptions of flying shoes and belts: "Now observe; as I gradually turn the rods the covers slip over the platinum, and the less platinum there is exposed, the lower I sink, and *helas!* I am standing upon the floor. […] This is perfection!" (461–462). In the end, the inventor is launched out into the sky and lost when the element proves uncontrollable. The narrator and other characters watch him, a tiny speck in the vast skies, until he disappears. Radium, an extremely rare metal, was used as an imaginary currency too, but infrequently, perhaps most notably in W.W. Cook's series of *Tales of Twenty Hundred* published in *Argosy* in 1906 and 1907; those are, however, thriller tales set in future world, with numerous themes and subplots, international intrigue, crime, and air war. Finally, a sole example of biological emanation of the force of radium (through mutations) can be found in "The Ultimate Inheritors" (1914), a competently written story about fight against gigantic man-eating spiders.

The most interesting texts focus on spiritual or psychic effects of radium, that is on the psycho-physiological problem; in several texts radium or radioactivity is represented as the material substance of spirit. Consequently, representation oscillates between the exhilarating description of spiritualized matter, and a soothing description of materialized spirit. In Vincent Harper's *The Mortgage of the Brain* (1914), personalities and memories are made of a "fleeting element" that can be erased and manipulated by radium, which characters find very exciting. This text is

perhaps related to Edward Bellamy's *Dr. Heidenhoff's Process* (1880), an excellent earlier novel about materiality of the mind, where mechanical removal of memories (by electric apparatus) is described as a failed remedy for social and personal problems. Bellamy's novel, where the fantastic device turns out to be a dream, is a psychological and philosophical one, and its treatment of materiality of memory seems to fall under the category of philosophical speculation: suffering is described as diseased brain tissue, which Dr. Heidenhoff destroys with electricity. Similarly, in Gelett Burgess's "The Ghost Extinguisher" (1905), the spiritual realm is fully identified with chemistry: ghosts can be made semi-material, can be extinguished by gentlemen ghostbusters, stored in bottles and resold, or restored back into the immaterial dimension, all with the help of radium:

> It was not until radium was discovered that I approached the solution of my great problem, and even then months of indefatigable labor were necessary before the process was perfected. It has now been well demonstrated that the emanations of radiant energy sent forth by this surprising element defy our former scientific conceptions of the constitution of matter. It was for me to prove that the vibratory activity of radium, whose amplitudes and intensity are undoubtedly four-dimensional effects a sort of allotropic modification in the particles of that imponderable other which seems to lie half-way between matter and pure spirit. This is as far as I need to go in my explanation, for a full discussion involves the use of quaternions and the method of least squares. It will be sufficient for the layman to know that my preserved fantoms, rendered radio-active, would, upon contact with the air, resume their spectral shape. (694)

Burgess's witty story points out precisely to the qualities of radium that made it interesting as a cultural phenomenon; literary (and scientific) texts formulated the idea that rays could be represented as a spiritual fact, and radium as a sort of gateway into scientific examination of a spiritual-material medium, the substance of the universe, the single coin of which matter and spirit were but two faces.

Albert Dorrington's[3] *Radium Terrors* (1912) adds a political dimension to the disquieting qualities of radium. The novel was initially serialized in Frank A. Munsey's magazines in 1910 and 1911. The novel is a piece of medicalized yellow-peril fiction, but Dorrington includes long descriptions of visual suffering induced by radium, placing chemistry at the psycho-physiological borderline, as if the Japanese criminals could operate in human heads, manipulating people's perceptions. It is in this novel that Langley's comment on denial of God by radium is paralleled by the opening line: "I've been hunting for a little god that escaped from some pitchblende, Tony," to which the answer is: "I should say that your god will hate you like poison when you have found him" (3). The god somehow refers to radium, so that chemically, Dorrington's radium combines god and poison; it still denies God as substance, not as a paradigm-shifting new vision of matter. This, however, is just the beginning: the detective Renwick, who utters the opening line,

is lured into the house of the Japanese doctor Tsarka, leader of "a gang of medical fiends" who stole radium from the neighbouring house, where an English scientist experimented with radium to discover a cancer cure. It is a trap; the Japanese fiends overpower the detective and smear radium solution over his eyes, so that he begins to see terrible flashes of violent colour. There follows a long monologue by the Japanese doctor, who can cure the detective, and other victims, but only at a price.

One of the most unusual passages in Dorrington's novel is the description of a Japanese-trained rat in the drains and sewers filled with chemical washings from the British doctor's laboratory; this is how the radium was stolen (45–49), and as it goes underground (or down the drain), it clearly is described as a sort of hidden force of subversion, before it gets into a victim's head: "Renwick was conscious of a numbing pressure of the eyes as though a silver-rimmed ophtalmoscope were searching the cells of his brain. His nerves flinched under the strain. A needle of light seemed to probe and illumine the depths of his retina" (75). More victims are affected by radium, as the gang organizes a series of viewings of Japanese art, where viewers use stereoscopes permeated by traces of radium solution, and thus receive "a baptism of radium molecules" (338). After a series of chases, the fraudulent Japanese doctor and his henchman are arrested, the detective regains his sight, and the radium is restored to its rightful owner. Like many yellow-peril novels, *The Radium Terrors* features a device that gives Asians a temporary advantage (a superexplosive, a sabotage plan, or death ray), but Dorrington's use of radium capitalizes on the fact that the radioactive element could be detected in very small quantities, traces, even when absorbed into a chemical compound with other elements; this quality is presented as an alarming one, because radium never goes, never fully dissolves, and remains dangerous, as a Japanese weapon, in smallest quantities, as a trace on a container, or as a thin solution in sewers, in human bodies, on eyerests of stereoscopes, in paintings, in the air.

Bachelard, in *Psychoanalysis of Fire*, provides an interesting observation on the substantialist cognitive obstacle, as a mechanism of imagination, which can be triggered by anxiety about hidden, inexplicable material interaction, and which leads to development of a paranoid fantasy about matter, possibly transposed into a political or criminal conspiracy theory. Commenting on pseudo-scientific theories about combustion, Bachelard notices that 18th-century theorists could (in their imagination) infuse matter with various attributes, giving it a hidden, energetic life:

> The muffled life force is really a dispersed heat. It is this vital fire which forms the basis for the idea of hidden fire, of invisible fire, of fire without flame. When this idea becomes common, then scientific reveries can be given free rein. Now that the igneous principle has been deprived of its perceptible quality, now that fire is no longer the yellow flame, the red coal, now that it has become invisible, it can take the most varied properties, the most diverse qualificatives. If we take the aqua fortis for example, we see that it consumes bronze and iron. Its hidden fire, its fire without heat, burns the

metal without leaving any trace, like a well-planned crime. […] Thus this simple but hidden action, laden with unconscious reveries, will be covered over with adjectives in accordance with the rule of the unconscious: the less we know about something the more names we give it. (1964, 78)

In popular culture, this overwhelming "covering over with adjectives" is recognizable today in apocalyptic narratives about radioactive contamination and fallout, but in 1912 it led to the development of a chemical conspiracy theory, a cross between chemistry and politics, which was an example of a mechanism based on the animist cognitive obstacle: because the destructive power was hidden in matter, it was subject to rapid work of attribution and name-calling. Consequently, it could be a fertile ground for construction of a plot based on the racist conspiracy theory. The criminal plot, and the urban setting, distinguish Dorrington's novel from the American frontier settings: radium is no longer a treasure hidden in the frontier, but a deadly poison dispersed in the bodies of the English upper class. The operation of substantialist cognitive obstacle, however, is observable in this novel too, in the images related to the search for residues of radium, dispersed in human bodies and spilled in London sewers.

5. Conclusion

The disturbing qualities of radium and radioactivity were most intensely represented as an illness, or other disruption of ordinary experience of the body or of biology in general. Most often, such representations can be found in texts about mysterious rays affecting a body, deforming or decomposing it. When such rays were described with a reference to chemistry, as something material, the text falls into the category of realist imagination, based on Bachelard's idea of realism. As it has been mentioned, literary interest with rays in the 1890s is not only attributed to the discovery of radioactivity, but also to Roentgen's X-rays, and Langley's research in infrared rays. It was probably in the wake of those two events, and their representation in the press, when it occurred to the general public that there is something new and disturbing about relations between rays, electricity, and matter.[4] Examples of literary representation of these relations include various early science-fiction texts about mysterious rays and the texts that Bleiler's bibliography lists under "atomic categories," that is texts about a fantastic discovery of the atomic nature of personality, emotions, energy, youth, health etc. Similarly to fictions about radium, most texts were about military rays, employed as background devices in fantastic descriptions of future wars. Interestingly, Bleiler lists relatively few texts about rays and atoms in general; as most texts were specifically about radium. Given the comprehensive quality of his bibliography, it is a good indication of radium's cultural importance as the

central chemical theme that provoked a reflection on matter in popular culture from the 1890s to the 1910s.

In terms of Bachelard's cognitive obstacles, while scientists were at a sort of blind spot, experimenting and looking for a new theory of matter, the general public was in a free and creative space of fantasy, where imagery, rooted in cognitive obstacles, could grow unchecked by experimental results. As it has been demonstrated with reference to more recent science fiction (Cogell 1978), scientific imagery was often related to the imagery of the American romance, in particular to the American mythology of the wilderness and of pastoral landscape. The same relation is suggested by the sensational plots of the stories discussed here. For a brief time, the atom could be incorporated into the American wilderness myth as a setting: the atom was a new imaginary frontier, an uncharted territory of free adventure, power play, and opportunity. Two American texts, which are not discussed here because there is no radium in them, take this tendency to its extreme but logical conclusion, and simply use the atom as setting of an adventure plot: in Fitz-James O'Brien's "The Diamond Lens" (1856) the protagonist can peek into an atom with a fantastic microscope, and in Ray Cummings's *The Girl in the Golden Atom* (1923), the protagonist shrinks and enters an atom.

In terms of realistic imagery, the texts discussed in this article are set in a world where matter, because it has new and surprising qualities, becomes unstable and unpredictable, because it is under an imaginary control of the human willing, projected inwardly into matter, through the operation of the animist and substantialist cognitive obstacles. As a setting, the world based on speculations about new rays was perhaps corresponding to fantasies about frontier spirit and freedom in the wilderness: radioactivity was still 'wild,' and so was the atomic world in general. Visible phenomena were signals from a wilderness, and so they presented opportunities for free play of imagination, perhaps best reflected by the adventures described in "A Modern 'Swiss-Family Robinson,'" in *The Gilded Man*, and in "Man in the Air." Characteristically, in all of those stories, human desires are fulfilled by inquiries into microscopic properties of matter, combined with macroscopic exploration of exotic (frontier) settings: in accordance with Bachelard's theory, radium and frontier perform the same function as the containers for objects of materialist desire. When valorisation becomes negative, as in the combination of racist and chemical imagery in *The Radium Terrors* and in "A Modern 'Swiss-Family Robinson,'" the animist and substantialist cognitive obstacles fed imagery into racial and political anxieties, contributing to images of racist-stereotypical enemies using the new and unknown qualities of matter to threaten the established social order in Britain and the United States (in Walker's novella the Japanese engineer makes only a half-hearted attempt to be an enemy). Thus, the time of scientific confusion and uncertainty was culturally reflected as a new world of adventure and opportunity, built of a matter that was believed to be more responsive to human dreams, prejudices, obsessions and aspirations.

Notes

1. The present inquiry tries to link the American frontier theme with imagery related to speculations about the structure of matter in American fiction of the 1910s. As an interesting digression, there is an analysis which somewhat similarly compares scientific inquiry into radium with colonial expansion in Brunngraber's novel, in terms of "synthetic colonialism" in Nazi Germany (Wagner 2022). In absence of opportunities for ordinary colonial expansion in the 1930s, German matter-related fiction, that is popular fiction about technology, focused on "synthetic" exploitation of new, previously unknown, "territories" in the microscopic world of chemical reactions, new elements, synthetic fuels and materials, etc.
2. Pseudonym of Clotilde Graves, a distinguished Irish playwright (1863–1932), who pursued a successful second career in England and America as author of competently written, melodramatic novels and short stories.
3. Dorrington (1874–1953) was an Australian author active in Britain, where he published serious fiction with Australian themes. In America, he was moderately successful in pulp-fiction magazines. Dorrington and Clotilde Graves are among many authors discussed here, who were not Americans, but had trans-Atlantic careers in the sense that their fiction was published in both British and American magazines; books would often be published simultaneously in both countries, and the authors were probably not perceived as foreigners in any. It seems that perhaps much of pulp fiction was a trans-Atlantic phenomenon, and only the most successful authors, such as H.G. Wells, were recognized as foreigners, or had a recognizable nationality at all.
4. There was, more or less at the same time, an anxiety about the age of the Earth and the estimated amount of energy emitted by the sun (the age of the Earth could be estimated by means of radioactive decay in fossils, the age of the sun could not be reliably estimated at all). It was not clear how the sun, over the estimated age of the Earth, could have produced and emitted so much energy. Here again, new rays and other newly unknown properties of matter, led to conclusions that could not be understood without the creation of a new branch of physics.

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PAWEŁ STACHURA is Associate Professor with the Faculty of English at the Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań. His research interests include 19th-century American literature, American science fiction, literary theory, and comparative literature. He has published articles on 19th-century American fiction (mostly), a book on visual readings of American popular fiction, and co-edited an essay collection about Walter Benjamin's *Arcades Project*.

Matthew Chambers
https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0465-0954
University of Warsaw

"Freedom – Is It a Crime?": Herbert Read's *The Green Child* and Human Rights in Post-war Britain

Abstract: Modernist author Herbert Read was best known as an art critic, anarchist, and poet, but one of the few works of his which remains in print is his little understood only attempt at fiction: his novel, *The Green Child* (1935). The novel updates a medieval tale about mysterious green-hued children who suddenly appear in a village, and in Read's work, the so-called Green Children set off a narrative where, I argue, that individual liberties like freedom of movement and political debates around human rights and refugees are staged and thought through. In reapproaching this semi-fantastical tale, I analyse how Read imagines a form of social utopia and also offers commentary on the mid-20th century refugee crisis.

Keywords: Herbert Read, modernist novel, human rights, refugees, immigration, speculative fiction, George Orwell

1. Introduction

In 1946, Arthur Koestler began circulating a proposal for a "League of the Rights of Man," penned by George Orwell. Koestler was looking for feedback and to generate interest in the idea, which eventually came to nothing. However, among the few respondents, publisher Victor Gollancz wrote a note in the margins of his copy which reads "relation to Herbert Read novel?" Gollancz could have only meant Read's one novel – *The Green Child*. It is a provocative question: Gollancz nowhere elaborates on his note nor is it immediately obvious why he would have had it in mind. Yet, his reasons may be inferred from a closer analysis of the text and a consideration of the political concerns Read, Orwell, Koestler, and indeed, Gollancz shared in the 1940's: in particular, their mutual concern over human

rights issues such as freedom of expression and equal treatment under the law. Where Read's initial and immediate context for considering migration crises in the mid-1930's may have been the changes he sensed to his "gentle nest of artists" in Hampstead, the book's republication in 1945 held new significance in light of the population upheavals brought about by the Second World War.[1] As Read's only work of fiction, it dramatises some of Read's political stances, while also creating space to consider a refugee crisis he does not address in his non-fiction work. The novel raises questions about law and governance, as well as how citizenship, place, and belonging impact our access to fundamental rights. Staged in three parts, in three different central locations, around two main characters, *The Green Child* presents the reader with multiple perspectives on how individuals may see themselves in relation to others in the body politic.

Read's writings on art and politics, and in particular his interests in surrealism and anarchism, have been well-covered, especially as of late.[2] *The Green Child*, on the other hand, while not being overlooked has definitely been under-served. In perhaps the only sustained treatment of the novel as of late – in a collection of essays honouring Read from one of his old publishers, Freedom Press – Leena Kore Schröder suggests throughout her contribution that Read's use of "the uncanny" – or something unsettlingly mysterious – and at least by way of implication, places the text in the tradition of Gothic literature. While this thread is apparent in the work, it is also very much grounded in realist elements as he works his way through different experiments with political revolution and reinvention. The novel reflects aspects of Read's political writings, while never putting itself in the position of advocating for any particular political stance or solution. Ultimately, it works as a creative imagining of what might be possible, while serving as a caution against more totalitarian approaches which had been valorised. In revisiting Read's novel, I analyse how he stages various political situations to comment on social and political assumptions, especially as they are challenged by evolving and changing contexts.

2. Herbert Read, George Orwell, and the Freedom Defence Committee

The Green Child was first published in 1935 and reprinted in 1945 by Grey Walls Press at the suggestion of poet Denise Levertov, a mutual friend of Read's and publisher Wrey Gardiner's (Levertov 12).[3] It is this 1945 edition published by Wrey Gardiner – who at the time was active publishing the influential *Poetry Quarterly* – that Gollancz may have been thinking of. Read, by the mid-1940s, was a well-known poet, art critic, and anarchist, who had become associated variously with British Surrealism and various leftist organisations. In the late 1930s and early 1940s, he outlined his ideas on art, politics, and the interrelationship between the two across such works as *Art and Society* (1937), *Poetry and Anarchism* (1938), *The Philosophy of Anarchism* (1940), *To Hell with Culture* (1941),

Education through Art (1943), *Education of Free Men* (1944), *Freedom: Is It a Crime?* (1945), and *Culture and Education in World Order* (1948). He regularly published with Faber and Faber, and he was well-known and well-regarded among leftist circles, especially in London. In the case of George Orwell, while the two were never close intimates, there was enough mutual appreciation between Read and Orwell for the latter to write to Read in early 1939 about the looming war and Orwell's fear of press censorship:

> At present there is considerable freedom of the press and no restriction on the purchase of printing presses, stocks of paper etc., but I don't believe for an instant that this state of affairs is going to continue […]. It seems to me that the common sense thing to do would be to accumulate the things we should need for the production of pamphlets, stickybacks, etc., lay them by in some unobtrusive place and not use them until it became necessary. (Orwell 1998, 313–314)

While nothing came of this idea, it serves as a measure of the trust Orwell had in Read that he felt he could approach Read with an idea he saw as potentially seditious but morally right. They did eventually partner in an organisation called the Freedom Defence Committee (FDC), which was founded towards the end of the Second World War. George Woodcock recounts how Orwell "spoke at a public meeting we [the Freedom Defence Committee] organised in Conway Hall in support of a general amnesty for people still in prison, many months after hostilities had ended, under various wartime laws and regulations" (22). Peter Davison states that a "probable result of this campaign was a half-hour adjournment debate in the House of Commons on 28 November 1945 […] [in which] the Secretary of State for War announced some mitigation of sentences" (357). The Freedom Defence Committee (FDC) was founded in early 1945 with Herbert Read serving as chairman, Orwell as vice chairman, Woodcock as secretary, and with the involvement of E.M. Forster, Bertrand Russell, Cyril Connolly, among others. According to the FDC constitution, it was "founded to uphold the essential liberty of individuals and organisations and to defend those who are persecuted for exercising their rights to freedom of speech, writing, and action" (1). It called for the abolition of conscription, the Emergency Powers Act, and the Defence Regulations, and promised action "publicly, through protest meetings, articles, and letters in the press, etc. […] [and] legal and financial aid wherever this is necessary and possible" (2).

As opposed to what appears to be Read's longer-lasting and committed involvement with the FDC, Orwell's involvement in the organisation appears to have been a result of his distaste for the perceived ineffectiveness of another rights advocacy group – the National Council for Civil Liberties (NCCL) – and its infiltration by the Communist Party (Crick 497). He would not have been alone in this feeling about the NCCL. Chris Moores had addressed the very question of CPGB infiltration of the NCCL, and concludes that it was never more than a

narrative Special Branch wished to peddle, and that it may have not understood the difference between communist and popular front activities and organisations (50-6). Even so, it was a perception which lingered for some time. For example, Amnesty International founder Peter Benenson would not work with the NCCL until after its re-organisation in 1963 which convinced him that it was finally free of communist influence (Moores 112–113). Despite Orwell's general concern about communist infiltration and his specific misgivings about the FDC, he retained his association with them, even as in the fall and winter of 1945 he was already thinking of establishing a separate organisation as, according to Bernard Crick, Orwell "found that the Freedom Defence Committee was too narrowly concerned with defending British Left-wingers prosecuted for political reasons" (497). Even as he stuck with the FDC, Orwell explored an alternate option while drafting his "League of the Rights of Man." Yet, before an exploration of what possible connection *The Green Child* has to Orwell's proposal for a new league can be attempted, the structure and plot of the novel must be explained, and in particular, those elements which pertain to the discussions around structures of governance and the rights of citizens.

3. *The Green Child*

The Green Child opens with the faked death of its main character Olivero. Olivero has decided to end his time as a dictator of the fictional South American country of Roncador and return to the village of his birth in England. On his way from the train station to the village of his birth, he notices the river seems to be flowing in the wrong direction and while trying to confirm his memory of its flow follows it to the old mill. He happens upon a strange scene of a man attempting to force feed the blood of a lamb to a woman whose skin has a greenish hue. It is then that Olivero remembers the story of the Green Children who had appeared in his village thirty years ago shortly after he had left. He recognises the man as a one-time former pupil, who now claims to be in charge of the care of this Green Child. The scene sets the tone and the terms for the remainder of the novel: wherever we are geographically in the novel, there is at least one key character out of place, and the scene rests on the tension of that character's displacement from the familiar and the known. As for the Green Children, as Olivero learns, a boy and a girl with green skin emerged unclothed from the moors, unable to speak any known language or in any way communicate where they came from or their condition. They were eventually taken in by a local woman, and the boy died shortly thereafter after he refused to eat anything offered and wasted away.

The present-day of the first part of the novel is 1860, and the appearance of the children is given as 1830, but Read is referencing an old tale which dates back to the 12th century. In William of Newburgh's *History of English Affairs*, he details

the appearance of two Green Children around the town of Woolpit in East Anglia (William of Newburgh 115–116). Read's adaptation of the tale does not vary much beyond his modernisation of the tale, except for William of Newburgh's detail that the boy dies shortly after his baptism. Whatever its precise details, the tale itself is clearly one of racial difference and cultural diversity. Jeffrey Jerome Cohen has emphasised that race, while a complicated category to define in 12th-century Norman England remains a useful one when discussing the tale of the Green Children:

> Race is constructed not only through inert signs like dermal pigmentation, but also through the embodied performance of identity: food consumed, language spoken, customs observed, sexuality practiced. Because it buttresses uneven distributions of power while emplacing the distinctions between dominating and subaltern groups in the body, race is […] dangerous – and therefore also the best term for capturing the *force* of differences thought to separate medieval people. (76)

The Green Children, whom Cohen sees as reminders of the difference inserted into Anglo-Saxon England following the Norman conquest, even as their assimilation or death represents the eventual disappearance of "Norman-ness" from English life (87). Brought into Industrial England, Read makes them markers of the displacement brought about by rapid industrialisation and global colonisation. The boy's failure to assimilate and the girl's partial assimilation – the lamb's blood we learn was a failed attempt by Olivero's former pupil to take care of the girl – establish the ineluctable cost of modernisation and the inability of difference to survive in modernisation's wake. The first part closes with Olivero following the Green Child to the source of the river and the two of them sinking through marshland at the river's source.

    The second part, now told from Olivero's perspective in the first person, details his journey from his village to South America. Along the way he holds a job in London; journeys to a village south of Warsaw and delivers money to the Jewish mother of his London-based employer; ends up in Germany where he books passage to Morocco; he is jailed in Morocco for two years for carrying a copy of Voltaire (which was perceived as incriminating literature of a revolutionary nature); he learns Spanish and gains a network of friends who were also jailed revolutionaries; is freed and sails to Buenos Aires on a pirate ship; is boarded by an English vessel on the way, gets arrested and then released and sent to Buenos Aires once his English identity is established; and then, because of the ship he arrived on, is confused for another person in an underground revolutionary movement in Buenos Aires and is sent to Roncador to aid in the toppling of the Spanish-run government. It is here the second, and longest, part of the book begins in earnest, but his roundabout manner in arriving at his destination precisely established Olivero's peripatetic nature and offers a stark contrast to the locals wherever he goes – be

it his home village, Morocco, Buenos Aires, or eventually in Roncador. People see in Olivero what they wish, inscribing their desires onto him, and never truly interrogate who he is or where he comes from.

The heart of the second part focuses on Olivero's successful aiding of a revolution, writing a constitution, planning a government, and eventually taking over that government for over two decades. We see in this part what kind of government Read wished were possible given the constraints of the potential of its population, external political forces, and of course, economic conditions:

> All men being endowed by Universal Providence with the same faculties, the same sensations, and the same needs, by this very fact it was intended by Providence that they should have a right to an equal share of the earth's bounty. Since the bounty is sufficient for all needs, it follows that all men can exist in equal liberty, each the master of his own destiny.
>
> Equality and liberty are the essential attributes of man, two laws of his being, elements of his very nature. Men unite to cultivate the earth and live on its fruits, and for this purpose they enter into mutual contracts; for every service freely rendered a just share of wealth is given. Liberty and equality are guaranteed by justice, which is the principle of government in a society of free men. (Read 1945, 71)

I will explore this aspect in more detail below, but it is important to point out that the Proclamation contains echoes of the 1789 Declaration of the Rights of Man and Immanuel Kant's *To Perpetual Peace* (1795) in its prioritisation of the rights of citizens and the establishment of equality as a binding principle among all under the law. Yet, what is most notable is that Read presents us with the Proclamation in its totality, and then has the reader follow Olivero through the various administrative issues he faced over the years.

Olivero, in working through the governance of Roncador, has to face the question of what his role, any individual's role, in society can and must be, and that role can and must relate to others:

> I might have introduced a system of education, and thus have created a society of intellectual beings. I might in that way have put an end to my boredom, but I should have disrupted the peace of the state by creating a class absorbed in visionary speculations, eager to translate their ideological projects into action. (Read 1945, 106)

In crafting a self-sustaining agrarian utopia, Olivero had failed to cultivate an intelligentsia, an enlightened ruling class. He had been content to run everything himself but fell victim to this crucial oversight. The aporia in his thinking and his approach is himself. As his rule slowly but surely takes on a more dictatorial aspect, he becomes detached from the very people he once felt he belonged to. Even in the act of creating his own country, Olivero remains a foreign presence in

the populace. Once he recognises this moment, he decides, as the opening of the book shows us, to remove himself definitively from the scene.

In the third part of the book, we discover what happened after Olivero and the Green Child sink through the water. They find themselves in the Green Child's land, inhabited by a people whose customs and practices are wholly unlike anything Olivero has experienced and the supreme objective of life there is solitary contemplation in a cave where one eventually turns into a form of crystal. First, Olivero is met with the same shock the villagers expressed meeting the Green Children for the first time:

> [T]he moment he moved towards them, they stared back in horror, as though they had been confronted with a ghost. And indeed, as such or worse than such, Olivero appeared to them; for actually the people of this country had no belief in disembodied spirits, and no knowledge of the different races of the world. In Olivero they suddenly saw a totally new species of human being; but only if you imagine a world in which there are no species, but only a single genus of mankind, can you get the measure of their surprise. (Read 1945, 115)

How Olivero appears to people he has never met in places he has never been before, and his eventual assimilation into those communities form the central actions of the book. By way of comparison, note his appearance once he arrives in Buenos Aires:

> On leaving the prison I had acquired a Spanish hat, wide of brim and high in the crown. I wore a dark brown shirt and a red neckerchief, and instead of a coat, carried across my shoulder my sailor's blanket; the few possessions I was left with were tied in a bundle which I carried in my hand. Until I reached the threshold of the room I was unperceived. (Read 1945, 50)

Through a combination of fortune and intention, Olivero was able to blend in to the community in Buenos Aires, and quite successfully as he is mistaken for another man, in a way which is not available to him in this new land. It is only when a panel of five judges in the Green Child's land decides that Olivero may join the community does he begin to learn their language, their ways of perceiving the world, and their actions and customs. He is, in the end, able to assimilate to a degree the Green Children were not, or perhaps, were never given the opportunity to do so. Olivero's passage through the various stages of life in this community – from assimilation to practice to contemplation to, ultimately, a process referred to as "crystallisation," wherein the individual physiologically transforms into crystals – offer a counterpoint to his search for cultural belonging through governing others portrayed in the second part. In the Green Child's world, individuals are nameless, often paired, and are always unquestionably present and active in whichever activity they are involved in.

4. Rights, Refugees, and Natural Society

As was mentioned earlier, the key political passage of the book contains Olivero's proclamation for the new government of Roncador. Seemingly modelled after sentiments expressed in the French Assembly's 1789 Declaration of the Rights of Man and Kant's *To Perpetual Peace*, the proclamation works as a reminder for the mid-20th-century reader of the high ideals of 19th-century liberal internationalism. The Declaration of the Rights of Man was a blueprint for numerous liberal causes in the 19th century as it foregrounded the rights of individuals within nations and the right of self-determination of nations. Kant, in writing *To Perpetual Peace*, proceeds from the assertion that governments, in order to do business successfully, would have to assume a peaceful posture towards one another and lays out six preliminary articles and three definitive articles for how this may occur, the third of which – namely, the right to universal hospitality – will be discussed below. Kant's work influenced a kind of liberal internationalism – that is, a form of liberalism which, as Beate Jahn notes, valued the "spread of democracy and respect for human rights to all states and peoples as well as an influential role for international organisations in the pursuit of these aims" (1). We see liberal internationalist ideologies expressed during Read's lifetime in international organisations like the League of Nations, and eventually, the United Nations, but its impact was felt at more local levels as, for example, expressed by progressive societies in the UK like the FDC and in some ways Orwell's proposal for a League of the Rights of Man.

While it is important to stress nothing came of Orwell's proposal for a new league, the document was circulated and sparked a conversation between a few writers in early 1946, including Victor Gollancz. Gollancz's reference to *The Green Child* was possibly sparked by two assertions in the proposal: (1) the need for an overhaul of the 19th-century vision of the Rights of Man, and (2) a recognition of the intertwined nature of the international community. As for the former, Orwell opens his proposal warning against a tendency for repeating past errors:

> During the past fifty years it has become apparent that the Nineteenth Century conception of liberty and democracy was insufficient. Without equality of opportunity and a reasonable degree of equality in income, democratic rights have little value […]. But the tendency, especially since the Russian revolution, has been to over-emphasise this fact and to talk as though the economic aspect were the only one […]. Both Communists and Fascists have reiterated that liberty without social security is valueless, and it has been forgotten that without liberty there can be no security. (1946, 1)[4]

This warning against valuing economic concerns over individual liberties echoes the core crisis during Olivero's reign over Roncador: while his proclamation pays lip service to the idea of freedom and equality amongst its citizens, and Olivero takes great pride in the self-sustaining economy in the nation he runs, he never

implements any social agendas which would improve fundamental rights like access to education or a free press. The result leads to a dead end with Olivero serving as a kind of benign, accidental dictator without any obvious way to transition power to another political body or individual and a population without any other function than to labour to produce goods to sustain a national economy. The totalitarianism of Roncador, however unintentionally arrived at, takes shape when the economics of the state take precedence over the liberties of its citizens.

The other assertion linking the proposal to *The Green Child* concerns the liberal internationalist sentiment expressed in Orwell's document, especially that his League should centrally coordinate and communicate the activities of already existing like-minded groups across the globe, and the assertion that its members should "advocate of infringements against the Rights and dignity of Man, whether they occur in the British Empire or in Russian occupied territory" (1946, 2). *The Green Child* has an impressively international scope – Olivero bounces from England to Poland, Germany, Morocco, Argentina, and eventually the fictional country of Roncador which appears to share a border with Argentina, and then ultimately back to his village and the otherworldly land of the Green People. In all these locations we learn some detail about its local politics – for example, in Warsaw, we witness a criminal being very publicly incarcerated (he is paraded through the streets serenaded by a booing crowd); in Morocco, Olivero feels the influence of European politics on North Africa as he jailed for possessing a copy of book by a French political philosopher and is surrounded by only Spanish-speaking inmates; and in South America, he immediately finds himself at the forefront of a coup. More precisely, we are made to feel Olivero's estrangement from these locations – he can only guess at what he is seeing in Warsaw and has to rely on a note written in Polish by his employer who has sent him there to get him around; in Morocco, he is thrown in jail ultimately for his naivete and initially does not speak the language; and his involvement in the coup is the result of a case of mistaken identity. In other words, the novel recognises the reach of historic European liberal politics internationally while also emphasising the difficulties individual citizens encounter once they step out of their national borders.

The challenges presented by the ideal of an international set of shared liberal principles in the late-18th to early-19th century was influentially addressed by Immanuel Kant. Kant's *To Perpetual Peace* is apropos here, especially his "Third Definitive Article for a Perpetual Peace" which calls for the "Cosmopolitan right shall be limited to conditions of universal hospitality" (15). Kant argues here that individuals have a right to another country's hospitality upon arrival in that country:

> If it can be done without destroying him, he can be turned away, but, as long as he behaves peaceably he cannot be treated as an enemy. He may request the *right* to be a *permanent visitor* (which would require a special, charitable agreement to make him a fellow inhabitant for a certain period), but the *right to visit*, to associate, belongs

> to all men by virtue of their common ownership of the earth's surface, for since the
> earth is a globe, they cannot scatter themselves infinitely, but must, finally, tolerate
> living in close proximity, because originally no one had a greater right to any region
> of the earth than anyone else. (15–16; original emphasis)

In some respects, Read's novel, through the figure of Olivero, tests the claim that individuals "cannot scatter themselves infinitely," but the titular character best represents Kant's claim here. The central dilemma put forward by the appearance of the Green Children involves this question of hosting – how does a community incorporate individuals who come from outside its borders? The death of one Green Child and the partial acculturation of the second (arguably also a failure as the first scene with the force feeding shows) demonstrate the village's inability to play host in Kantian terms. On the other hand, the political ideal Read explores in the land of the Green People involves a more successfully realised form of hosting. Olivero's arrival is wholly unprecedented, but the Green People, in Kant's terms, "tolerate [Olivero] living in close proximity." Olivero is only granted a right to visit after a panel of five judges deliberate, and ultimately agree to host him as part of their community. They eventually decide to treat him like everyone else, so his assimilation comes through consensus – he has become a "permanent visitor" in this land.

The Green Child, even as it proved to be Read's only foray into fiction writing, in many respects incorporates his political writings from the period. For example, Read writes elsewhere about his vision for a "natural society" which embodies many of the elements he puts in place in Roncador, and also carries it with it the very strong mark of the influence of Kant's *To Perpetual Peace*. In "The Politics of the Unpolitical," Read argues that a natural society should, among others, embody the following features: "I. The liberty of the person [...]. V. The abolition of parliament and centralised government [...]. VII. The delegation of authority. VIII. The humanisation of industry" (1943, 11). Olivero attempts the first feature, but ultimately fails because he does not successfully prioritise numbers V, VII, and VIII. In the land of the Green People, there is no central authority, everything is delegated, and all work is in the service of others and everyone works. Most importantly, there is no evidence of discord or want anywhere. For Read, following Kant, these features he lists are fundamentally pacific and international largely because they "aim at the production of worldwide plenty, at the humanisation of work, and at the eradication of all economic conflicts" (1943, 11). In such a society, nationalisms and tensions around cultural differences would melt away as meaningful political markers. Yet, while Read's liberal internationalism is clear in his political writings, he does not articulate how his natural society would process "otherness." In other words, his internationalism assumes a lack of mobility or displacement brought on by war or economic hardship. While he imagines a Utopic near-future where such problems cease to exist, and despite developing a solution for hosting foreigners with Olivero's case at the end of his novel, Read never thoroughly theorises what ought to be done

with the greatest challenge presented to an international liberal order after 1945, namely, the refugee crisis brought on by the Second World War.

The political challenge brought by displaced persons was of growing concern in the opening decades of the 20th century, and *The Green Child*'s original 1935 publication date means that Read may have had the refugee crises produced by the Russian Revolution, the First World War, or even the early years of Nazi oppression of Jews in Germany on his mind (Torpey 124–127). Wrey Gardiner's 1945 interest in taking up Denise Levertov's suggestion may have certainly been motivated by how acute the problem had become in the intervening ten years. The Green Children in his story function as a reminder to the local English villagers that they are part of a larger world, a world they have a history in colonising and subjugating. As Cohen emphasises about the Green Children of Woolpit, they live in land adjacent to the village and "are surrounded by people who want to change their pastoral mode of life [...] to acculturate them just as the contemporary Welsh (and Irish and Scots) were being forcibly anglicised" (90). The girl only ever partially assimilates and the boy dies from being unable to. The dominant culture remains intact, and Olivero must find his Utopic ideal on a different plane of existence.

By the end of the Second World War, there were a large number of displaced persons in Britain. The reprinting of this novel in 1945 would hold clear resonances for the politically attuned reader at the time. As Katherine Cooper has explained, writing on this situation in Britain, that "[t]he very presence of the refugee represents not simply a challenge to [...] social norms, but rather a disruption which demands attention and elicits political and social change both within and without the space of the home" (193). She refers to refugees as "threshold figures [...] [who] occupy simultaneously the space of the past (the war they have come from, the country they have left), the present (their adopted country, their adopted home) and the future (their plans to return home, their hopes for rebuilding their country) […] [and who] in the domestic space of the home, where each represents a point of rupture, bringing the war into the safety of the domestic space, and demanding an engagement with the political processes outside" (193, 194). At first blush, the Green Children may appear to have nothing in common with the refugees of the Second World War, especially as Read treats the Green People's own land as a Utopic ideal. However, for reasons they are unable to articulate, and the villagers are never able to grasp, they leave that idyllic space for what proves to be more trying and tragic circumstances. The reader learns in the third part that the Green Children got lost in their own land and accidentally found themselves at the village, but this is never known by the villagers, nor any of the details of the land which they came from. The hosts' inability to understand the motivations, background, and lives of their guests is the shared element. It is this failure to host which forms the core of Olivero's dilemma, and is the founding crisis which starts off the novel. If the novel holds a lesson, it lies in these Kantian terms of hosting and visiting.

5. Conclusion

Herbert Read was able to explore in his fiction something he does not quite grapple with in his political writings – namely, the question posed by modern statelessness. Lyndsey Stonebridge has argued that for mid-century writers "writing about displacement was a powerful way of thinking about rights, citizenship, and sovereignty at the moment when the question of what it meant to belong to a nation, at least in Europe, was its most vexed" (19). In his thinking on a world without centralised governments, a forward-looking idealism overtook his focus, and did not seem to permit attention to the complicated present of this particular crisis. And yet, in his novel, where he is meant to describe a plausible facsimile of 19th-century political governance, he is able to draw our attention to the question of displaced persons in our midst. Or, as Stonebridge conceives her authors asking, "what kind of political, legal, moral, and psychic life might we imagine existing *between* national citizenship and statelessness?" (19). In the case of Read's *The Green Child*, the answer is itself hidden and displaced. Olivero fails at educating the children of his village, fails to build an educated country in Roncador, and can only seek self-education in a contemplative life shut off in a cave from the rest of the world. It is not a hopeful message to end on, but the novel presents to the reader several difficult challenges to contemplate for themselves, and in this manner, maintains its continued value.

Notes

1. See Herbert Read's memories of 1930's Hampstead in "A Gentle Nest of Artists." *Apollo* 77.7 (September 1962): 536–539; and Monica Bohm-Duchen's overview of the area in relation to the increasing late-1930's refugee crisis in "Modernist Sanctuary: Hampstead in the 1930's and 1940's."
2. For more recent scholarship, see Michael Paraskos ed. 2008. *Rereading Read: New Views on Herbert Read*. London: Freedom Press and Matthew S. Adams. 2015. *Kropotkin, Read, and the Intellectual History of British Anarchism: Between Reason and Romanticism*. Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan.
3. For more on Levertov's friendship with Read, see Donna Krolik Hollenberg. 2013. *A Poet's Revolution: The Life of Denise Levertov*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
4. I would like to thank Bill Hamilton from the George Orwell Estate for permission to quote from this draft.

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MATTHEW CHAMBERS is Associate Professor at the University of Warsaw where he recently received a two-year grant by the Polish Ministry of Science and Higher Education as part of their Excellence Initiative to research modernist bookshops and their networks at the University of Reading. He has written on literary networks and publishing history in *Modernism, Periodicals, and Cultural Poetics* (Palgrave 2015) and in *London and the Modernist Bookshop* (Cambridge 2020). His most recent research looks to build out from his last monograph to explore the social, political, and literary roles bookshops played in the early decades of the 20th century. He is a member of the Bookselling Research Network, and editor of the peer-reviewed journal *The New Americanist*, which will soon be available from Edinburgh University Press.

Beatriz Valverde
https://*orcid*.org/0000-0003-1918-4447
University of Jaén
Ana Valverde González
https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8788-1263
University of Jaén

Reality as a Palimpsest:
Information Disorder Practices
in George Orwell's *1984* and *The Loudest Voice*

Abstract: Drawing upon mass communication theories, with special emphasis on Jean Baudrillard's theory of simulacra and simulacrum, we will examine distortion of information practices in George Orwell's *1984* (1949) and in the American TV miniseries *The Loudest Voice* (2019). Even though there is nearly a century between both works, socio-politically speaking, the control of information dissemination is equally important in both narrative products: in the maintaining of the *status quo* in an authoritarian system in *1984* and in the process of undermining the current US democratic system in *The Loudest Voice*. With this, we will argue that these literary and audiovisual texts are key for citizens to develop critical thinking skills and to question their worldviews, or, in Orwell's own words, to exercise an uncommon common sense, which entails independence of thought and integrity of mind.

Keywords: mass communication theories, fake news, George Orwell, *The Loudest Voice*, simulacra

1. Introduction

In our current model of information society, citizens experience an overload of information in their everyday lives, through traditional communication channels as well as social media. We face serious challenges trying to discern which information is based on verified facts, which has been, to some extent, manipulated, or simply created to disseminate as disinformation and, thus, cause confusion

regarding specific issues. Fake news, defined by Carmi et al. as "information that is false and deliberately created to harm a person, social group, organization or country" (3), is everywhere we look, and is circulated by both individuals and institutions, in private and public spheres, in order to mislead public opinion regarding diverse political, scientific or social issues. Significantly, the phenomenon of fake news has emerged as a global concern (Bharali and Goswani 118), having a considerable impact on the public's perception of the world. Let us consider the following example. In November 2020, during the American presidential elections, Donald Trump deliberately used social networks such as *Facebook* or *Twitter* to sow doubt about the U.S. election process and, in particular, the mail-in voting. Specifically, on the night of the elections, while the votes were being counted, Trump tweeted: "We are up BIG, but they are trying to STEAL the Election. We will never let them do it. Votes cannot be cast after the Polls are closed!" (Graham, para. 2) In the two days after Election Day (3 November, 2020), after major controversy on whether social networks should limit the freedom of speech when disinformation is spread, *Twitter* added warning labels to nine of Trump's related-election tweets as containing misleading information.

As Martin Moore states in the report of the *Centre for the Study of Media, Communication and Power* at King's College London, fake news is a phenomenon that is centuries old. In this sense, Moore observes that "[t]he political, economic, and social motivations for creating fake or highly distorted news have existed since the invention of the printing press" (Moore 5). The difference, however, between older disinformation practices and the present phenomenon of fake news lies primarily in their extent, their dissemination, and their effects (Moore 5). Tellingly, Moore relates information manipulation in media and literature with his reference to Mark Twain's "Petrified Man," a satirical news story – what we would consider a hoax nowadays – published in *Territorial Enterprise* on 4 October 1862. While Twain intended to "illustrate the absurdity of many of the stories being published in the press about 'petrification' by satirizing them" (Moore 5), his satirical attack was not understood as such by his readership and the story was published as verified news in newspapers all around the world.

Literature and journalism have always been intertwined, even before the latter existed as a profession. The list of authors pursuing career paths in journalism and of those who led a double professional life, as journalist-writers, is extensive, including acknowledged names in the canon of literature written in English, such as Jonathan Swift, Walt Whitman, Charles Dickens, Stephen Crane, Mark Twain, Ernest Hemingway, or Martha Gellhorn, among others,. As a result of their experience in journalism, many of these authors formed a forward-thinking conception of information dissemination and of its influence on public opinion. Best known as a novelist, essayist and critic, George Orwell (1903–1950), the pen name of Eric Arthur Blair, was no stranger to the journalistic profession. In fact, he worked as the literary editor of the left-wing weekly magazine *Tribune*, to which – from 3

December 1943 until 16 February 1945 – he also regularly contributed a column under the heading "As I Please" (Orwell et al. 54). Orwell's writings were intellectually provocative, encouraging his readership to become more self-conscious of the way they think and feel and to question conventional opinions. In this process of self-awakening, as Orwell believed, common sense played a significant role: "[G]enuine common sense," if hard to acquire (since it is discredited through the misconceptions of it permeating society, culture and politics) "is needed to counter what we have come unthinkingly to accept as 'common sense' – the received views that all of us are accustomed to and that we tell ourselves we know are true" (Cain 76). Non-conformity and unorthodox thinking, which led toward independence of vision, were among his central terms.

In the present article, drawing upon the theory of simulacra and simulation by the French sociologist Jean Baudrillard and the concept of "information disorder," we will analyze the manipulation of facts carried out in Orwell's masterpiece *1984* (1949), comparing the techniques used in the novel with the tactics employed by Roger Ailes from Fox News in the American mini-TV series *The Loudest Voice* (McCarthy et al. 2019). We will argue that these two works, despite being set in completely different socio-political scenarios - a totalitarian regime and the current democratic political system in the US, respectively - show similar strategies of thought control and (dis)information dissemination, which are key in influencing the public's mindset. Additionally, we will claim that these fictional narratives urge their audiences to exercise that unorthodox common sense that Orwell advocated in order to question the information they consume and readjust their vision of reality.

2. Information Distortion as Simulacra

Training the public to think and act according to the agenda of institutionalized power entails the control of the information citizens receive.[1] What is more, it requires providing a fake narrative of the facts that aligns with the interests of that power. According to Lazer et al., fake news is "fabricated information that mimics news media content in form but not in organizational process or intent" (1094), fostering information disorders to deceive people. In this sense, it is necessary to note that the concept of information distortion includes three main categories: disinformation, defined as "information that is false and deliberately created to harm a person, social group, organization or country" (Carmi et al. 3); misinformation, that is, "information that is false, but not created with the intention of causing any harm" (Carmi et al. 3); and finally, malinformation, defined as information that is based on reality, but whose content is misled to inflict harm on a person, organization, or country (Wardle and Derakhshan, 2017).[2]

Baudrillard's theory of *Simulacra and Simulation* (1994) becomes relevant in order to explain the process of information distortion in *1984* and *The Loudest*

Voice. First, the French sociologist introduces the concept of 'simulation,' defined as a faithful representation of events which stands for some truth. In Baudrillard's words, "[e]verywhere we live in a universe strangely similar to the original-things are doubled by their own scenario" (10). Therefore, the narrative of the events the public gets when approaching the news will never be what actually happened, but an interpretation of the facts made by the professional who recounts them. Following the ethics of the journalistic profession, the main aim of journalists should be to convey rigorous, verified facts to the public, avoiding prejudging the reported issue based on personal interests (Ward 301) – a faithful simulation of reality in Baudrillard's terms.

There is a significant difference between what simulation is in its first stage and the same concept in a subsequent phase. In this second stage, the distinction between the sign and the reference starts to break down: simulation distorts the events conveyed in such a way that the public is given an image which masks the real course of matters. In this kind of simulation, the purpose of journalists, or the person in control of the narrative, "is to modify the truth according to their own interest or the agenda of the mass media for which they work" (Valverde and Pérez-Escolar 104). Therefore, the narrative of the events is not any longer a faithful and disinterested representation of reality. Finally, Baudrillard points to a last stage in which we are no longer in front of a simulation of reality, but in the presence of a simulacrum. According to the French sociologist, "the transition from signs which dissimulate something to signs which dissimulate that there is nothing, marks the decisive turning point" (6). In this stage of representation, signs precede and determine what they represent, the real. There is no valid distinction between reality and its representation; there is only the simulacrum. Enlightening in this sense is the epigraph from Ecclesiastes with which Baudrillard opens his philosophical treatise *Simulacra and Simulation*: "The simulacrum is never what hides the truth-it is truth that hides the fact that there is none. The simulacrum is true – Ecclesiastes" (3).

Baudrillard claims that this third stage of simulacra is associated with the postmodern age. The sign is no longer considered a value; it has become the reversion and death sentence of every reference. As Baudrillard states, when it comes to the postmodern simulacra, "it is no longer a question of imitation, nor duplication, nor even parody. It is a question of substituting the signs of the real for the real" (2). He argues that, in the postmodern age, all ability to distinguish between nature and artifice has been lost. As a consequence, in this day and age, the notion of truth appears to be absolutely distorted, with simulacra prevailing over simulations. What matters nowadays is to impose a convenient narrative, a vision of reality which constitutes a simulacrum of what truth genuinely is. When informing the public, the representation of the facts resembles less and less what really occurred, and, consequently, simulacra are presented as information that could be considered real but that no longer mirrors reality. In Baudrillard's words:

"simulation threatens the difference between the "true" and the "false," the "real" and the "imaginary" (4). It is this "elusive twisting of meanings" (Baudrillard 14) what gives birth, therefore, to a hyperreal vision of society in which it is difficult to distinguish between the real and the imaginary world. The public is given a fake narrative of events which, in many cases, has nothing to do with the real world. However, the veracity of the facts depicted is not questioned as long as such narrative goes along with the individual's previously formed perceptions. In this scenario, fake news seems impossible to distinguish from real facts without a thorough research of events, comparing and contrasting different versions of the same facts. Baudrillard refers to Disneyworld as an example of hyperreality: "This world wants to be childish in order to make us believe that the adults are elsewhere, in the 'real' world, and to conceal the fact that true childishness is everywhere – that it is that of the adults themselves who come here to act the child in order to foster illusions as to their real childishness" (11). In this sense, Disneyworld represents the same vision adults have of the real world; it is a voluntary suspension of disbelief that Baudrillard considers an "infantile" response (Pinsky 100). As a result of this "childishness," the image of the world the public prefers to consume is an easy and already digested one, turning citizens into passive consumers of information.

3. Information Distortion in *1984* and *The Loudest Voice*

In this section, we will examine the existent manipulation techniques in the communication of information in Orwell's *1984* and *The Loudest Voice*. In *1984,* we will mainly focus on analyzing the control of the present through the manipulation of the past on the part of the Party. History is transformed, as the authoritarian establishment can alter the past through the Ministry of Truth, where Winston works. In this vein, we will analyze the construction of simulacra, as in Baudrillard's definition (1994), through which the signs of the real become a substitute for reality. Not only does Ingsoc alter the past, but they also adjust the citizen's present worldview to the party's strategic interests; equally worryingly, they dominate the visions of the future. Similarly, concerning *The Loudest Voice*, we will concentrate on the creation of simulacra in the field of mass media, examining journalistic professional malpractices when reporting information to the public. Journalistic practices fictionalized in *The Loudest Voice*, if viewed in the light of Baudrillard's theory, cannot be considered faithful simulations of reality; on the contrary, Roger Ailes and his collaborators purposefully manipulate the narrative of events and spread simulacra so that the public's views align with their financial and political interests. This is nothing but information disorder. As we shall see, both malinformation and disinformation – black propaganda, following Jowett and O'Donnell – play a fundamental role in the professional journalistic practices dramatized in *The Loudest Voice*.

Even though readership could see Orwell's *1984* as distant in time and its narrated circumstances as impossible to conceive in the democracies in the Western world, the novel has experienced a major revival of interest in recent times. As Packer notes, it is significant that Orwell's novel is still notable these days:

> [...] Orwell never intended his novel to be a prediction, only a warning. And it's as a warning that *1984* keeps finding new relevance. The week of Donald Trump's inauguration, when the president's adviser Kellyanne Conway justified his false crowd estimate by using the phrase alternative facts, the novel returned to the best-seller lists. A theatrical adaptation was rushed to Broadway. The vocabulary of Newspeak went viral. An authoritarian president who stood the term fake news on its head, who once said, "What you're seeing and what you're reading is not what's happening," has given *1984* a whole new life." (Packer 41)[3]

In this vein, a comparative analysis of *1984* and *The Loudest Voice* regarding information disorder and its effects on the public opinion is of utmost relevance to explain the way in which the manipulation tactics Orwell dramatized in his masterpiece are currently used in western democracies. Significant in this sense are the malinformation and disinformation practices – examples of Baudrillard's stage of simulacra – used by a fictionalized Roger Ailes as he guides the rise of Fox News, a cable TV channel that belongs to News Corp, property of Rupert Murdoch. In fact, Ailes's decisions on the way Fox News convey (dis)information to the public show uncanny similarities with the Party's *modus operandi* in *1984*.[4] In this train of thought, both the Party and Ailes practice what Habermas called the "fragmentation of consciousness": "everyday knowledge appearing in totalized form remains diffuse. [...] *Everyday consciousness* is robbed of its power to synthesize; it becomes *fragmented*" (1987, 355; original emphasis). This process of fragmentation of consciousness blocks enlightenment, allowing "the imperatives of autonomous subsystems make their way into the lifeworld from the outside – like colonial masters coming into a tribal society – and force a process of assimilation upon it" (Habermas 1987, 355). Ingsoc and Fox News, with their systematically distorted communication practices and the dissemination of simulacra, foster that process of fragmentation of their audience's consciousness, impeding enlightenment and colonizing public opinion. What is more, both ruling structures pursue a similar aim: the control of their respective societies through the manipulation of facts and the narrative of events.

The substitution of reality by simulacra is fully appreciated in *1984* through the manipulation of the past*,* since, as Tyler notes, "in the Orwellian world of *1984*, the control of knowledge, of information – indeed of history itself – is paramount for the exercise of power and the disciplining of society" (139). The main aim of the Party is to dominate the narrative of present events; and, in order to achieve this, they alter the past, that is, history.[5] As Xhinaku and Pema put it, building on the

dark wisdom succinctly expressed by the slogan "Who controls the past, controls the future," the Party has managed to reduce history into an ever-changing narrative that only serves to legitimize its latest political twists and turns, while facts are constantly being made up in order to lend credibility to the most outlandish fictions (29).

Written records are not the only ones used to manipulate the stream of thought. Audiovisual means are also controlled in order to disseminate disinformation and mislead the public's view of reality every single minute of their lives: "Day and night the telescreens bruised your ears with statistics proving that people today had more food, more clothes, better houses, better recreations–that they lived longer, worked shorter hours, were bigger, healthier, stronger, happier, more intelligent, better educated, than people fifty years ago. Not a word of it could ever be proved or disproved" (Orwell 85). Similarly, in *The Loudest Voice*, we witness a process of imposition of simulacra through malinformation and disinformation practices, using both verbal and visual codes. As Valverde González observes, even though Ailes defines himself as "a newsman, first and foremost […] and states that Fox News' intent is first and foremost to be objective when conveying information, […] all his decisions are aimed at manipulating his audience" (111). Tellingly, in line with Ingsoc's control of the information the inhabitants of Oceania consume, in episode 1, Ailes categorically states: "People don't wanna be informed. They want to believe they are informed" ("1995").

We will focus first on episode 3, "2008," to exemplify the practice of malinformation in the TV mini-series. During that year's presidential election campaign, Fox News takes a real image, a simulated fist bump between Barack and Michelle Obama at one of their rallies, and purposefully reports it in a misleading way. What was clearly a sign of affection between the Obamas, becomes a "terrorist's fist jab" ("2008"). David Axelrod, Obama's campaign manager, complains to Roger Ailes about this issue, but Ailes refuses to retract because, as he tells Axelrod, in Fox News "[w]e let the viewer decide, you know" ("2008"). In this same line of action, the continuous use of Obama's second name, Hussein, is imposed on the host of the news programs in the channel to spread a vision of Obama as foreign and suspicious. With the continuous use of real images and facts but commenting on them deceitfully, Roger Ailes and Fox News are manipulating reality in order to change their viewers' mindset. In his distorted communication practices, not only does Ailes use malinformation practices to manipulate the public; he also disseminates a series of simulacra so that Fox News' audience, the conservative half of the country, aligns with his strategic interests.

The order that Ailes gives to his collaborators in Fox News in episode 2, "2001," is significant: "We need to drive the news. Not just cover it." The first significant example of disinformation occurs in episode 4, "2009." We are in the first days of President Obama's first administration and Ailes wants to undermine the new presidency at all costs. With that purpose in mind, through a communicative

strategy similar to the repetition of slogans in Orwell's *1984* – "Freedom is Slavery" or "Ignorance is Strength" – Ailes informs his employees of the channel's new tactic of disinformation:

> This White House hates America, hates capitalism, hates anyone who is not in the lockstep with their way of thinking. Every time they bring up a talking point, we are gonna counter it. They say progressive, we are gonna say socialists, they say safety net, we are gonna say welfare cheat. They say Health Care, we are gonna say fucking Death Panels! Just push the message, we are gonna say, socialists, muslims, un-Americans. Just keep hitting those things, over and over again. ("2009")[6]

In this same episode, Fox News, following Ailes' directions, informs about a fake story on ACORN,[7] an association that receives funding from the government in order to pursue social justice and build stronger communities. Through the use of disinformation, Ailes finally manages to get an investigation opened by the American Congress at the same time that he accuses Obama of corruption for having funded ACORN.

Ailes uses in this case one of his most disrupting and obnoxious hosts, Glenn Beck. Beck turns also to malinformation practices, offering biased information and manipulated images to the public, so the viewers get a misleading idea of what ACORN does with the money obtained. Brian Lewis, Ailes' loyal PR executive for years, boasts about the way they have manipulated the whole issue in their own interest:

> How does Ailes' journalism work? This is like baseball. First base, we find a story. Like the ACORN story. We put it out there. Second base, everyone else picks up the story, our story. It doesn't matter if it is real or fake. Third base, The New York Times says that if a lot of people are talking about a story, it has to be important. And, real or not, they have to cover it. And finally, a democratic congress just defunded ACORN without a single investigation […] because of us. ("2009")

Another relevant example of disinformation practices happens in episode 2, "2001." In his report of the war in Iraq, one of the journalists working for Fox is caught in a lie. Some of Ailes' employees in Fox show their concern because this is clearly a case of journalistic malpractice and argue that the channel must apologize. However, Roger Ailes refuses to issue an apology:

> We [people in Fox] don't have to apologize. Say this is the fog of war. An honest mistake. This journalist is in Fox because he is a patriot, he is loyal. There is "no pulling back" [regarding mass destruction weapons in Iraq]. [W]e are giving the people what they want. This country needs to heal, we need to see who we are

fighting. No more of this faceless enemy bullshit. The current face of evil is Saddam Hussein's." ("2001")

Tellingly, Ailes states that the US must win that war because "when America wins, Fox News wins" ("2001"). Therefore, the reason why Fox News fabricates simulacra concerning the existence of mass destruction weapons in Iraq and disinforms the public is not to support the American government on their supposed war against terrorism, but to maintain their audience share and continue making more money.

    A final example of disinformation happens again in episode 4, "2009," when Roger Ailes induces the citizens of Garrison, the town where he lives, to vote against the rezoning designed by the Town hall. He uses his newly acquired town's newspaper and Joe Lindsey, his editor, to twist the town supervisor's plans, spreading a fake version of reality. Ailes gets to manipulate the town supervisor's words, as he wants to turn his original plan for the town into a debate of public versus private property. Actually, what he is doing is bringing to the table one of the pillars of American society, private property, a concept that nobody would ever question, to win this battle. Interestingly, he gets the majority of the inhabitants to support him in a meeting by quoting George Washington: "A violation of my land is a violation of my being" ("2009").

    The creation and imposition of both verbal and visual simulacra attain the objective of dominate the public's view of actuality in both, Orwell's novel and in *The Loudest Voice*. Oceania's citizens' perception of reality is transformed in a subtle way. The Party fabricates simulacra to adapt history to their current interests in an attempt to provide the society with the impression of living in an everlasting, homogenous indivisible whole (Xhinaku and Pema 32). Therefore, not only is the flow of events biased, but the past is also restructured in a way that gives the Party's acts an unwavering status of coherence and justice (Pavloski 8).[8] What is more, this disinformation practice not only affects the narrative of the present of past events; it has also altered the citizens' conception of time itself, which is also turned into a simulacrum: "[a]nd so it was with every class of recorded fact, great or small. Everything faded away into a shadow-world in which, finally, even the date of the year had become uncertain" (Orwell 48). A similar strategy to control the public's perception of reality is perfectly exemplified in episode 4 of *The Loudest Voice* (2009), in which the town of Garrison becomes a synecdoche for the US. In his attempt to alter Garrison people's mindset, Ailes utilizes disinformation for his interests to prevail. This is exactly the same as what Fox News is doing with their audience in the whole country regarding Obama's first presidential term. Actions have consequences, and in this case, Garrison, a peaceful place to live until Ailes's family moves there, becomes a town with a population which, in the political sense, becomes increasingly polarized. Its citizens cannot reason their problems out anymore; instead, they heatedly argue and cannot agree on a compromise. The

depiction of the ideological polarization on a small scale – in Garrison – finds its reflection, on the one hand, in the large-scale disharmony of the whole American society that is observed throughout the series, and, more generally, also in contemporary Western societies.

The progressive ideological polarization of societies is a strategy that clearly serves political interests. Polarization can be attained by manipulating the way information reaches the public in our overconnected world. In this process, online social media play a relevant role. Companies owning networks such as *Facebook*, *Instagram* or *Twitter* create algorithms in order to feed the public the information which best suit their previously conceived ideas. This is directly connected to the so-called "filter bubble," defined by tech entrepreneur and internet activist Eli Pariser as a state of intellectual isolation, a phenomenon that affects internet users' perception of reality by their use of search engines and feeds on social media. As a consequence of these "filter bubbles," citizens get suggestions to follow people or join groups whose political views align with their own ones. As Bruns observes (2), "filter bubble" is a phenomenon more connected to the Internet; however, it is precisely there where the public gets most of the information they consume throughout the day, as this is not only a question of browsing feeds in social networks, but also reading newspapers or even watching TV channels online. All the information on citizens' use of the Web is gathered and used to provide the audience with points of view as similar as possible to the ones they already hold. In this sense, as stated in the documentary *The Social Dilemma*, "[p]eople are manipulated like computer programs, as if they were computer programs."

As a result, there is a tendency among citizens to believe those facts which are more likely to accord with our point of view and, hence, our tendency not to regard as real those other facts that contradict our beliefs. As analyzed in the cases of *1984* and *The Loudest Voice*, audiences take news for real, without running any fact-checking or asking themselves if there could exist a different narration of reality, just because in that way life is easier, more bearable. In our current society, human beings are malleable through the consumption of media, either TV, radio, printed press, or the Internet. Contrary to what could be thought, Orlowski argues that the Internet does not sell a product to suit the public's needs, "[i]t's the gradual, slight, imperceptible change in your own behavior and perception that is the product. Changing what you do, how you think, who you are." Hence, today, the media is the market, and the human being is the product. As Shoshana Zubob states in *The Social Dilemma*, "we now have markets that trade in human future."

4. Conclusion

The existence of discourse manipulation practices is not new. The phenomenon of information disorder has occurred, at least, since the times when the first records

of printed documents appeared. Today, the notion of manipulation of the narrative and dissemination of simulacra has been amplified due to the existence of new channels of communication, such as the different social networks found on the Internet (Varona and Herrero 15). The analysis carried out in this article shows that the control of information exerted by Ingsoc in Orwell's *1984* and by Roger Ailes through Fox News in *The Loudest Voice* can be taken as examples of how simulacra prevail over facts and how easily public opinion can be misled in our current societies, both in authoritarian regimes and in Western democracies. This goal is obtained by the manipulation of the present and past events in *1984*, on the one hand, and journalistic malpractices in *The Loudest Voice*, on the other. We can conclude that through the control of language, memory and thought; through the repetition of slogans as part of the power gray and black propaganda dissemination program, the structures of power are able to shape the public's understanding of reality so that they would align with the power's strategic interests.

In both works analyzed in this study, reality as such no longer exists; it has been replaced by a simulacrum of reality, the third stage in Baudrillard's theory. The first stage, simulation, which should be the pillar of any journalistic practice, has disappeared. The public is surrounded by a narrative that has nothing to do with facts: while in *1984* we find a manipulated narrative of past events that have been turned into a present interpretation of former deeds, in *The Loudest Voice* a distorted narrative has been created to represent reality, the so-called fake news. In an undermined democratic socio-political scenario, there is "an entire global generation who are raised within a context in which the very meaning of communication, the very meaning of culture is manipulation" (*The Social Dilemma*). In addition, the strategies of thought control implemented by the *status quo* in *1984* and *The Loudest Voice* for their interests to prevail restrict as well the capacity of the public to listen to standpoints different from theirs and to question critically their own positions. People, through media, and more specifically through social networks, consume information that is in accordance with their previously conceived ideas and, without running any fact-checking, tend to regard as false any fact that contradicts their beliefs. The main consequence of this is a progressive ideological polarization of societies.

In order to prevent this manipulation of public opinion, institutions such as the European Commission (2018) insist on the importance of fostering awareness on disinformation practices and of the means to combat them. With this objective in mind, the use of literary and audiovisual works, such as the ones examined in this study, is of utmost importance in order to make the public more educated and, therefore, more prepared to envisage the possibility that the news they receive may be delivered with the intention of misinforming. In other words, as Orwell emphasized in his work, it is essential to prompt citizens toward "uncommon common sense" which entails independence of vision and integrity of mind.

Notes

1. In fact, in light of the challenges associated with the overwhelming flow of
    disinformation in our time and the difficulties in distinguishing the truth from
    falsity, the European Union has developed "The European Commission Action
    Plan against Disinformation." This plan defines disinformation as "verifiably
    false or misleading information that is created, presented and disseminated for
    economic gain or to intentionally deceive the public, and may cause public
    harm" (*European Commission* 3). One of the main objectives of this plan is
    raising citizens' critical awareness and societal resilience against the threat
    that information distortion poses. With that purpose in mind, the plan fosters
    initiatives "linked to awareness raising and media literacy as well as support
    to independent media and quality journalism" (*European Commission* 2).
2. The recent development of the concepts of malinformation, misinformation,
    and disinformation as categories within the phenomenon of information
    disorder dissemination is closely related to the conceptions of propaganda
    that grew out mainly of the two world wars. The definition of propaganda
    by Jowett and O'Donnell is significant in this sense: "Propaganda is the
    deliberate, systematic attempt to shape perceptions, manipulate cognitions,
    and direct behavior to achieve a response that furthers the desired intent of the
    propagandist" (7). In their classification of the forms of propaganda, Jowett
    and O'Donnell first mention white propaganda; in this case, the source from
    which the information comes from is identified correctly as well as accurately
    reported (16). However, there are two more forms of propaganda that are
    closely associated with the phenomenon of information disorder: first, gray
    propaganda, where the source "may or may not be correctly identified, and
    the accuracy of the information is uncertain" (20). In addition, Jowett and
    O'Donnell identify the form of black propaganda, "which is credited to a false
    source and spread lies, fabrications and deceptions" (17).
3. Actually, Orwell's name and his work has also been made part of disinformation
    campaigns in recent years: During the 2016 U.S. presidential campaign,
    propagandists at a Russian troll farm used social media to disseminate a
    meme: "'The People Will Believe What the Media Tells Them They Believe.'
    – George Orwell." But Orwell never said this. The moral authority of his name
    was stolen and turned into a lie toward that most Orwellian end: the destruction
    of belief in truth. The Russians needed partners in this effort and found them
    by the millions, especially among America's non-elites. (Packer 42)
4. A connection may be established between Roger Ailes' egocentric personality
    and that of the soul of the Party, Big Brother. Both pursue the same objective:
    instituting their vision of reality as the only possible one. As Maleuvre puts it:
    "It is easy to see how a conversation between solipsists can soon degenerate
    into the tyranny of one solipsist who says that his truth is the truth – a person

whose belief is that only his belief should prevail, and that the world will be happier if everyone lives in his fantasy" (43).

5. In connection with narrative manipulation, the use of the prefix re- in the following extract is enlightening: "Do you realize that the past, starting from yesterday, has been actually abolished? [...] Already we know almost literally nothing about the Revolution and the years before the Revolution. Every record has been destroyed or falsified, every book has been *rewritten*, every picture has been *repainted*, every statue and street and building has been *renamed*, every date has been altered. And that process is continuing day by day and minute by minute. History has stopped. Nothing exists except an endless present in which the Party is always right" (Orwell 178; emphasis mine).

6. The use of lexis in Ailes' tactic of disinformation is especially relevant here, with the substitution of terms: "socialist" instead of "progressive"; "welfare cheat" instead of "safety net"; and "Death Panels" instead of "Health Care." Ailes intends to eliminate any possible positive nuance in the narrative of Obama's administration policies, reducing the language used in Fox News to "socialist, muslims, un-Americans." Manipulation of language is also crucial in *1984* (Enteen 211). Ingsoc exerts the control of the accounts of events through the creation of Newspeak, the ultimate simulacrum. As Habermas claimed, "language is also a medium of domination and social force. It serves to legitimize relations of organized power" (Habermas 1979, 130).

7. ACORN (Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now) was the largest community organization in the US for low- and moderate-income families, working with the objective of fostering social justice and creating stronger communities. From 1970 to its ceasing of activity in 2010, ACORN grew "to more than 175,000 member families, organized in 850 neighborhood chapters in 75 cities across the U.S. and in cities in Canada, the Dominican Republic and Peru. ACORN's accomplishments included successful campaigns for better housing, schools, neighborhood safety, health care or job conditions" (*Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now*).

8. A key example of manipulation of the present and past narrative is the episode of change of alliances in the war that occurs on the sixth day of Hate Week: suddenly, Eastasia, and not Euroasia, is the enemy. The orator giving the discourse of that day, significantly described as "[a] little Rumpelstiltskin figure" (Orwell 209), proves perfectly able to alter the narration of events in the middle of his speech without any change of his voice or manner: only the name of the enemy is different. As a consequence of this unexpected change, as Winston observes, the truth of "a large part of the political literature of five years was now obsolete," and therefore, had to be rectified (Orwell 211).

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BEATRIZ VALVERDE holds a doctorate in English Philology from the University of Jaén. In addition, she has an MA in Spanish from Loyola University Chicago. She has worked at different national and international universities: Loyola University Chicago (2005–2010) and Loyola Andalucia University (2015–2020). Currently, she is an assistant professor at the University of Jaén, concretely at the Department of English Philology. Regarding her research work, she has carried out research stays at Loyola University Chicago (2016) and at Georgetown University (2019). She has published articles in journals such as *English Studies*, *European Journal of English Studies*, *Anglia*, or *Cervantes: Journal of the Cervantes Society of America*. Together with Dr. Bosco (Georgetown University) she has edited *Reading Flannery O'Connor in Spain: Andalusia in Andalucía* (2020), co-published by The Catholic University of America Press and UJA Press.

ANA VALVERDE GONZÁLEZ holds a master's degree in English and Literary Studies, which she earned at University of Jaén (Spain) in December 2020. Currently, she is a PhD candidate at the Department of English Philology at the University of Jaén, with an interest in modernist and postmodern literature, as well as in the fields of cultural studies and comparative literature. She has published on these areas in international journals, such as *Forum for World Literature Studies*.

Zohreh Ramin
https://*orcid*.org/0000-0003-1347-1592
University of Tehran
Sara Nazockdast
https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7450-5656
University of Tehran

Who Speaks in Memory? Self-Reference, Life-Story, and the Autobiography-Game in Vladimir Nabokov's *Speak, Memory*

Abstract: As best evidences of our narrative identity language-games, autobiographies unveil the illusive power of language in purporting a unitary self. Drawing upon Ludwig Wittgenstein's no-reference view of "I" and studying its use as a necessary formal tie in autobiographical memory, it is contended that sense of self through time is constituted in narrating and being narrated in memories. It is argued that Vladimir Nabokov's *Speak, Memory* illustrates the lack of reference of the first-person pronoun in autobiographical memory, its formal and inventive emergence, and its diversity in narrative compositions. As the title hints, the self does not speak in memory; it is spoken in autobiographical language-games of composition.

Keywords: autobiography, autobiographical memory, hermeneutic remembering, narrating the self, Vladimir Nabokov, Ludwig Wittgenstein

1. Introduction

Autobiography is equivocal. It defies definitions and framework, and at the same time it seems obvious. James Olney, one of the most distinguished figures in autobiographical studies, calls this a "paradox" and says: "everyone knows what an autobiography is, but no two observers, no matter how assured they may be, are in agreement" (Olney 7; qtd. in Stelzig 60). These conflicting characteristics are in line with the same features of the self, the cornerstone of autobiography. In the same way everybody has a sense of *what it is to be a self* while not knowing what a *self*

is. Thus, it can be deduced that it is the convenience of the "dear self," as Kant puts it (1949, 67), that gives meaning to auto-bio-graphy, and it is the complications of the self that render autobiography problematic, to the extent of becoming impossible (see de Man 31–33). Autobiography runs deep in our existence; in the words of George Misch: "Autobiography is one of the innovations brought by cultural advance, and yet it springs from the most natural source, the joy in self-communication and in enlisting in the sympathetic understanding of others" (16). Due to its correlation with a sense of self evinced in narrative self-reference, in recent years, autobiographical study has progressively broadened as autobiographical acts have been adopted by psychology, philosophy, cognitive science, etc. to explain human behaviors beyond written texts. Autobiographies, then, are not mere books: they are as familiar, intricate, ancient, philosophical, and fundamental as selves and self-communication.

Our diachronic sense of self, usually called personal identity, or what makes one the same person through time, is only one of the senses of self that we own, albeit an essential one. Due to its diachronic features inducing connectedness, and evaluative and emotional depth, this kind of self-perception, is narrative in structure. In simple words, we have a narrative understanding of ourselves and others, and each one of us owns a life-story that expands over time. It is autobiographical memory that equips us to configure this kind of self-perception. Autobiographical memory is a mental capacity that composes a coherent overall life-story by clustering memories of the past and possible future scenarios. The introduction of autobiographical memory to studies of self-identity, along with theories of memory as self-invention substituting the preceding assumptions of memory as past-reservation, has led to narrative theories of identity.[1] The claim that "identity itself is a life-story" (McAdams 95; qtd. in Davenport 3) makes autobiography a "discourse of identity" (Eakin 2004, 122). One of the important contestations faced by narrative identity concerns the identification and reidentificaion question: what does this unified *"I"* of life-stories denote? In order to avoid the complications of self-identification and bracketing the question of the reference of "I" from the subjective sense of self, some philosophers such as Marya Schechtman and Christine M. Korsgaard (see Davenport 14–16; Rowlands 93–103) have attempted to differentiate between the metaphysical self, or what the self is, and the practical self, or the way we understand ourselves as a person which they believe is necessarily narrative (Davenport 14). However, as Davenport points out (18–19), the two notions are so intertwined, with the latter presupposing the former, that separating them is not possible (19). What keeps the life-story together, gives it coherence, and makes it significant and meaningful for *me* is that it is *my* life-story, "I" narrate it," and "I" narrate *myself* in it. As narratives founded on self-reference, autobiographies significantly reopen the massive cloud of debates condensed in this "drop of grammar" (Hamilton 5).

Here, and in response to the separation of theory and practice in studying the self, it is fruitful to draw upon Ludwig Wittgenstein's later philosophical method,

which is against drawing such lines between philosophical language and practical language, or between a hidden inner self and an outer experienced self. In his revolutionary transition, Wittgenstein famously asserts that "meaning is use" (qtd. in Child 86). Accordingly, for understanding the meaning of self, instead of looking for the referent of "I" or neglecting its reference all together, we should look for how it is used in identity narratives. The main transitional ideas of Wittgenstein on the notion of self, such as the "counter-intuitive" (O'Brien 42) idea of lack of reference of the first-person pronoun "I" were proposed in the *Blue and Brown Books*. For the mature Wittgenstein of *Philosophical Investigations,* the self would be a cluster of context-sensitive uses played according to the rules of its language-games. Within the framework of Wittgenstein's later philosophy, we can analyze autobiographies to unravel the illusive power of language that purports a transparent unity of the self, and expose "I"'s false claims of substantiality, unity, and fixity of reference. As Garry Hagberg contends, autobiographies are "reminders of what we actually, contra the picture, say and do" in our identity language-games (31). Hagberg in his inspirational work *Describing Ourselves* maintains that by denouncing the pervasive Cartesian ocular terminology of looking into an image of the self by the self in autobiography it can be realized that the self is a variegated linguistic use.

Wittgenstein's no-reference view of the first-person pronoun comprise our core argument in this article. The aspiration is to investigate what this contention and its application to the narrative structure of autobiographical memory can reveal about one of the most celebrated and unique autobiographies of all time: *Speak, Memory* by Vladimir Nabokov. *Speak, Memory* is renowned for its unique structure and foregrounding the significance of form in memory and self-narration. This distinctiveness has led to extensive critical attention to its central themes such as memory and time (see Moraru); and nostalgia and loss (see Diaz; Ramin and Nazockdast), as well as its significant stylistic features, including ocular tropes (see Lyaskovetz; Oliver); thematic patterns (see Blackwell and Johnson); nonlinearity of narrative progression (see Moraru; Shields); deception and doubling (see Durantaye; Cooper; Roth); and convergences of fact and fiction (see Shields; Sagan; Wisnieski; Green). The majority of these studies approach Nabokov's style in the backdrop of the contemporary innovative movements of his time, namely modernism (see Foster; Sala; Diaz; Pieldner) and Bergsonism (see Glynn). In this study, however, and in adopting the most recent theories of self-narration, Nabokov's narrative forms are sourced back to autobiographical memory and identity's narrative language-games. In substituting the ontological self with a narrative one, Nabokov's central features can be explained in a new way, revealing the Wittgensteinian essence of his narrative diversities and autobiography-game.

2. Self-Reference in Autobiography and Autobiographical Memory

Philippe Lejeune believes the identicalness of the referent in the three facets of "self" in autobiography: the narrator, the character, and the author outside the text can be summarized (rather from the point of view of the reader) in the "unquestionable reference" of the proper name (43). However, with recent theories of reference claiming meaning not to be monolithically fixed in reference and conveyed through semantic values of context dependent senses (Reimer), the importance of multiplicity and contextuality of reference are recognized, and the validity of identicalness of the proper name and its substitutes questioned. The most apparent and significant epistemological difference between the proper name and "I" is that unlike proper names that can refer to the person in third-person point of view, "I" can only be used in the first-person point of view and only for self-reference. In commonsense as well, when a person uses her name to self-refer, it implies dissociation: "name-use [in self-reference] can imply a sense of seeing oneself as others do" (Hamilton 26). Correspondingly, proper names entail social structures such as gender, nationality, class, and religion. Therefore, although as readers we look to the name of the author to know who is speaking the "I" in autobiography, by neglecting the difference between I-use and the use of the proper name, we also neglect the significance of the first-person pronoun in what makes autobiography a discourse of personal identity. Before discussing "I" in autobiography, we should explore I-use in autobiography's source: autobiographical memory and the language-games of personal identity.

The unique function of "I" results from the significant ways in which it refers. I-use is the manifestation of self-consciousness (Hamilton 33). We humans, as self-conscious beings, use "I" for a variety of self-ascriptions believing it to consistently and invariably denote what we know as the self. Wittgenstein, however, negates the denotation of "I" and its reference "to a bodiless something, an inner, metaphysically hidden ego" (1958, 59). In discussing the diverse meanings of "I," he differentiates between using "I" as subject and using "I" as object and derives a foundational distinction between these two kinds of self-ascription (1969). As it can be conjectured, the first group adopts a first-person point of view towards self-ascriptions and the second a third-person point of view. In the cases of I-use as object, one may misidentify oneself with another person (e.g. one's hair with another's). However, subjective I-uses such as "I have toothache" (67) are "immune to error through misidentification" (a term later coined by Shoemaker and generally initialized as IEM). Wittgenstein rejects the referentiality of "I" all together due to the very guaranteed identification in this category and says: "there is no question of recognizing a person when I say 'I have toothache'" (1969, 66–67). Assuming that "I" cannot misidentify, its use does not convey any knowledge and identification of its referent either. When there is no knowledge and identification there can be no reference at all.

Episodic memories that constitute autobiographical memory,[2] unlike other forms of memory, also employ "I" as subject and are cases of IEM (Hamilton 42–51; Evans 179–191, 215–225, 240–249; Shoemaker) in the sense that you cannot remember an episodic memory without it having you in that content (the same structure is applicable to future narrative scenarios but hereafter omitted for the sake of our focus on past memories). IEM cases, including memory judgements, have been increasingly determined essential for constituting personal identity (see Evans 210–211; Hamilton 52, 186). The claim is that, counter to our expectations, the very non-reference and non-discriminatory characteristic of I-use in IEM of remembering leads to a subjective sense of self through time: "I cannot think about anything without there being something – myself – which in central cases I do not need to discriminate at all" (Hamilton 52). "I" in episodic memory is always a part of a narrative. Our episodic memories and anticipated scenarios of the future are narratives that cluster, connect, and form a life-story extended in time.[3] In the act of remembering, the first-person pronoun binds two very different perspectives of the self in relation to the episode: the present "I" remembering and the "I" being remembered in the content of the memory.[4] Peter Goldie associates this convergence of the two different perspectives with the "Free Indirect Style" (hereafter abbreviated as FIS) in narrative literature. Consequently, the "I" of autobiographical memory is the convergence of the "I" as now and the "I" as then, appearing to be unified in the FIS of narration. Goldie's Observation of FIS in remembering is on a par with Hamilton's IEM of I-use as subject in memory: within the first-person point of view of remembering, I-use as subject conjoins the present "I" and a past "I" in a seemingly unified "I" in its FIS exactly because it does not designate a numerical unity between them. Its very lack of reference and identification makes it possible for I-use as subject to play an a priori and formal, in autobiographical memory a narrative, role without the requirement to latch on a unified and persistent self. Accordingly, I-use as a narrative first-person point of view plays the key role in constituting unity of consciousness over time and a sense of personal identity in autobiographical memory (Hamilton 8,93). This narrative non-referential I-use has two important contributions for personal identity.

The first is related to how self-analysis emerges from an ironic standpoint toward the past. Within this nonlinear and dual perspective, one internal to the narrative (the remembered self), the other external (the remembering self), an ironic epistemic gap "is opened up," Goldie explains, "because one now knows what one did not know then," and has a "different stance" towards the memory, and then "bridged" (36, 39) in the conjoined voice of the first-person pronoun. The point of view of the narrative is constantly that of the first-person and the dramatic irony is conveyed in the way the memory is narrated, hence remembered; for example, in the nonlinear way the events of individual memories are linked with future outcomes and their evaluative analysis from the present point of view (26–55) resulting in the emergence of thematic patterns across time in one's life-story.

Another implication of the no-reference view of I-use as subject in memory nar-ratives is that via the ironic epistemic gaps of episodic memories, diverse and variegated narrative senses of self-appear, clustered around the unchanging first-person point of view, forming a life-story. As a result, I-use in autobiographical memory is 'narratively' diverse, for each "I" emerges in a different context. We can say the continuous I-use as subject in memory is the "real-tie" (Hamilton borrows J.S. Mill's term, 101) of diverse memory narratives, constituting the sense of *a self* through time; *The teller effect*, Eakin calls it, where there is no free-standing teller (2004, 128). We learn to use "I" in this way in self-communication and identity language-games via the set rules in our forms of life (see Child 6). Without the FIS opening up and bridging the ironic gaps, narrative analysis, thematic depth and consistency, and self-understanding would not be possible. Hence, our sense of self is a cluster of narratives with I-use at play in our autobiographical identity language-games.

As aesthetic renditions of these language-games, in denouncing a referent self, and seeing "I" as only use, autobiography does not become an alienated discourse. On the contrary, it is in autobiography that we can see how I-use in memory instates personal identity. Anscombe uses a brilliant excerpt from Ambrose Pierce as an analogy of the diversities and deceptions of "I" at play in self-reference:

> 'I' is the first letter of the alphabet, the first word of the language, the first thought of the mind, the first object of the affections. In grammar it is a pronoun of the first-person and singular number. Its plural is said to be we. But how there can be more than one myself is doubtless clearer to the grammarians than it is to the author of this incomparable dictionary. Conception of two myselves is difficult but fine. The frank yet graceful use of 'I' distinguishes a good author from a bad; the latter caries it with the manner of a thief trying to cloak his loot. (qtd. in Anscombe 31–32)

Autobiographies not only testify to the diversities of the narrative "I," but also, by foregrounding the role of "I" as the narrator, they expose the significance of style in the formation of sense of self. Autobiographies are best reminders that selves are not referents but, to a great extent, narratives in formation. Thus, autobiographies can *speak self* the best.

3. Understanding Nabokov's Ambivalent Memory: An Overview

The "poetry of memory" (Nivat 673) was one of the most important thematic and structural features of modernist literature (see Foster, Moraru). Memory is the medium in which the modernist subject finds her identity woven within the fabric of time and in the attempt to illustrate an aesthetic time (Moraru 175), develops an aesthetic self-understanding. George Nivat in comparing Nabokov's autobiography

with both his Russian peers and the celebrated European practitioners maintains that the western autobiographers use autobiography, in an Augustinian tradition, for a semi-spiritual self-discovery. However, Nivat asserts, "Always hiding emotion under many strata of games, devices, and veils," Nabokov is not writing a "confession" (674).[5] As a famous gamester, Nabokov in his autobiography is not in an avowed and forthright quest for an inner self. In a letter to Edmond Wilson, Nabokov wrote that he is writing "a new type of autobiography – a scientific attempt to unravel and trace back all the tangled threads of one's personality" (Nabokov and Wilson 215). He had also told his editor at Doubleday, that he is planning to write "a new kind of autobiography, or rather a new hybrid between that and a novel" (qtd. in Green 89). Nabokov's scientific and artistic works have always borrowed from one another as he believed optimally "their landscape is one and the same" (Sagan 250). Simultaneously, *Speak, Memory* is far from a conventional autobiography and the generic rules of historical writing in its convergence of fact and fiction. Therefore, based on Nabokov's accounts of his autobiography, we are dealing with a true life-story that is written with scientific exactitude and fictional imaginativeness, if such a thing is possible. As a matter of fact, memory in *Speak, Memory* resolves this polarity.

In *Strong Opinions*, Nabokov differentiates a good memoirist from a bad one believing that a bad memoirist "retouches" the past, whereas a good memoirist "does his best to preserve the utmost truth of the detail" (186; also qtd. in Wiśniewski 308). Paradoxically, in the same book he asserts: "I do not believe that 'history' exists apart from the historian" (Nabokov 1981, 138; see Green 90). In order to understand these ambivalences, we need to understand Nabokov's account of memory. Nabokov does not value what Moraru calls "mimetic realism" in remembering (177). As, for Nabokov, finding "thematic designs through one's life should be […] the true purpose of autobiography" (1999, 16). Nabokov's memory is a nonlinear and, borrowing the term from Moraru, "hermeneutic" reconstruction of the past (178). To observe memory scientifically, within the backdrop of our theoretical discussion, is to recognize that it does not record and retrieve the past but narratively reconstructs it.[6] Memory is not "a veridical recording of events, not something you can read 'in one of those blessed libraries where old newspapers are microfilmed,'" Husain writes, quoting Nabokov in his cognitive study of memory (1927). Furthermore, I-use in autobiography does not refer to a self that historically exists and persists in memories but a narrative role that, in turn, constitutes a narrative sense of self in a life-story. In this regard, Nabokov's belief that "the best part of a writer's biography is not the record of his adventures but the story of his style" (1981, 155) is in a sense scientific and accurate. In his scientific attempt, Nabokov unravels the narrative structure of the self by foregrounding how it is constituted in nonlinear, hermeneutic, and thematically consistent compositions of memory.

4. *Speak, Memory*, Points of View, and the First-Person Hermeneutic Remembering

Many of Nabokov's novels are titled after the names of his characters. In *Speak, Memory*'s first-person point of view, however, the use of his name emphasizes the narrator's position in shared identities such as nationality and patrimony, the roles that one is born into. For instance, in the one rare occasion that the writer refers to his first name, he is comparing its Russianness with the name of his cousin Yuri (Nabokov 1999, 152). Another name adopted by the author that particularly unveils the communal significance of the proper name is Vladimir Sirin, Nabokov's pen name in the years of exile in Europe. The name of a singing bird borrowed from Russian mythology, the emergence of Sirin is concomitant with the loss of home and when the shared national roots have gained new significance. Interestingly, although the general reader knows Sirin is his penname, Nabokov refers to it only in third-person, subtly suggesting a division and a doubleness between the first-personal "I" and its past as Sirin[7] (Nabokov's doubles will be discussed below).

Yet there is more to the use of diverse narrative points of view in *Speak, Memory*. The first chapter begins with first-person plural: "The cradle rocks above an abyss, and common sense tells us that our existence is but a brief crack of light between two eternities of darkness" (1999, 9). David Shields believes that, by "contemplatively" addressing "humanity" in the opening line of his autobiography, Nabokov is laying the keystone of understanding "life," which is the "signature" of autobiography (46). Shields contrasts this opening line with that of *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight* which starts with a "parodic" introduction of the character: "Sebastian Knight was born on the thirty-first of December, 1899, in the former capital of my country" (5), asserting it is "the movements of the human mind" that starts *Speak, Memory* and not random places and dates (46). By rejecting to start with an individualistic "I," Nabokov prefigures the common ground of ungraspable correlations between consciousness, time, and the self and presents his autobiography as an attempt to narrate over them.

The dominant first-person narrative point of view emerges immediately after, for autobiography is after all an exclamation of "I"'s presence and existence. Existence for Nabokov is synonymous with consciousness. Boyd recites Nabokov in one of his interviews: when he was asked: "What surprises you most in life?" he answered "the miracle of consciousness: that sudden window opening onto a sunlit landscape amidst the night of non-being" (qtd. in Boyd 42). This dominant theme is conveyed in *Speak, Memory* through metaphors of emerging forms amid voids, light amid darkness, and lives amid nothingness (examples of all three can be found in *Speak, Memory* 9–10). In the contemplative opening of the first chapter, Nabokov asserted that "our" consciousness is inevitably imprisoned by time. Temporality of existence crops up the primal void into "before" and "after" states, similar to the absolute beginning and ending of a story. Paradoxically, in recounting the story of

one's life – in autobiographical memory and from the first-person point of view, these absolute marks cannot be included. The darkness, in fact, from the first-person point of view, is the penultimate moment before the emergence of self-consciousness and after its disappearance. The story of one's existence in *Speak, Memory*, appropriately, begins not with consciousness per se but with self-consciousness and remembering this birth in I-thoughts: "the inner knowledge that I was I" (1999, 10). The emphasis on the first-person "I" is by no means accidental here. The prequel to self-consciousness's full awakening, Nabokov remembers, is a "series of spaced flashes," "the intervals between them gradually diminishing until bright blocks of perception are formed, affording memory a slippery hold" (1999, 10). Only after these sporadic fragments appears his first true autobiographical memory. This opening memory, which the author calls his "sentinel birth," is declared more miraculous than his baptism into a proper name, or his actual birth of which he has no memories, for it celebrates the miracle of self-consciousness – the light. The first narratively solid memory is not only acknowledged as the beginning of his life-story by the author, but also the inauguration of the first-person point of view and self-consciousness expressed in I-use in that memory (1999, 11) and concomitant with the beginning of sense of self. The firmer "hold" of memory comes with unity of consciousness being constituted in stronger ties of first-person point of view installed in the progressively more elaborate narratives of autobiographical memory filing the gaps between fragmented flashes and providing more solid continuity. This "I" does not denote an emanating light within, but creates "bright blocks" by building stronger narrative connections.

Nabokov's first memory also marks his consciousness of time in becoming aware of the age of his parents in relation to his (1999, 10); this concern with time is at the heart of *Speak, Memory*. In his comparative analysis of Proust and Nabokov's aesthetic time, Moraru says that both authors give a central place to time in their autobiographical works. However, while Proust celebrates "continuous time as a means to surpass time itself," Nabokov "fractures […] its contingent continuity" (Moraru 182). By breaking the continuity of time in his pursuit of patterns across time, Moraru claims, Nabokov departs from time as "a generic reality" and creates an ecstatic/aesthetic world beyond it (182). Borrowing Proust's words in elucidating his own configuration of aesthetic time, Moraru believes what Nabokov "achieves is not mere a transcription of recollections, but a true 'hermeneutics' of the past […]. The 'laborious deciphering' of the 'inner book of unknown symbols,' the technique of 'reading backwards' if rigorously conducted, leads to subjective 'revelations' and 'visions' through which we are 'able to emerge from ourselves'" (179). Moraru's insightful observations of Nabokov's aesthetic rendition of memory are in line with autobiographical remembering and its contribution to narrative identity and sense of self through time. Memories "feed on time" (Moraru 180), for they unfold in the "then" and "there" of individual narratives. Via juxtaposing these narrative time-slices and creating an overall life-story the

self is 'extended through time.' However, remembering also breaks the linearity of continuous time by necessarily being narrated in FIS and forming an interconnected cluster of memories rather than a continuum; hence, autobiographical remembering is hermeneutic. The difference is between a narrator who takes what he remembers as *the past* and the narrator who recognizes the true ways of Mnemosyne and foregrounds the diversities of narrative points of view ("reading backwards") that lead to thematic connections across time (deciphering "symbols," "revelations," and "visions"), thus gaining an intricate sense of self in this hermeneutic style ("the emerging self"). As *Speak, Memory* has gone under many 'revisitings,' first written in English, then translated to Russian, later rewritten in English, Nabokov's hermeneutic style has become more elaborate and sophisticated.

In the same vein, Shields associates the thematic structure of *Speak, Memory* with patterns created by memory "which is the structure of the book."[8] This "rupture" of temporality is, according to Shields, essential in autobiography, for an autobiography should be about "the process by which it, and its author, came to be." In defining narrative identities, Schechtman contends autobiographical memory unfolds in characterization rather than temporal continuity (100). By understanding the self not as a substantial and unified thing that connects time-slices through its persisting presence but a narrative, the meaning of life-story changes from being a realistic collection of sequence of events in one's life to a metafictional life in progress. In the magic carpet of one's life, not only do past memories transcend linear time and connect across time with the ones in the future of the past, but also with the future of the present, to the narratives of anticipation, for they are all parts of one story: that of *me*, conjoining who I am, who I was, and who I am going to be (see Foster's notion of "anticipatory memory" 52–69). In other words, Nabokov rejects time by exposing that its linearity collapses in our narrative sense of self. It is worth mentioning that yet again, Nabokov frustrates expectations and set rules by addressing his last chapter to "you"- his wife Vera.[9] If in the other chapters, Nabokov is in "dialogue with his own self in the presence of the reader" (Nivat 674), the last moves beyond this personal level and becomes a manifestation of self-communication and sharing one's stories in a more public level of language-games.[10]

5. Narrative Compositions of "I": Stories of the Self
     in *Speak, Memory* and Ocular Metaphors of Narrative Points of View

It was argued earlier that what we call sense of self and personal identity over time is the conjunction of contextually diverse narrations of the self-latched in the use of the "same sounding 'I'"(a term borrowed from Kant *A363* by Hamilton in deriving this observation) and constituted in the hermeneutic reconstructions of the past. As such, the "I" is both the narrator and the narrated character and the past

always a story told in the present; as Goldie puts it: "I tell it the way I remember it, and I remember it the way I tell it" (48). In preserving the coherency of a life-story, we take what we remember as 'the past' and ignore the additional narrative changes and imports. In *Speak, Memory*, "I" as the narrator is manifestly both the fictionist creating and the man remembering to the extent that Nabokov does not mind sending envoys to memory-like episodes in which he was not present at all.[11] For Nabokov imagination is rooted in memory (Boyd 113), because both are founded upon 'composition.' Boyd believes one of the main themes of Nabokov is an immanent disjunction between the consciousness of the character and his world (159). Temporal disjunction of consciousness is the source of memory compositions as well. Not only are individual memories narrative compositions that unfold within the backdrop of an ironic temporal gap between the self and its past, but the sense of a unified self is itself an overall story constituted by these narratives and narrated by a non-referential "I." In other words, as a consequence of this subjective disjunction, "I" becomes the composer and the primal composition itself.

All through *Speak, Memory* we can see how self-identities are aligned with stories and are in turn stories told and believed. Uncle Ruka identifies with Sophie, a character from his childhood storybooks who "n'etait pas jolie" (1999, 56). Nabokov's mother relishes the past and strives to impeccably preserve the illusory worlds of her loved ones (25, 31–33). In Chapter Ten, Nabokov identifies his cousin with the cavalier fictional characters they use to role-play (155). Mademoiselle too identifies with the beautiful but forsaken Anna Karenina. Her memories from her past are filled with improbabilities that the writer always assumed were desperate fictitious intrusions to create a perfect past to compensate for her pathetic present state. Only later Nabokov realizes that Mademoiselle is not a liar; if, to Nabokov, in her contrived past she emerged as a failing dodo rather than the swan, he adds, that swan is close to "her truth" (88). Mademoiselle sees herself as the swan, and within the disjunctive and incomprehensible world she lives, that is the identity-story she tells and believes. In stories of the self we only have metaphors – selves– for there is no fixed reference or model called *the self*, and the persisting "I" is an unchanging deceiving mask worn alongside its harlequin patterns of multiplicity.

In *Speak, Memory* the disjunction and diversities of the self are often expressed in ocular terms as Nabokov seems to be "watching" his life "like a movie" (Moraru 188). In modernist literature with its reliance on recording subjective mental states and their interactions with conscious or even subconscious dimensions, visual perception becomes an important trope for conveying the subjective point of view and its struggles with an alienated world.[12] Modern technologies in cinematography and photography are also an important influence on modernist art as they become literary vehicles in these works (Lyaskovets 3). Furthermore, the significance of Henry Bergson and his spatial metaphor of time cannot be neglected in modernists' understanding memory in terms of a spatial record of the past similar to a photograph (see Michael Glynn). The abundant ocular terms in Nabokov's works

have been studied extensively, not only in *Speak, Memory* in which they receive full expression, but also in his fictional works and poetry (see Gomez). Nabokov himself recognized his tendency to "think in images" (1980, 289; qtd. in Lyaskovets 2), and both his passion for painting and scientific designs as a lepidopterist evince his strong visual perception. In *Speak, Memory,* and under the above mentioned influences, one use of the ocular jargon is for metaphorical illustrations of perceptions of time, memory, and the self. Moraru believes Nabokov uses visual terms as metaphors "to appropriate memory as a scanning beam" (188). In other words, by transfixing his memories and putting them under the microscope Nabokov is able to magnify them and thus find the details which he is collecting for his thematic patterns. In putting "time" under the microscope, temporality's past, present, and future become one in the "magic carpet" that Nabokov likes "to fold […] after use, 'in such a way as to superimpose one part of the pattern upon another' like a butterfly that folds its symmetrically patterned wings" (Nabokov, 1999 106; Lyaskovets 139).

In emerging philosophical shifts of the second half of the 20th century, the idea of the world being the "world that I see" reliant upon ontological objects of knowledge changed to a world constituted in language as the limit of thought (Hagberg 9). In line with these changes, the self was no longer the invisible eye that sees everything, even itself in "introspection," but a linguistic use formed in communication. Autobiographical memories, as narrative practices, are essentially different from photographs and other visual records of past. Unlike photos, memories are not supplements; we do not need to find ourselves in them for we emerge in narrating them and being narrated through them. Correspondingly, in studying Nabokov's ocular jargon, Lyaskovets says photographs as objects are actually inferior to memories (5). For instance, Lyaskovets refers to Nabokov's memory of his mother's last lodging filled with photographs, but then Nabokov concludes "she did not really need them, for nothing had been lost" (49). Nabokov's mother did not need her time marks like the actors that don't really need their lines, for memories are a great part of selves. On par with this observation, it is important to point out that one of the most intricate ways that Nabokov uses ocular terms to convey disjunction and diversity is as *metaphors of narrative points of view.* As identities are stories told out of the disjunctions of the self, these metaphors foreground the essential detachment that surrounds consciousness. In the same manner, in *The Eye*, one of Nabokov's most manifestly ocular fictions, we see that the eye, or in Russian translation of the title the spy, is sarcastically referring to an "unreliable narrator who conveys an intentionally distorted reality in conjunction with duplicitous perceptions of himself" (Oliver 93).[13] Correspondingly, in Nabokov's ocular terminology, the "eye" can be taken as a metaphor of the narrative point of view of the "I": the eye is not really the eye that *sees* an ontological world outside but an "I" that is inevitably disjoined from the empirical reality and attempts to reconstruct it and *narrate over* this disjunction. Therefore, the truly photographic

and transparent reality is lost in the past and our memories are, borrowing from Nabokov's ocular terminology, inevitably "tinted" (Wiśniewski 310). In *Speak, Memory* Nabokov tells us that in his childhood he enjoyed seeing the world through *harlequin patterns* of the veranda and not the transparent "normal, savorless glass" (1999, 79). Based on his works, especially his autobiography, we see that for Nabokov all existence is harlequin; an important theme in Nabokov that can be best understood in Wittgenstein's framework.

6. Deceptions, Doubles, and the Harlequin Self in Nabokov's Autobiography-Game

As a scientist, Nabokov does not negate the notion of reality. However, he invites us to understand reality in its full depth. In *Strong Opinions* he defines true reality as "an infinite succession of steps, levels of perception, false bottoms, and hence unquenchable, unattainable" (11). Nabokov distinguishes "average reality" from "true reality" defining average reality as the reality of general ideas and imitated conceptions (1981, 93; seen in Green 92). In Wittgensteinian terms, this is the reality produced under the influence of the unifying illusions of language veiling the inherent diversities. In average reality we take appearances as facts. True reality is the one that exposes the gaps and foregrounds the contrived nature of definitions and certitudes. Nabokov says: "Paradoxically, the only real, authentic worlds are of course, those that seem unusual" (1981, 118; Green 92). Perhaps it is from nature that Nabokov learns this lesson about "reality." In *Fine Lines*, Stephen H. Blackwell and Kurt Johnson assert for Nabokov art and science both, in close observation, expose a "necessarily incomplete understanding" (1). Accordingly, Nabokov did not see the playful diversity in his style as a matter of artificial distortion; he says "my purpose is not to be facetiously flashy or grotesquely obscure but to express what I feel and think with the utmost truthfulness and perception" (1981, 179; Blackwell and Johnson 5). That is why there is no fixed reality to Nabokov's worlds but "phantoms" (Nivat 684) and doubles.

The inherent diversities that Nabokov discovers in the real world find expression in his narrative parallelisms and doubles that are not just limited to that of his characters (present in nearly all of his works, most significantly in *Despair*, *Lolita*, and *Pale Fire*), but also include time, places, worlds, and minds (Roth 6). Wiśniewski believes Nabokov's fictions are "alternative versions of his personal past" (307). Furthermore, Nabokov told a biographer that "the past is my double" (qtd. in Gomez 103; Field 86). As time flows and present turns into past, it is lost; however, the past leaves its trace – a watermark (Nabokov 1999) – like the patterns on a butterfly's wing that bears the trace of the past of the species. Memories are an important part of this trace, distinct from the present narrating "I," but latched to it, like a double is psychologically latched to a character. In this way, the self is

not unified, complete, and one, but diverse and conjoined in I-use, and no matter how alienated, still a part of what is called the self. Perhaps, this is why Nabokov believed the artificial use of the doppelganger is "a frightful bore" (1981, 83; Gomez 104), for Nabokov's ingenious doppelgangers are rather psychological doubles and tropes for the diversities of the self. The illusion of a unified self is created in the seemingly consistent use of "I" as its signifier;[14] however, autobiographies expose the falsity of claims of unity via their contextually diverse narratives of the self. "I" in autobiographical memory both opens up and then bridges (Goldie 36–39) this division between the first-person and third-person perspective of the present self as narrator and the past self as character, deceptively concealing the doubleness of the past in relation with the present.

Thomas Karshan claims that Nabokov's signature theme and idea is "play" (see Karshan). In discussing this theme and in a review of Karshan's insightful book Durantaye refers to Wittgenstein's notion of game and his extension of the word to all forms of language-use calling them language-games (the idea behind this notion is that there are no necessary and sufficient conditions behind uniform use of words, only family resemblances; contractual rules assign context-sensitive meanings to words with language concealing the diversities under false unities and constructed definitions). Wittgenstein's view of hidden diversities behind deceptive unities is in accordance with Durantaye's claim that Nabokov uses games in the sense of "deceptive play, play which does not present itself as such" (603). As diversity for Nabokov is the truth of reality, he comes to the observation that "everything in the world plays" (qtd. in Durantaye 509). The inherent diversities of "true reality" were masterly conveyed in Nabokov's thematic compositions. He believed only the unsophisticated will "miss the point" of diversity and look for the "thetic" and the apparent (1999, 228). Boyd attests: "[Nabokov] disliked the impulse to impose easy meaning – a generalization […] on a complex and recalcitrant reality" (87). Nabokov first found these beautiful forms in studying nature. In *Speak, Memory* Nabokov maintains: "Its phenomena showed an artistic perfection [...]. I discovered in nature the non-utilitarian delights that I sought in art. Both were a form of magic, both were a game of intricate enchantment and deception" (95). The "stab of wonder" of discovering mimicry in nature is also compared with the moment of birth of mind in realizing its artistic composition (233). This is why Durantaye believes Nabokov is not just deceptive; he is "mimetically deceptive" (604).

On a deeper level than his fictions, *Speak, Memory* is the acknowledgement that the past, and temporality in general, is not the linear flow of time-slices. Borrowing the words from *Ada*, *Speak, Memory* upholds that the time we live through, once it slips into the past, "ceases to mean the orderly alternation of linked events," and becomes instead "a constant accumulation of images" out of which we can make what we choose (Nabokov 1969, 545; Boyd 286). The reality of things is their compositional forms, and Nabokov's true reality is found in the way he narrates the past and himself with it- in the "story of his style" (Green

99). It is not surprising then that Nabokov wanted to name his own autobiography anthemion. The self in *Speak, Memory*, minted in the narratives of autobiographical memory, is not an external and independent referent obtained in every use of "I," but a narrative thematic pattern, drawn and told by the voice of "I." In narrating oneself, each episodic memory, each lifetime period and lifespan is a detail and a twist of this seemingly unified, yet ongoing pattern. In another brilliant rendition, Nabokov declares: "Neither in environment nor in heredity can I find the exact instrument that fashioned me, the anonymous roller that pressed upon my life a certain intricate watermark whose unique design becomes visible when the lamp of art is made to shine through life's foolscap" (1999, 14). In this metaphor, parallel with the anthemion metaphor, Nabokov's self is not a historical referent detached from his memory narratives, but the master theme that evolves in his hermeneutic reconstruction of the past and through his life-story.[15]

In Chapter Twelve, Nabokov speaks of a game he used to play with a friend, when he was only nineteen: "The idea consisted of parodizing a biographic approach projected, as it were, into the future and thus transforming the very specious present into a kind of paralyzed past." He then continues "now I catch myself wondering if we did not disturb unwittingly some perverse and spiteful demon" (Nabokov 1999, 193–194). When he was young, Nabokov mocked the fusions of present and past and the artificiality of narrative composition, but now he realizes that he himself is the teller and the told in a game whose rules indicate that in 'real life' too life-stories constitute a great part of who people are. Thus, autobiography is a game of composition in the deceptive and "demonic" voice of "I," a mask that creates the illusion of a unified self. The "I" of autobiography and autobiographical memory is the harlequin that Nabokov also found in mimicry. The metaphor of the harlequin achieves its full form in Nabokov's last work, *Look at the Harlequins*: "Look at the harlequins! [...] All around you. Trees are harlequins, words are harlequins. So are situations and sums. […] Come on! Play! Invent the world! Invent reality!" (1970 8–9). Not surprisingly, Nabokov finishes his autobiography with yet another game and a riddle: "Find what the sailor has hidden" (1999, 243) which hints at what the future has in store for the author. Another example of the playfulness of life (Boyd 155), Nabokov's riddle reminds us that time itself is a part of us as we play along inventing realities.

7. Conclusion

In this article it was argued that "I" in autobiographical remembering does not build a referential link to a substantial self. The I-use as subject in autobiographical memory which is tantamount to the *Free Indirect Style* of narration conjoins the "I," the narrator now remembering, and the "I," the character then being remembered, through a formal unity that does not designate a unitary referent self. Thus,

clusters of memory narratives bearing diverse narrative I-uses conjoin and form an overall life-story via the unified voice of "I," leading to a unitary self-effect and a sense of self through time. Consequently, selves are narratives told and believed in reciprocal identity language-games. The narrative "I," albeit a foundational illusion, is the most essential linguistic move we play. In line with the new studies on autobiographical memory and narrative identities delineated above, it was contended that Nabokov in his hermeneutic remembering foregrounds the nonlinearity and thematically consistent structure of autobiographical memory that constitutes a narrative sense of self based on self-characterization *across* time rather than 'within' the sequence of time-slices. Nabokov thus acutely shows that the function of memory in an autobiography is not to retrieve the past, but to reconstruct it in FIS that fractures the continuity of time leading to emergent revelations and thematic patterns. By unraveling the structural form of autobiographical memory, Nabokov illustrates how his "self" unfolds not only in memory narratives that recount the "record of his adventures," but also in "the story of his style" (1981, 155).

Nabokov's belief that in the close look, the world is not comprised of mono-lithic appearances but of diverse, deceptive, and playful forms can also be traced in the narrative structure of autobiographical memory; in *Speak, Memory* and within the temporal disjunction of the remembering self in relation with its past, memory composition form making the past selves doubles of the present, composed by a necessarily non-referential "I" that connects diverse narratives in its deceptive unified voice without designating a referential unified self. In Wittgensteinian terms, *Speak, Memory* reminds us that autobiographical memory plays the *game* of inventing a "real" self and unmasks the harlequin "I." The self in Nabokov's autobiography emerges as the primal thematic design interwoven in the fabrics of his narrative style. As Nabokov believed "true reality" is inherently incomplete, diverse, and variegated, *Speak, Memory* invites us to see beyond the veil of the "average reality" of the self. Like Nabokov's harlequin master composer that hides its multiplicity behind his deceitful mask of uniformity, the "I" in *Speak, Memory* ties the composer and the compositions in its narrative first-person point of view and "invents reality." In conclusion, based on our Witggensteinian reading of *Speak, Memory*, Nabokov in his autobiography unravels how in our identity language-games we play the game of composition and find meaningful forms and connections in a disjointed world; the formal first-person point of view is the essential rule of this game, and the "self" its greatest artistic creation. It is worth mentioning that an important aspect of *Speak, Memory* that was left untouched in our study is the way Nabokov moves beyond individual lives and binds life-stories across history and generations in the great design that is life. Reciprocating life-stories and forming collective memories is at the heart of our identity language-games. Hence, in order to understand them well, we should acknowledge the communicative significance of our identity stories, and, in a Nabokovian vein, contract the image to let more beautiful patterns emerge.

Notes

1. On narrative identity see Davenport, Eakin, Schechtman, McIntyre, Korsgaard.
2. For more explanation on different types of memory and why episodic memories are considered the building blocks of autobiographical memory see Rowlands 35–49 and Hamilton 44–45.
3. For more on the narrative structure of memory see Conway and Jobson 54–59; Goldie 2–24, 26–55.
4. For a different epistemological analysis of the first-person in episodic memories and the presence of the self, see Rowlands 169–189; Ramin and Nazockdast 26.
5. Unlike Nabokov, Nivat contends, Tolstoy "as a man of nature, an aristocratic companion to the Russian peasant or the free Cossack, but also as a 'Christian pilgrim,' avidly seeking his own salvation" combines the traditional Russian tradition of Aristocratic writing and the spiritual European one (673).
6. For neurological discussions that support this observation see Rowland 104–106.
7. In an interview, Nabokov addresses Sirin as his "Russian" name and says "Don't be bewildered by the presence of this combined team: Nabokov is here, of course, and so is Sirin, and someone else" (qtd. in Shrayer 111).
8. In comparing the titles of *Speak, Memory* and *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight*, Shields infers that whereas the latter biography is ironically claiming to be "real," the former foregrounds the its fictive nature by claiming that "memory is the active agent" and Nabokov is simply "the conduit of these recollections" (50–51).
9. A conclusive last chapter in third-person narrative voice of a "fictitious reviewer" was not published (*Selected Letters* 105).
10. Nivat believes this change is a movement from his life as a boy and his parents, now gone, to his role as a father and husband to the living wife and son and his life ahead, strengthened in the symmetrical correlation between his first memory and this last counted memory (674).
11. An example is the episode of Mademoiselle's arrival in Chapter Five (1999, 72).
12. Lyaskovets says modernist authors "begin to treat time as the image of the mind and by doing so connect the perception of time with a certain awakening of sight" (2).
13. Oliver explains: "the central thematic tensions within *The Eye* are forces of visionary imagination juxtaposed against empirical optical observation as Smurov's imaginative recreation of reality is constantly thwarted against pervasive glimpses and reflections of his 'real' self, which finds an antithesis between optics and imagination" (47).

14. The distortion of pronouns finds a brilliant expression in Lolita: "I felt suffocated as he rolled over me. I rolled over him. We rolled over me. They rolled over him. We rolled over us" (446).

15. Green says: "Writing was, for Nabokov, a method of self-analysis. In its duality, in the process of shaping a world by depicting it, he came to know himself as both a subjective and objective self" (99).

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ZOHREH RAMIN is Associate Professor of English Language and Literature at the University of Tehran, Iran. She has been teaching at the BA, MA and PhD level and has supervised MA and PhD dissertations at the department of English. Ramin is also the Editor-in-Chief of the journal *Research in Contemporary World Literature*. She specializes in American Literature and Literary Theory. Her area of research interest includes the American short story, American fiction, comparative literature and travel narratives.

SARA NAZOCKDAST is an invited lecturer at the Department of English Language and Literature of University of Tehran, Iran. She is also the English editor of journal of *Research in Contemporary World Literature*, Department of Foreign Languages and Literatures, University of Tehran. She received her PhD in English Literature in February 2020. Her PhD dissertation focuses on autobiographical memory, identity language-games, and sense of self in autobiography and autobiographical fiction. Nazockdast's research interests also include Wittgenstein philosophy, narrative theory, theory of fiction, identity studies, and post-colonial studies. She is currently extending the subject of narrative identities to the research areas of collective memory, narratives of trauma and grief, and comparative literature.

Bárbara Arizti
🆔 https://*orcid*.org/0000-0002-8803-1308
University of Zaragoza

Autobiography, Time and the Palimpsest in Jamaica Kincaid's *See Now Then: A Novel*

Abstract: This article analyses Jamaica Kincaid's autobiographical novel *See Now Then* through the metaphor of the palimpsest with the aim of exploring the frictions between the different generic and thematic layers that make up the text. It argues that despite the novel's generic openness, its thematic concerns, most notably its treatment of time and narrative temporality, encourage a backward-looking stance that reasserts the past. The theories of Sarah Dillon and Lene Johannessen on the nature of palimpsests, especially the difference between the palimpsestic and the palimpsestuous and the interaction between the horizontal and the vertical, the new and the old, will be drawn upon in conjunction with Leigh Gilmore's investigations into limit case autobiographies – works, like Kincaid's, that question the borders between fiction and life-writing under the pressure of traumatic experiences.

Keywords: Jamaica Kincaid, autobiography, (auto)pathography, post-colonial palimpsest, trauma, narrative temporality

1. Introduction: Limit Case Autobiographies and the Metaphor of the Palimpsest

Jamaica Kincaid's *See Now Then,* published in 2013, is the second novel the West Indian author sets outside her birthplace. Unlike *Annie John* (1985), *The Autobiography of My Mother* (1996), and *Mr Potter* (2002) – inspired by the lives of her parents, and, to a lesser extent, her maternal grandparents – the plots of this her latest novel to date and the novella *Lucy* (1990) unfold in the United States. Lucy, the eponymous teenage heroine, works as an au pair in an unnamed city that closely resembles New York. She has fled her Caribbean home to escape from a love–hate relationship with her mother, a staple of Kincaid's fiction. *See Now Then*,

set in a small village in New England, pictures the joys and miseries of the Sweet family, bringing into focus the debilitating effects of the parents' divorce. Upon publication, both novels met with controversy because of their heavy reliance on autobiographical material that invited connections between the characters and real-life people. To be sure, nineteen-year-old Lucy and middle-aged Mrs. Sweet have been read as thinly disguised versions of Kincaid at different stages of her life. More controversially, however, the autobiographical tour includes intimate details of people very close to the author who the novels depict in a rather unfavorable light, leading readers like J. Brooks Bouson to "question the ethical propriety of Kincaid's adversarial autobiographical performance" (357). At the core of *Lucy* and *See Now Then* lies the portrayal of an ugly divorce: that of Mariah and Lewis, the affluent couple Lucy works for; and the divorce of the Sweets, which reviewers were quick to interpret as being based on Kincaid's failed marriage to composer Allen Shawn (Cohen 224; Gilbert 62; Row n.p.).

Although Kincaid, especially in her early career, has often candidly admitted that her life constitutes the main raw material of her fiction (Ferguson 176; Wachtel 55; Bonetti n.p.), of late, she has grown wary of what she calls "the autobiograph-ical question" (qtd. in Cumber Dance 9), particularly so when it concerns the characters and events that make up *See Now Then*. Asked by Celeste Headlee about the coincidences between the book and her own life, Kincaid retorts:

> why does it matter? It doesn't matter to me that it's autobiographical. But it seems to matter to people as a way to read it, you know, except I think it's a way of diminishing what I think might be remarkable about the work. And it's painful, in its way, to be dismissed because, well, it's about her marriage and revenge or something. It's not that at all. (Headlee n.p.)

To a certain extent, Kincaid is right to reject a purely autobiographical reading of *See Now Then* as simplistic. But, to me, the key question is how to reconcile the fact that the author's life experience obviously matters for a fuller comprehension of her fiction – despite her protestations – with the need to go beyond the intricate mesh of autobiographical parallels in her work.

Leigh Gilmore seems to have found a way out of the conundrum. She considers Kincaid's deployment of certain events in her life as paradigmatic of significant transformations undergone by contemporary life writing. Gilmore puts forward the term "limit case autobiography" to refer to works that tether on the edge between the fictional and the factual when representing traumatic experiences. These liminal works disrupt expectations in that they are more concerned with the author's recur-rent preoccupations, prompted by a traumatic event, rather than with conventional truth claims. In the case of Kincaid, her works *Annie John* (1986), *Lucy* (1991), *My Brother* (1997), and – only in passing – *The Autobiography of My Mother* (1996) are analyzed as limit case autobiographies, part of an "ongoing self-representational

project," in Gilmore's own words (2001, 97). This serial *sui generis* autobiography, starting back in 1983 with the collection of short stories *At the Bottom of the River*, is characterized not so much by a stable traditional autobiographical subject but by the matrix of the essentials of Kincaid's fiction, revisited work after work. There is certainly no doubt that her later novels *Mr. Potter* (2001) and *See Now Then* have come to engross the list of Kincaid's hybrid writings of the self. Two recurring sources of trauma feature prominently in the author's work: one of a personal nature and the other an archetypal instance of historical trauma, namely, her troubling relationship with her mother, and the legacy of colonialism and slavery. These topics are part of the backdrop of *See Now Then*, which is, nevertheless, mainly concerned with domestic trauma, combining the stark realities of Kincaid's deteriorating relationship with her ex-husband, together with fiction, alongside some flights into pure fantasy.

Besides providing insights into a fictional work, metaphors can also play an important role in the growth and development of literary research. Jamie Herd has published an ingenious article that analyses *See Now Then* through the metaphorical figure of grafting in order to explain its intertextual and generic intricacies. She graphically describes Kincaid as "a master grafter set on embedding multiple fruit-bearing shoots into the rootstock of *See Now Then*" and taking a step back to watch "the intertextual and intergeneric grafts disrupt time as they branch out in new directions" (31). As Herd clarifies, "the grafter plays with time, making old trees bear new fruits and young rootstock grow scions of fruit-bearing trees of the past." She puns on the title of Kincaid's novel when she adds that looking at the grafted tree "is seeing time defied, at once seeing now then and seeing then now" (31). Like Herd, I acknowledge the centrality of time in *See Now Then*, as well as the constant interplay between the past and the present, the old and the new that characterizes the text. However, I would like to put forward a complementary figure that further helps advance thinking about the novel and that has a long tradition as a metaphor in literary criticism: the palimpsest.

Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Thomas De Quincey, Gérard Genette, Jacques Derrida, and within a feminist agenda, Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar in *The Madwoman in the Attic* are some eminent examples of the figurative use of the palimpsest among writers and critics alike. As is well known, palimpsests emerged in ancient times, when writing materials were scarce and costly to obtain. By erasing the older text, writers made room for new inscriptions. Three main aspects define the structure and the logic of the palimpsest: the possibility of re-inscription; the overlaying of different texts; and – perhaps its most intriguing characteristic – the fact that, over time, traces of the underwriting often end up reappearing on the surface. I argue that these aspects can make important contributions to the analysis of *See Now Then*. In keeping with the logic of the palimpsest, Kincaid's autobiographical project is open-ended, always already open to future re-inscriptions. In Gilmore's words, the "preoccupations that persist across [her] texts," compel the

author to return to "the autobiographical scene" (2001, 98) and raise "the spectre of endless autobiography" (2001, 96). The palimpsest's layeredness and its uncanny ability to simultaneously erase and preserve, conceal and reveal – sometimes unintentionally – prove particularly fruitful for investigating the novel both in terms of genre and theme. Sarah Dillon has studied the relationship between the layers that compose a palimpsest in depth, unravelling the new analytical possibilities that the friction between its surface and what lies beneath opens up. This article puts her insights in dialogue with Lene Johannessen's explorations of the cross-fertilization between the postcolonial figurative palimpsest and Homi Bhabha's concept of hybridity.

2. The Palimpsestic Versus the Palimpsestuous

In "Reinscribing De Quincey's Palimpsest: The Significance of the Palimpsest in Contemporary Literary and Cultural Studies," Dillon distinguishes between the terms "palimpsestic" and "palimpsestuous," two different but complementary ways of approaching a multi-layered text. Palimpsestic, she explains, refers to the process of adding layer upon layer, while palimpsestuous, in contrast, alludes to the final result, that is to say, the interpenetration of the different layers visible on the surface (2005, 245). In Dillon's opinion, the palimpsestuous can yield more exciting results as a critical tool than the palimpsestic. In fact, a palimpsestuous reading serves as the basis for the textual analyses she provides in her monograph *The Palimpsest: Literature, Criticism, Theory*. Besides, drawing on Foucault's theory, Dillon equates the palimpsestic with the archaeological and the palimpsestuous with the genealogical (2005, 253). Like archaeology, a palimpsestic reading is mainly interested in reaching down to the deeper layers – the hidden meaning of a text that is supposed to be its true and most valuable story. In Dillon's opinion, this form of reading is necessary but often not sufficient. She advocates instead a palimpsestuous approach to texts that stays on the surface. After all, the palimpsest provides only an "illusion of depth […] while always in fact functioning on the surface level" (McDonagh; qtd. in Dillon 2007, 3). Palimpsests, corroborates Brecht de Groote, "do not actually arrive in neat layers that can be peeled down to their ever delayed core like the skins of an onion: they are by definition a single surface inhabited by multiple dissociated discourses, each of which is its own irreducible moment" (124). In the same way as genealogy traces the "strategic connections" between the discourses that have been made visible (Foucault; qtd. in Dillon 2005, 254), a palimpsestuous reading focuses primarily on the surface of the text and explores the intersections between the dominant discourse and the traces of encrypted texts. Dillon labels this quality "palimpsestuousness," defined as "a simultaneous relation of intimacy and separation" that preserves "the distinctness of its texts, while at the same time allowing for their essential contamination and

interdependence" (2007, 3). According to Dillon, the palimpsestuous corresponds to the adjective "involuted," used by De Quincey in a similar context (2005, 245). The different "texts that inhabit the palimpsest […] are involved and entangled, intricately interwoven, interrupting and inhabiting each other" (Dillon 2007, 4), like De Quincey's "involuted" surface structure in which "our deepest thoughts and feelings pass to us […] in compound experiences incapable of being disentangled" (De Quincey; qtd. in Dillon 2005, 245).

In *See Now Then*, the tensions generated between the pull to dig out the connections with Kincaid's personal experience and the need to trace the genealogy of Kincaid's concerns can be productively explored by pursuing a palimpsestic, as well as a palimpsestuous, reading. The first, palimpsestic approach, will touch on the factual layers of the novel, which Kincaid claims to have erased. More importantly and more comprehensively too, I will adopt a palimpsestuous approach to the different discourses on time and temporality so as to examine the way they circulate Kincaid's characteristic concerns as they re-emerge in the variegated "Now" of the novel. This will prove to be of far greater value, as the surface of the palimpsest eclipses the interest of what lies below. In *See Now Then,* a horizontal approach studying competing discourses on the surface text level yields more abundantly than a vertical one excavating personal and generic origins.

In correlation with Dillon's differentiating between the palimpsetic and the palimpsestuous, the archaeological and the genealogical, Johannessen argues that postcolonial palimpsests invite a double reading that consists in an "oscillation between vertically oriented disclosures of pasts on the one hand, and, on the other, a horizontally oriented unveiling of concurrent contexts" (873). Despite the apparently conflicting logics of the palimpsest – grounded in "the principle of imposition and attempted erasure of the word that precedes it" – and Bhabha's idea of the hybrid – following "the principle of dialogue" and integrating "various […] discourses into some form of whole" (897) – Johannessen affirms that some postcolonial palimpsests work to encourage hybridity. This happens because the older layers are not granted "the authority of being prior in the sense of being original: they are prior only in the sense of being anterior," thus giving rise to a "third space," "something different, something new and unrecognizable, a new area of negotiation and representation" (Bhabha; qtd. in Johannessen, 880).

Other postcolonial palimpsests, in contrast, do not participate of this "thirdness" (Bhabha; qtd. in Johannessen, 885) and simply reassert the pre-eminence of the past over new hybrid forms (872). In the words of Darby Lewes, there can be two different outcomes of the superimposition of layers: "when the old bleeds through and reasserts itself, or when old and new combine to make a third discourse." In the case of the latter, "the final result is simultaneously new/old, and not new/not old. The oppositions are deconstructed, and privilege is obliterated" (qtd. in Johannessen, 872). Clearly, this final image evokes Herd's words on the result of Kincaid's grafting different genres and intertexts in *See Now Then*. However,

by examining the novel in the light of Dillon's theory, I intend to demonstrate that despite the hybridity encouraged by genre conventions, thematic concerns promote a backward view that forcefully reinstates the past. This is especially the case when the different conceptions of time and temporality are analyzed, most of them revolving around the figure of Mrs. Sweet and contaminated by trauma. In an image that conjures up the structure and the dynamics of the palimpsest, Mrs. Sweet strives to keep her past in check but ultimately fails: "Mrs. Sweet had buried her past – in the cement that composes memory, even though she knew quite well that cement deteriorates, falls apart, and reveals eventually whatever it was meant to conceal" (Kincaid 2013, 93). Only in the last two pages of the novel, as a last-minute afterthought or, more appropriately, as the embryo of a different, more hopeful re-inscription, the novel begins to contemplate the possibility of the future.

3. A Palimpsestic Approach to *See Now Then*

As noted, two main generic layers blend in *See Now Then*, one tapping into autobiography and the other following the conventions of fiction. Without doubt, the book's subtitle – "A Novel" – hints at the author's intention to foreground the fictional over the factual. However, and despite the fact that Kincaid has repeatedly dismissed autobiographical readings of her work ("10 Questions…"), the text presents obvious parallels with her life. Extrapolating from Johannessen on the mechanics of the palimpsest, in *See Now Then* "intended absence becomes unintended presence" (872). As she puts it, "the layeredness of the palimpsest operates chronologically and vertically, lending itself to the unearthing of meanings and stories" (872). Thus, a palimpsestic approach to the novel would keep critics and readers in the know busy excavating, so to speak, the details of Kincaid's family life, especially the circumstances surrounding her divorce in 2002.

The main character, Mrs. Sweet, is – like Kincaid – an Afro-Caribbean writer and keen gardener. She is in the process of coming to terms with the fact that Mr. Sweet – like Shawn, a Manhattan-born pianist and composer – has left her for a younger musician. The couple has two children, Persephone and Heracles, and lives in Vermont, where Kincaid, Shawn and their children Annie and Harold resided for years. Most reviewers of the novel point out the autobiographical subtext of *See Now Then*. Paula Marantz Cohen writes: "The couple at its center is transparently lifted from life: a short white man raised in New York City and a tall black woman from the Islands" (227). Jess Row situates the novel in the context of Kincaid's "incendiary autobiographical nonfiction" and her heavily autobiographical previous fiction (n.p.). She discloses in great detail the nonfictional undertone of the novel:

> The resemblance isn't just a matter of biographical details in the public record: *See Now Then* represents Mr. Sweet, the father of the family, as the agoraphobic, intensely

limited, and solitary man Shawn has described himself to be in his own memoirs. It refers to Mrs. Sweet as the author of novels about the Caribbean including *Mr. Potter* (the title of Kincaid's own 2002 novel), and describes her virtuosic gardening and her conversion to Judaism – that is, it represents Kincaid exactly as the public figure she has become over four decades of writing. (n.p.)

The fact that Kincaid sets the spotlight on the ugly details of her divorce brings the novel close to (auto)pathography. This is the term Joyce Carol Oates employs to designate biographical writing primarily engaged with describing "dysfunction and disaster" (qtd. in Ward, n.p.) and encouraging a kind of morbid voyeurism in readers. *See Now Then* portrays the Sweets as a dysfunctional family where the husband hates his wife and son and sets his daughter against her mother. Mr. Sweet constantly harbors thoughts of hatred and contempt about his wife, "that bitch of a woman born of beast" (Kincaid 2013, 10), and fantasizes with stumbling by surprise upon her dismembered body. The children too feel at times neglected due to their mother's addiction to writing and gardening, and at other times overwhelmed by her suffocating attentions. The wife is referred to as "that poor dear woman" (35), "poor, benighted Mrs. Sweet" (133) and "poor Mrs. Sweet" (165), which – although the adjective poor is on occasion also applied to Mr. Sweet and Heracles – can be read as dramatizations of Kincaid's self-pity.

This archaeological, palimpsestic approach aimed at unearthing the facts of the author's life must necessarily be supplemented by an analysis of the themes that emerge to the surface of *See Now Then*. Borrowing again from Johannessen, the hidden autobiographical traces and meanings "potentially surface amidst myriad memories and stories" (872). Since critics and the author herself affirm that time is the centerpiece of the novel (Bouson, 371; Cumber Dance, 9; Headlee, n.p.), Section 4 explores the implications of the different approaches to time and narrative temporality that blend and clash in the text. The decision to carry out a palimpsestuous approach to the patterns the multi-layered realities and legacies make on the surface of the novel is taken on account of both textual and extratextual aspects: the dense, convoluted style of the novel; the generic conventions of limit case autobiographies that highlight recurrent preoccupations rather than factual details; and the genealogical relationship with Kincaid's earlier autobiographical works.

Like her previous works, especially *Mr Potter*, *See Now Then* departs from the traditional conventions of life writing in its choice of a lyrical, deeply subjective style that steadily draws attention to itself, working as a screen rather than a mirror of reality. According to J. Brooks Bouson "the convoluted, digressive, and highly repetitive style of *See Now Then* serves to partly conceal rather than reveal the painful events surrounding the collapse of Kincaid's marriage to Allen Shawn" (371–372). In her review of the novel, Prudence C. Layne notes the "heavy-handed repetition" and charges Kincaid with overindulging: "The repetitiveness of the opening chapters, the run-on sentences, the oblique assertion of

the present as already passed, of 'Now' and 'Then' being the same thing, become
a bit overbearing" (218). Notoriously, the novel defies chronology and linearity
and embraces repetition with slight variation. Mrs. Sweet reminiscing a rehearsal
of an orchestra perfecting the Goldberg Variations (Kincaid 2013, 110) – Bach's
famous piece made up of an aria and an assortment of thirty variations on the main
theme – provides a hint at how the main character remains trapped in a loop of
obsessive ruminations on her family life. Mrs. Sweet's reflections on her writing
practice, plainly an extension of Kincaid's own, further contribute to the style's
involutedness in a clear metafictional fashion, which is made even more apparent
when "dear Mrs. Sweet" decides to read to "the young Heracles a chapter from
a book called *See Now Then*, against her better judgment." The external narrator
explains that "she was unable to stop, the pages of the book compelled her to
continue, her eyes were glued to them, her tongue was an ingredient of the pages"
(Kincaid 2013, 111).

Besides Kincaid's flair for repetition and the deployment of metafictional
strategies, the grammar of *See Now Then* is a further invitation to stay on the sur-
face of the text and undertake a horizontal palimpsestuous reading. Commenting
on the stylistics of *Mr. Potter*, Nicole Matos has drawn attention to Kincaid's
preference for parataxis over hypotaxis. Her paratactic structures, Matos asserts,
"form a world that proliferates horizontally" (9). Albeit the use of coordination
and juxtaposition over subordination is not as striking in *See Now Then* as it is in
Mr Potter, the novel still features significant paratactic renderings of events, like
the one on its very first page:

> and she could see the firehouse where sometimes she could attend a civic gathering and
> hear her government representative say something that might seriously affect her and
> the well-being of her family or see the firemen take out the fire trucks and dismantle
> various parts of them and put the parts back together and then polish all the trucks
> and then drive them around the village with a lot of commotion before putting them
> away again in the firehouse and they reminded Mrs. Sweet of the young Heracles. (3)

See Now Then is written in the style of Modernism, imitating the stream of con-
sciousness of the main characters, especially Mrs. Sweet, who often ponders on the
passing of time, the way in which her "Now" quickly turns into a "Then" and the
"Then" still painfully impinges on the "Now." In *See Now Then* "the nonlinear plot
collapses current and decades-old events into an almost stream-of-consciousness
story of family and betrayal" ("See Now Then…"). Mrs. Sweet's memories – in
the form of free indirect style – combine the domestic and the historical and feature
the staples of Kincaid's fiction, such as her troubled relationship with her mother,
the joys and the grieves of motherhood and her anger about the legacy of coloni-
alism and slavery. As a limit-case autobiography, it is the genealogy of concerns
Kincaid revisits in this serial project that matters more than the factual detailing of

the events of her life. Unlike the novel's hybridity as a generic palimpsest opening autobiography to new inscriptions, on a thematic level a palimpsestuous reading reveals that the "Now" of the novel forcefully reasserts the past.

4. A Palimpsestuous Approach to *See Now Then*: The Role of Time and Temporality

Even though palimpsests partake of the inseparability of time and space, in *See Now Then* the temporal presides over the spatial. Its title, explains Lauren Gilbert, hints at "the author's conceit that everything can be glimpsed in the same instant, and the narrative moves vertiginously forward and backward through time, sometimes within a single paragraph" (62). Significantly, in the title of the novel, the "See" that precedes the stark juxtaposition of present – "Now" – and past – "Then" – subordinates time to the experience of the human subject, in an invitation to characters, readers, and perhaps the author herself, to perceive the interconnection between what is and what was. According to Dillon, the palimpsestuous relationship established between past, present and future on the surface of the palimpsest leads to the spectralization of temporality: "The 'present' of the palimpsest is only constituted in and by the 'presence' of texts from the 'past,' as well as remaining open to further inscription by texts of the 'future,'" thus evidencing "the spectrality of any 'present' moment, which always already contains within it 'past,' 'present' and 'future' moments" (37). Mrs. Sweet's ruminations in *See Now Then* neatly reflect how the present, the past and the future haunt each other: "she was thinking of her now, knowing that it would most certainly become a Then even as it was a Now, for the present will be now then and the past is now then and the future will be a now then, and that the past and the present and the future has no permanent present tense, has no certainty in regard to right now" (Kincaid 2013, 13). In this spectral relationship, as the analysis of the different conceptions of time and temporality will show, it is the past that wins the day, eclipsing the now and possibly hamstringing the future.

Paul Ricœur's reflections on narrative temporality can throw some light on the representation of past, present and future in *See Now Then.* He distinguishes between three levels that Heilna du Plooy summarizes as follows: "a) time 'in' which events take place, b) time as 'historicality' seen as the weight of the past, c) time as temporality reflecting the care emanating from reflection on the complexity of time in its simultaneity of past, present and future (ontologically and in representation)" (6). The events in the novel are mainly narrated in the past tense, with brief forays into the present. That the "Now" of the title is overshadowed by its "Then" is proof of the burden of both personal and historical pasts. Moreover, the preoccupation with time and human boundedness in time that make the bulk of Mrs. Sweet's and, to a lesser extent, her husband's and their children's cogitations, epitomize Ricœur's third level, adding a layer of metaphysical reflection. The

presentness of the time of writing thematized whenever Mrs. Sweet is portrayed in the act of holding a pen (Kincaid 2013, 28, 30) contrasts with the backward view that the novel's heavy reliance on memories promotes. As we shall see, the interaction of the various forms of time evoked in the Now of the novel mainly works to reassert the bitter past that leaks through the characters' nostalgic recollection of better times. In *See Now Then*, the mythical clashes with the historical and the human scale of time is set in contrast to the eras of geology. The different conceptions converge in the personal experience of time, depicted both in its everydayness and in the throes of an acrimonious divorce, at the same time that they are disrupted by the time of trauma.

Mrs. Sweet, steeped in the Greek classics, has given her children the names of mythological characters. The goddess Persephone, born of Zeus and Demeter, ruled over the underworld with her husband Hades for part of the year. He had abducted her to the desperation of her mother who, during the time Persephone was away, made plants and crops wither bringing about winter ("Greek Mythology"). It is certainly apt that Mrs. Sweet, a keen gardener, is equated to the goddess of agriculture and harvest. In the novel, however, the father usurps the place of the god of the underworld, as Mrs. Sweet recounts on several occasions how Mr. Sweet would keep "the beautiful Persephone away from her mother" (59) in order to train her as a musician. This might be one of the reasons why Mrs. Sweet – like Kincaid herself – hates winter (Kincaid 2013, 11; 1999, 59). More importantly, the myth helps explain Mr. and Mrs. Sweet's relationship with their daughter. In the same way as the mythical Persephone ends up falling in love with Hades, Persephone Sweet will side with his father when estrangement between her parents comes. The Sweet's son Heracles – like the Greek mythological hero after whom he is named – is described as having a "mighty force" (Kincaid 2013, 95) as well as many tasks to perform. Some tasks are real, like "hitting balls, large and small, into holes of all sizes" to the point of perfection (36), but some are imaginary, echoing those of the strongest of mortals, according to Greek mythology: "slay the monster, cross the river, return again, climb up the mountain, descend on the other side, build a castle on the top of a hill" (36). Heracles remains closer to Mrs. Sweet, described as an "adoring mother worshiping her young son, a hero to her already" (62). She laments having "failed to keep him from knowing the bitterness of a weak and jealous father […] who knew not at all how to love a son" (168). The names of the children – always accompanied by typically Homeric epithets – evoke mythological time. The traces of the mythical bespeak a time not yet ruled by chronology and akin to the time of the seasons, with Demeter/Mrs. Sweet bringing winter over the earth every time Persephone leaves to join Hades/Mr. Sweet in the underworld. Its cyclicality is resonant with the repetitiousness of the style and impregnated with the atemporality of archetypes: "The young Heracles would always be so, then, now, and then to come, as would his sister the beautiful Persephone be so, then, now, and then to come" (95).

In the "Now" of the novel, myth meets with history, the cyclical perception of time contrasting with the linearity of historical events. Like Kincaid, Mrs. Sweet comes from a Caribbean island that, she says, is "only a footnote" to larger historical events (Kincaid 2013, 112). She arrived in the US in what her husband disdainfully calls a "banana boat" (9), as part of the Caribbean diaspora. For Kincaid, history, more often than not, equals the process of colonization of the West Indies. "What should history mean to someone who looks like me?" – she wonders in her essay "In History" – "Should it be an idea, should it be an open wound and each breath I take in and expel healing and opening the wound again, over and over, or is it a long moment that begins anew each day since 1492?" (1997, 620). In *See Now Then*, Mrs. Sweet's thoughts and her writing regularly return to the empire and the Atlantic Slave Trade – "a monstrosity, a distortion of human relationships" (Kincaid 2013, 12), "the vast world that began in 1492" (145): "No morning arrived in all its freshness, its newness, bearing no trace of all the billions of mornings that had come before, that Mrs. Sweet didn't think, first thing, of the turbulent waters of the Caribbean Sea and the Atlantic Ocean" (18). Colonialism and slavery, Mrs. Sweet affirms, are events she has to keep writing about to prevent people from forgetting them (129) and to save them from becoming just a footnote to history (112). Mrs. Sweet, in the same way as Jamaica Kincaid, constantly strives to keep these historical events that happened "Then," before she could even read and write (30), alive in her readers' "Now."

As a limit case autobiography, *See Now Then* complicates the relationship between writing of the self and recording history. According to Philippe Artière, "[b]iography is the worst of the historical genres. In itself it is perfectly contrary to the historian's approach since historical time does not coincide with biological time and it is impossible for the trajectory of a single individual to be significant" (qtd. in Burdiel 13; trans. B.A.). Contrary to this opinion, Gilmore states that limit case autobiographies can be considered a form of testimonial writing, since she endows the subject with the capacity to represent traumatic historical events beyond his/her individuality. In "'What Was I?' Literary Witness and the Testimonial Archive," Gilmore analyses Kincaid's *The Autobiography of My Mother* as literary testimony, a form of "public mourning" that expands "the limits of what it means to acknowledge and grieve the losses of history" (2011, 83). Kincaid's as well as Mrs. Sweet's reflections on the nature of history conflate the chronology of the historical encapsulated in the year 1492 with the time of trauma, which challenges linearity, brings about the dissolution of temporal boundaries and fuses past, present and future at the same time that it leaves the subject perpetually at the mercy of the past, caught up in the acting out of the traumatic event and unable to work through and reengage life (LaCapra, 21–22). "The unforgettable," Jenny Edkins states, "testifies to an unspeakable perhaps similar to what we call the traumatic, before or outside any particular social or symbolic order and yet inhabiting it at its core" (127). There is no day, Mrs. Sweet states, that she does not think of

the legacy of imperialism and slavery. In *See Now Then*, it could be stated that the linearity of history is halted by the experience of trauma.

Mrs. Sweet's concerns are belittled when the span of a single human life and the time of history are contemplated in the background of geology. Geological time, embodied in the many eras that Mrs. Sweet reels off in her mind – "Precambrian, Hadean, Proterozoic, Paleozoic, Cambrian, Ordovician, Silurian" (Kincaid 2013, 181) – evokes once more the image of the palimpsest. Notice Mrs. Sweet's description of the stonewall surrounding her house: "the stones are of mica schist formed 400 million years ago in the Lower Devonian Period […] the result of sandy mud sediments that had been resting at the bottom of an ancient sea" (99). Mrs. Sweet is often portrayed at her window, looking out at the mountains, the river and the valley, what "remained of a great geologic upheaval, a Then that she was seeing Now" (2013, 10), "the remains of the violence of the earth's natural evolution" (11). Again, the inseparability of time and space and the bleeding of the past through the present as an effect of trauma are implicit in her thoughts. The future erasure of her current concerns is hinted when she ponders that her present "will be buried deep in [all that remained of a great geologic upheaval]" (10). Mr. Sweet also entertains thoughts in which the geological is associated with permanence and endurance. However, being an urbanite who hates living in the countryside, his musings do not revolve around the natural world but around his love of skyscrapers: "tall buildings made to look as if they were made from granite or something indestructible, something eternal, something that will always be there" (16–17). Likewise, Mrs. Sweet finds strength in gazing at the mountains, the lake, the river, the valley, "all serene in their seeming permanence, all created by forces that answered to no known existence" (18). The vast expanse of geological time and its accompanying feeling of permanence and stability contrast with the ephemeral nature of human timeframes. The earth is "indifferent to a unique individual consciousness" (149), Mrs. Sweet ponders. On some occasions, a planetary perspective complements her interest in the geological, further enhancing the irrelevance of the span of a human life: "the world turned, continuing in its mysterious way, mysterious to any human being trying to understand her place in it" (40).

While the mythical primarily recalls Mrs. Sweet's children Persephone and Heracles, the historical and the geological intertwine in significant ways when she thinks of her husband as a rodent from the Mesozoic (24) or as having the size of a "young Tudor prince" (68). Besides highlighting her husband's small stature, it is revelatory that Mrs. Sweet associates his white US husband with the Tudors, as the first colonization efforts of America by the British happened under Tudor rule, thus placing Mr. Sweet in the uncomfortable position of the colonizer. These disparaging comments are a reminder of how the different forms in which time comes in the novel are always mediated by personal experience, especially that of Mrs. Sweet, and tainted by the messy divorce that has come to disrupt the ordinariness of family life. It is this subjective, more intimate, conception of time that dominates

the "Now," the surface layer of the novel. I will draw on Heidegger's distinction between the ontological everyday within-time-ness of subjects and their "thrownness among things" – that is to say, the need to contend with the unexpected, "the unsympathetic, cold and hard aspects of real life" (du Plooy 6) – in order to lend clarity to the analysis of the personal experience of time in the novel. Mr. Sweet's decision to leave his wife for a younger woman constitutes a complete breakdown of continuity in the lives of the characters. It is undoubtedly a proof of the subject's thrownness into the world, a "threshold event," in Heilna du Plooy's phrase. Since "people and circumstances develop and change in ways which are sometimes very traumatic" (22), time as experienced by humans is inevitably exposed to dramatic breaches in the linearity of experience (21).

According to Mrs. Sweet, it is on the personal plane, in contrast to the historical, that joy and happiness are to be found along with disaster and catastrophe: "See Now Then, See Then Now, just to see anything at all, especially the present, was to always be inside the great world of disaster, catastrophe, and also joy and happiness, but these two latter are not accounted for in history, they were and are relegated to personal memory" (65). Every now and then, Mrs. Sweet's memory turns to the time before estrangement and divorce materialized, when Mr. Sweet loved her and her love for Mr. Sweet "was taken for granted, like the mountains Green and Anthony" (12). Mrs. Sweet's anger at being abandoned blends with her nostalgia for the everyday within-time-ness of the couple: "he used to enjoy her company" (87); "his beloved Mrs. Sweet – formerly so at any rate, for he must have loved her when they lived all alone and together at 284 Hudson Street" (79). De Quincey's resonant metaphor of the "palimpsest of the mind" – a fantasy of resurrection that allows him to preserve the memory of his dead sister (Dillon 2007, 36–37) – can explain the way Mrs. Sweet treasures the joys of her marriage by turning to these more amiable times in her mind. The novel, nonetheless, is taken up by the difficulties of parenting, the arguments, the resentment, the misunderstandings, and the mutual accusations leading to the divorce. The placid ordinariness of everyday existence is shattered by this traumatic reminder of the subject's thrownness into the world. Mrs. Sweet's "Now" is irredeemably contaminated by a past where disaster and catastrophe have outweighed happiness and joy: "There is always a Then to see Now" (Kincaid 2013, 71); Mrs. Sweet experienced "a moment of Then, Now" (72). The convolutedness of time as well as the certainty of things past bleeding through and overwhelming things present becomes evident when Mrs. Sweet states that "[e]very morning is the next morning of the night before" (68).

After a painful process of coming of age, Lucy – an early protagonist of Kincaid's open-ended self-representational project – purposefully writes her full name and the first sentence on the blank pages of her notebook. She is alone at home and the rigors of the long winter have given way to the warmer air of spring (Kincaid 1991, 161). Lucy's tears then "fell on the page and caused all the words

to become one great big blur" (164), metaphorically providing her with the oppor-
tunity to further reinvent herself. The tableau of Mrs. Sweet looking at the future
at the very end of *See Now Then* echoes similar feelings of dissolution and new
possibility. "All that is to come will change the way right now is seen […] what is
to come will make, distort, and even erase right now" (181), Mrs. Sweet thinks as
she looks out the window and hopes to finally put behind this painful phase of her
life. This also happens in spring, the paradigmatic time for renewal and rebirth.
Mrs. Sweet notices that "outside *now* there was spring" and that there "were large
trees, some of them evergreen, some of them deciduous and right *then* in bud"
(182; emphasis mine). The adverbs "now" and "then" in this last sentence of the
novel parallel the title. However, instead of reinstating the traces of the past in the
present moment as it occurs in the bulk of the book, they both allude to the coming
of spring. As Plooy explains, threshold events often mark the point of beginning
of a new time, triggering "the processes of finding and adapting to new identities"
once a boundary is crossed (Plooy 4). The ending of *See Now Then* opens up the
protagonist's life – palimpsest-like – to possible new inscriptions, offering a ten-
uous glimpse of a different future, hopefully to be described by Kincaid in a new
instalment of her limit-case autobiographical scheme.

5. Conclusion

See Now Then is further proof of Kincaid's compulsion to mythologize herself in
her literary production. Neither purely fictional nor transparently autobiograph-
ical, the novel deconstructs the barrier between the conventions of fiction and
life-writing to produce a third hybrid discourse, characteristic of what Gilmore
has labelled "the limit case." By analyzing Kincaid's latest contribution to her
serial autobiography in the light of the metaphor of the palimpsest, this article has
revealed the contrast that exists between the newness of genre, which opens up
different possibilities of representation, and the reassertion of the pre-eminence
of the past when themes are concerned. Following Dillon and Johannessen, the
palimpsest has been regarded both as a vertical succession of layers and as a hori-
zontal plane simultaneously presenting the new alongside the old. A palimpsestic,
archaeological reading has been pursued in order to foreground what the text hides
in its depths, particularly the autobiographical subtext based on the facts of Kin-
caid's divorce. However, the analysis has put the spotlight on the intricate pattern
of discourses emerging to the surface layer. In this palimpsestous approach, *See
Now Then* appears as a convoluted array of different forms of time and temporality
whose study has revealed the weight of the past in the text, be it personal, myth-
ological, geological or historical. It is only at the very end of the novel that the
traces of the past make room for the faint promise of a different future, opening
the text, like a palimpsest, to new inscriptions. The analysis has also foregrounded

strategic connections with earlier instances of Kincaid's limit case autobiography like her recurrent concern with the legacy of colonialism and slavery. In *See Now Then*, however, it is the domestic trauma of the protagonist's divorce that occupies center stage, detracting from the representativeness of the Kincaid character as the inheritor of historical traumas in her earlier novels.

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BÁRBARA ARIZTI is Senior lecturer in English Literature at the Department of English and German Philology of the University of Zaragoza and part of the research team "Contemporary Narrative in English," funded by the Aragonese Government. She is also a member of the University Research Institute for Employment, Digital Society and Sustainability (IEDIS-University of Zaragoza), founded in May 2021. Arizti has specialized in contemporary Australian literature, the relationship between ethics and the novel, Trauma Studies, Memory Studies and Transmodernity. She is the author of several publications on writers such as Tim Winton, Inez Baranay, Charlotte Wood, Richard Flanagan, Janette Turner Hospital, Carmel Bird, Jean Rhys, Jamaica Kincaid, Daniel Berrigan, Ian McEwan and David Lodge. Arizti authored the monograph *'Textuality as Striptease': The Discourses of Intimacy in David Lodge's* Changing Places *and* Small World in 2002 (Peter Lang). In 2007 she edited the collective volume *On the Turn: The Ethics of Fiction in Contemporary Narrative in English* (Cambridge Scholars Publishing) together with Silvia Martínez-Falquina. In 2021, with her colleagues Silvia Pellicer-Ortín and Silvia *Martínez-Falquina*, she published the special issue *Beneath the Waves: Feminisms in the Transmodern Era for The European Legacy: Toward New Paradigms (*Taylor and Francis, vol. 26. 3–4).

Andrea Sofía Regueira Martín
https://*orcid*.org/0000-0002-0635-1085
University of Zaragoza

From the Teen Film to the Emerging Adult Film: The Road to Adulthood in *Say Anything* (1989) and *High Fidelity* (2000)

Abstract: In the past decades, the transition to adulthood in post-industrial countries has become longer, giving rise to emerging adulthood, a new life stage between adolescence and adulthood (Arnett and Taber 1994, Arnett 2000, 2004). Cinema has reflected this change, with a growing number of narratives exploring the challenges of this life stage. Through a comparative analysis of *Say Anything* (Cameron Crowe, 1989) and *High Fidelity* (Stephen Frears, 2000), this article seeks to establish the emerging adult film as a youth film subgenre of its own by outlining some of the generic conventions that make it different from teenage films.

Keywords: film studies, film genre, teen film, adolescence, youth, emerging adulthood, emerging adult film

1. Introduction

The past three decades have witnessed a growing concern with the rate at which young people complete their transition to adulthood. In 1990, Richard Linklater's first feature film *Slacker* popularized the term "slacker" to refer to overeducated, underemployed youths. According to the filmmaker, the term was a nickname used in Austin for those young people who lived a "quasi-collegiate existence" despite not being students (Holden 84). A few months after the film's release, the British newspaper *The Observer* defined "slacker" as "US slang for twentysomethings" (Reynolds 58), which indicates that this view of young people as underachievers had come to be applied to an entire cohort: Generation X. In the following two decades, the focus shifted to millennials who, like their older siblings, were deemed lazy, entitled, selfish and dumb (Strauss and Howe, 319; Stein; Petersen xviii).

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Both Generation X and millennials have been called a "lost generation" (Barringer; Lowrey) but what their strikingly similar media treatment suggests is that what has actually been lost in the past decades is a straightforward route towards adulthood.

At the same time, a certain type of character became ubiquitous in popular culture: young(ish) people, usually overeducated and underemployed, who seem in no rush to grow up. Instead of taking the straightforward route to adulthood, these characters tend to drift from job to job and from relationship to relationship as they attempt to figure out who they want to become. These twentysomething – and, sometimes, thirtysomething – characters find themselves at the latter end of the coming-of-age process. They are what psychologist Jeffrey Arnett calls emerging adults: individuals who are no longer teenagers but have not completed their transition to adulthood, having attained some markers of adulthood but not others (2000, 2004). This article argues that the emergence of a new life stage between adolescence and adulthood has stretched out the boundaries of the coming-of-age film, giving rise to a new trend within the genre that is concerned with the final stages of the transition to adulthood. I seek out to explore the features that differentiate emerging adult films from those films depicting the preceding stage of the coming-of-age process – teenage films – through a comparative analysis of *Say Anything* (dir. Cameron Crowe, 1989) and *High Fidelity* (dir. Stephen Frears, 2000), two romantic comedies starring John Cusack that are concerned with different aspects of the transition to adulthood.

While *Say Anything* is a teenage film that begins with high school graduation and thus depicts the protagonist's first steps into emerging adulthood, *High Fidelity* features a protagonist who has overstayed his welcome in emerging adulthood, remaining stuck in this liminal stage between adolescence and adult commitment despite being in his mid-thirties. A concern with romantic love and commitment, together with John Cusack's star persona as a romantic anti-hero, brings the two films closer together, emphasizing their different outlooks and making a comparative analysis a useful tool from which to begin exploring the differences between teenage films and emerging adult films. At the same time, the wide age gap between the two protagonists – the protagonist in *High Fidelity* is twice the age as the protagonist in *Say Anything* – underscores the differences between their life stages and, consequently, between teen films and emerging adult films.

2. The Rise of a Filmic Genre

Jeffrey Arnett pinpoints the 1990s as the time when going through emerging adulthood became more the norm than the exception in post-industrial societies, which coincides both with a growing media concern with slackers and with the rise of representations of emerging adulthood in popular culture. He argues that the characteristics ascribed to Generation X are not generational but, rather, features

of emerging adulthood, which he defines as characterized by self-focus, identity exploration, instability, in-betweenness and a feeling of possibility (2000; 2004, 4–8). Even though some filmic representations of emerging adulthood, like *The Graduate* (dir. Mike Nichols, 1967), *Girlfriends* (dir. Claudia Weill, 1978) and *St Elmo's Fire* (dir. Joel Schumacher, 1985), predate Arnett's definition, it is during the 1990s that the number of films depicting emerging adulthood became numerous enough to talk about the emerging adult film. Films like *Singles* (dir. Cameron Crowe, 1992), *Reality Bites* (dir. Ben Stiller, 1994), *Clerks* (dir. Kevin Smith, 1994), *Kicking and Screaming* (dir. Noah Baumbach, 1995) and *Romy and Michele's High School Reunion* (dir. David Mirkin, 1997) engage with Generation X's winding path to adulthood. As the decades passed, the number of films that put the trials and tribulations of emerging adulthood at the center of their narrative increased substantially, reflecting both the larger size of the millennial generation and a growing concern with the challenges that the transition to adulthood poses in contemporary society, especially after the Great Recession.

The number of emerging adult narratives increased significantly in the 2010s as the majority of millennials entered their third decade and struggled to find their way in the world. Although these films mostly refuse to engage explicitly with the economic context that provided the backdrop for the transition to adulthood of the millennial generation, the rising age of their protagonists and the focus on women's transitions to adulthood suggest that adulthood is more out of reach than ever. While earlier decades placed an emphasis on young men in their early twenties, the 2010s saw a gender-shift and a turn towards older protagonists. For instance, the protagonists in *Frances Ha* (dir. Noah Baumbach, 2012), *Laggies* (dir. Lynn Shelton, 2014) and *Obvious Child* (dir. Gillian Robespierre, 2014) are 28-year-old women, while those in *Lola Versus* (dir. Daryl Wein, 2012), *The Lifeguard* (dir. Liz W Garcia, 2013), *Ass Backwards* (dir. Chris Nelson, 2013), *Life Partners* (dir. Susanna Fogel, 2014), *Social Animals* (dir. Theresa Bennett, 2018) and *Someone Great* (dir. Jennifer Kaytin Robinson, 2019) are about to turn 30. Some films, like *Young Adult* (dir. Jason Reitman, 2011), *Girl Most Likely* (dir. Shari Springer Bergman and Robert Pulcini, 2012) and *Saint Frances* (dir. Alex Thompson, 2019) feature protagonists well into their thirties who remain stuck between adolescence and adulthood. As of 2022, the emerging adult film remains alive and well, with some films like *Promising Young Woman* (dir. Emerald Fennell, 2020) and *The Worst Person in the World* (dir. Joachim Trier, 2021) receiving critical acclaim and recognition in the award circuit.

As Celestino Deleyto argues, film genres belong to a "complex system" that is in constant motion, their boundaries constantly shifting under the influence of "the films themselves and other discourses, both internal and external to the industry" (2008, 9). Following Jacques Derrida's *The Law of Genre*, which speaks about "participation without belonging – a taking part in without being part of" (1980, 206), Deleyto sees films as "meeting points" for genres, further arguing that the

way in which films combine generic conventions is "historically and culturally spe-cific" (12). Keeping this in mind, it can be argued that the socio-historical changes that have given rise to longer transitions to adulthood have had an impact on the workings of the coming-of-age genre, giving rise to a new kind of coming-of-age film that focuses its attention in the last stages of the transition to adulthood. This expansion of the boundaries of the youth film is then representative of a specific point in history during which the transition to adulthood became a particularly fraught process.

Despite the growing visibility of emerging adulthood in film and television, film studies scholars have paid little attention to onscreen representations of this life stage. When filmic depictions of emerging adult life are included in analyses of youth film, they are often analyzed together with teenage films (Martin 1994, 66; [1998] 2012; Hentges 87–101; Tropiano 205–206; Driscoll 2011, 55–56; Colling 2019, 4–5). In these cases, film scholars adopt a broad definition of adolescence or youth that goes beyond the age boundaries of the protagonists' teenage years and stretches out to include characters of college-age and even beyond. Catherine Driscoll justifies this point of view by arguing that teen films place their focus on "the process of becoming a recognizable adult subject" (2014, 304), which unites both teenagers and twentysomethings as non-adults. While it is undeniable that the process of becoming is central to youth identities and that the gradual attainment of adult roles plays a central role in filmic representations of youth, regardless of the protagonists' age, the differences between adolescence and emerging adulthood give way to new themes, characters types, plots and narrative structures. Further-more, the sheer number of emerging adult narratives reflect a growing concern with the latter stages of the coming-of-age process, which I believe warrants their consideration as a separate object of analysis.

3. New Stage, New Challenges, New Attitudes

Writing about the narrative conventions of teenage films, Driscoll mentions the following: "the youthfulness of central characters; content usually centred on young heterosexuality […]; intense age-based peer relationships and conflict either within those relationships or with the older generation; the institutional management of adolescence […] and coming-of-age plots" (2011, 2). Most of these narrative con-ventions appear in emerging adult films too, albeit from a different point of view. Like teen films, emerging adult films are partly defined by the age of their pro-tagonists and by an opposition between their youthful behavior and the mores of adulthood. However, whereas in teenage films youthfulness sets all teenage charac-ters in opposition with the older generations, in emerging adult films the characters that embody adulthood may be the same age as the protagonists and, sometimes, younger. The protagonists' youthfulness is then marked by their attitude, behavior

and values, which contrast with those of their more mature peers. Intra-generational conflict in emerging adult films is therefore structured around the degree of maturity that different characters have attained. While teenage characters often clash with those who belong to different high school cliques, emerging adult characters experience conflict with characters who have made a swifter transition to adulthood. It could be argued that in emerging adult films the teenage scale of popularity is replaced by the scale of adulthood, where those who have completed their transition to adulthood at the top, those who are on their way there in the middle and those who remain unhealthily attached to their youth and refuse to grow up at the bottom.

However, the attitude towards those at the top of the pyramid is different in emerging adult films. In teen films popular kids are often depicted as antagonists, but popularity is a currency that characters belonging to different social groups crave. In contrast, in emerging adult films the protagonists overtly reject a standardized transition to adulthood, which they consider as a giving up one's ideals and identity. The challenge that emerging adult protagonists face, then, is how to take steps towards greater commitment without losing oneself in the process. In emerging adult films the institutions that regulate the lives of teenagers, like educational institutions or the family, lose their narrative weight. Occasionally, they may be replaced by the world of work, where rules inhibit the protagonists' behavior and managers are often depicted as ineffectual and unprincipled, which mirrors the representation of adults as inadequate in teen films until the 2000s (Shary 2014, 36). Finally, the fact that emerging adult films are concerned with the latter stages of the coming-of-age process means that the rites of passage and romantic and sexual firsts that appear throughout teenage films are replaced by different sort of coming-of-age moments in which the emphasis shifts towards the process of settling down. That is, the protagonists' attempts to figure out what kind of adult they want to become and who they would like to share their lives with.

The opening scene of *Say Anything* fulfils all the narrative conventions outlined above. The sound of somebody playing electric guitar and a conversation between Corey (Lili Taylor) and D.C. (Amy Brooks) can be heard over the opening credits and an establishing shot that locates the action in suburban Seattle. Corey is talking about graduation and her feelings (or lack thereof) towards it and criticizing one of her teachers for writing what she considers to be a phony dedication on her yearbook. Even before the spectator is allowed to see the film's characters, they are already being defined in opposition to the adult world, which they perceive as inauthentic. Furthermore, Corey's claim that she has no feelings regarding her graduation emphasizes her reluctance to join the ranks of adulthood while downplaying the importance of graduation as a rite of passage. The characters' youthfulness is also marked by the sound of the electric guitar, which has long been associated with youthful rebelliousness. In teenage films, costume, setting and props provide insight into the characters' status within the high school caste system. Once the spectator is allowed into Corey's room, the music paraphernalia scattered around

the room, along with their outfits, places the teenagers as members of the alternative crowd. The film's protagonist, Lloyd Dobler (John Cusack), remains silent during the conversation until he changes the subject by saying she wants to take Diane Court (Ione Skye) on a date. This first intervention, in which Lloyd gives more importance to a potential date with somebody he barely knows than to a supposedly life-changing event like high school graduation, underscores the heightened nature of teenage emotions. At the same time, his willingness to date outside his clique despite his friends' opinion that "brains stay with brains" marks him as an optimistic individual who believes his feelings are stronger than the restrictions imposed on teenagers by the social hierarchy.

The optimism and tolerance shown by Lloyd are nowhere to be seen in Rob Gordon (John Cusack), the protagonist of *High Fidelity*. While *Say Anything* begins with the protagonist at the brink of a life change exclaiming that he wants to get hurt, *High Fidelity* starts with the protagonist's pain while going through a break-up which was partly motivated by his inability to change. Whereas Lloyd is eager to date someone who is very different from himself, Rob's problems with Laura (Iben Hjejle) partly stem from the fact that she has changed and he has remained the same. Laura and Rob first met at a club night where he was the DJ, and their first ever conversation was about his music taste. Music is part of every aspect of the protagonist's life: he owns a record store, his friends are obsessive music fans, he spends his free time listening to music or seeing live music, he meets prospective partners through music and he communicates through music. Although Laura was initially part of his world, as the years went by, Laura's affiliation with the music scene faded: she toned down her subcultural look, began to dress more conservatively and started a career. That is to say, she grew up and evolved while Rob remained frozen in his twenties.

The link between Rob's relationship with music, which represents his inability to move on, and the end of his relationship is made evident in the film's opening scene. *High Fidelity* begins with detail shots of a vinyl record and a hi-fi system. The camera follows the headphone cables that link the object with the listener, thus providing a physical connection between the protagonist and music that mirrors his emotional attachment to it. Once Rob has been established as a die-hard music fan with a special relationship to music, a close-up shows him looking straight into the camera, breaking the fourth wall as he wonders "what came first? The music or the misery?" out loud. It is only then that the spectator is made aware that there is another character in the room. Laura, who is getting ready to go, disconnects Rob's headphones, which hints towards the fact that his love of music has had something to do with their break-up and can be read as her pulling the plug on their relationship. As she does this, the song that had been playing stops, which makes the spectator realize that the music playing through the scene was in fact playing diegetically and coming from the protagonist's headphones. The use of music, together with the protagonist's narration and breaking of the fourth wall, gives the

scene a confessional tone, encouraging identification with the protagonist from the very first moment. Rob is letting us in, sharing both his innermost feelings and the song that he believes describes them best. Once Laura leaves, Rob continues to address the spectator and begins to tell the story of his top-5 break-ups, which are shown through flashbacks that visually connect the protagonist with his adolescent and twentysomething self, all while underscoring how little he has evolved.

4. From First to Last: Depictions of Romantic Love

Emerging adult films and teenage films differ in their representation of romantic love. Teenage films focus on firsts, on the protagonist's first love, first kiss and the loss of virginity, while emerging adult films, especially those that deal with the latter stages of the transition to adulthood, are concerned with the protagonists lasts, with the process wherein emerging adults figure out whether they want to settle down and what kind of person they want to settle down with. Like *High Fidelity*'s Rob, emerging adult protagonists have a romantic and sexual history, which gives them a different outlook on love and relationships. Emerging adult films tend to underscore the difficulty to settle down in a world that is in constant change, the temporariness and lack of rules that characterize contemporary relationships and the commodification of sexuality and relationships (Bauman 2001, 2003; Illouz 2019). As in *High Fidelity*, there is often an emphasis on what Eva Illouz calls "unloving" and defines as "the unmaking of bonds" (3), which includes avoiding relationships, breaking relationships and hopping from one relationship to the next. Consequently, each type of film displays views of love that are at odds with each other. As Timothy Shary explains, teen film protagonists rarely hold any doubts regarding their love: they do not question whether they are ready to be in a relationship or whether their romantic partner is right for them. Instead, the obstacles standing between the couple are always external, such as their different status within the high school hierarchy (which is often linked to different social class) or familial opposition to the union (2002, 214–215). In contrast, emerging adult characters display a more pessimistic attitude: they constantly scrutinize their feelings, pondering whether their partner is right for them, worrying that somebody better might come along and even questioning their ability to love and to be loved.

These opposing views of love can be seen in both of the films analyzed. In *Say Anything* the obstacle between Lloyd and Diane is her father, who expects his daughter to date somebody more successful than Lloyd, who lacks aspirations and plans for the future. In contrast, in *High Fidelity* what is standing between Rob and Laura is Rob himself, his selfishness and his fear of commitment. Lloyd's optimistic, carefree attitude and his unwavering adoration for Diane contrast with Rob's disillusioned cynicism and his lack of consideration towards his long-term partner. The contrast is not only expressed in narrative terms, but also visually. In

Say Anything, romantic moments are punctuated with music and shot in a way that underscores their emotional significance for the protagonist. After the couple's first on-screen kiss, a montage shows them kissing in two different locations, both of which highlight the moment's romanticism. First, Lloyd and Diane are shot from a long distance, standing in the middle of a garden framed by luscious vegetation. The garden, like their love, is blossoming, and a song can be heard in place of their dialogue, allowing the spectator to imagine what was said and to project our own expectations of romance onto the couple. Next, they are shot from a medium distance, which, together with their more passionate kiss, suggests that their emotional connection is getting stronger. The fact that they are standing in the middle of the rain, soaking wet, indicates that their need to be together has grown to be more important than other needs, such as seeking shelter. Additionally, the rain gives the scene a soft-focus that adds to its romanticism. Finally, they are shown in Lloyd's car, which is parked next to the ocean as the couple take their relationship one step further and lose their virginity together. In this scene, the emphasis is not placed on the physical act of intercourse, but, rather, in the emotional connection between the two. Two-shot close-ups keep the couple together in the frame at all times while Peter Gabriel's "In Your Eyes" plays in the background and Lloyd says that he must be shaking because he is happy. The same song plays later on when Lloyd attempts to win back Diane's affections by standing outside her window with a boombox in a scene that has become a symbol of romantic longing and remains an integral part of John Cusack's star persona as a romantic anti-hero over thirty years after the film's release.

In *Say Anything*, grand romantic gestures work. Diane notices Lloyd's gentle acts of care and kindness, such as driving for hours until he finds the home of a drunk classmate who cannot remember his address or making sure that Diane does not step on broken glass, and whenever Lloyd's actions fail to yield the expected results, his perseverance and romanticism eventually pay off. In contrast, *High Fidelity* rejects a romanticized view of love, an approach which is common across emerging adult films. Emerging adult intimacy is shown through companionship rather than through idealized romantic moments like the ones described in the previous paragraph. Rob and Laura are never shown kissing under a soft light while a romantic ballad plays. Instead, they are shown sharing activities such as reading in bed, picking up records at a market or enjoying a musical performance. In emerging adult love, the focus is on the mundane, on the everyday experiences that bring a couple together. It could be argued that *High Fidelity* actively undermines idealized portrayals of romantic love through a romanticized depiction of non-romantic moments and a non-romanticized depiction of moments that should be romantic. This refusal to comply with the conventions of romantic love happens both narratively and aesthetically. At a narrative level, the flashbacks into Rob's most memorable break-ups reveal that moments that he had believed to be romantically significant were not so, which reflects the lack of rules that characterize

contemporary relationships (Illouz). For instance, when he calls his first girlfriend, he is shocked to find out that she married her first boyfriend. In this case, a lack of consensus over what a romantic act such as kissing meant, led Rob to make false assumptions about the nature of this relationship, which led to a sort of romantic idealization that was completely one-sided: while he took this break-up as one of his romantic failures, the other person involved did not even see it as a break-up.

Visually, *High Fidelity* refuses to depict romantic love in an idealized manner, and it saves the idealized depiction of a romantic moment for an act that is decidedly unromantic. One of the flashbacks to the protagonist's break-ups shows him entering what Anthony Giddens calls a "pure relationship," a relationship that is entered for its own sake without a real purpose and that will last for as long as both parties are satisfied enough (58). The protagonist explains that his relationship with Sarah (Lili Taylor) is a transactional one that they both entered simply because they did not want to be alone. The marked lack of romanticism of his narration contrasts with the idealized images that accompany it, which show the couple kissing for the first time by Lake Michigan. The scene's setting by the lake, with the waves crashing against the shore and Chicago's skyline in the background, together with the warm glow of twilight, grants the scene a romantic feel that the situation did not really have, undermining idealized depictions of romance. Rob's atypical marriage proposal to Laura stands in marked contrast to the representation of Rob and Sarah's kiss. The magnitude of a potentially life-changing moment is undermined by the rejection of the conventions surrounding marriage proposals: Rob does not go down on one knee or give Laura a ring, the proposal takes place in a bar rather than in a romantic setting, and when asked why he proposed he retorts that he is "sick of thinking about it all the time," which is not exactly a great declaration of love. Moreover, Laura's refusal to marry Rob points towards the obsolescence of the institution of marriage and, by extension, of rites of passage that used to mark an individual's transition into adulthood.

5. Growing Up Without Giving Up

Rob's inability to move on into adulthood stems partly from idealization both of his past relationships and of the music world and those involved in it. It can be argued, then, that the film's rejection of idealized romantic moments serves as a reminder that, in order to grow up, one must learn not to sugarcoat things and see love, work and individuals as multifaceted and complex instead. Rob's investment in the music scene has made him see life in hierarchical terms, with those who share his music taste at the top and everybody else at the bottom. This view, which is characteristic of somebody much younger than himself, is reminiscent of the social stratification of teenage life, where individuals are neatly categorized into cliques that determine their position within the high school caste system. Ironically,

teenage Lloyd Dobler is less concerned with this pigeonholing of identities than thirtysomething Rob Gordon.

The depiction of high school cliques in *Say Anything* is not as relevant to the narrative as it is in other teen films of its time, such as *The Breakfast Club* (dir. John Hughes, 1985), *Pretty in Pink* (dir. Howard Deutch, 1986) or *Heathers* (dir. Michael Lehmann, 1989). Diane is not coded as a nerd despite her intellectual prowess (Shary 2002, 33). She is conventionally attractive and comes from an affluent background, and although intellectual achievements have come at the expense of her social life, she is not deemed an outcast. Similarly, although Lloyd falls within the rebellious type, his rebellion is inconspicuous and does not affect those around him. For instance, he wears punk rock band t-shirts, he is involved in alternative martial arts and he refuses to see his career counsellor or to think about his future. All of these can be considered rebellious acts, but they are directed inwards rather than outwards. When he is with his classmates his behavior is affable and considerate, which defies the stereotypical depiction of teenage rebelliousness. The importance of the high school caste system as a regulatory agent in the personal lives of teenagers is made explicit at the beginning of the film. When Lloyd expresses his desire to date Diane, he is told that she does not date boys like him. Later on, when he takes Diane to the graduation party, his classmates express shock that they came together, and when one of them asks him "what" he is, the protagonist replies "I'm Lloyd," emphasizing his refusal to play by the rules of popularity. However, after their first date the high school hierarchy loses its importance, giving way to the real threatening force to their union: familial expectations.

In *High Fidelity*, the protagonist and his two friends and employees, Dick (Todd Louiso) and Barry (Jack Black), have carried on the drive to classify people according to their music taste into their thirties. The record store functions like a safe space where the three music snobs reign supreme, free to criticize and humiliate those whose taste they perceive as more commercial or uncool. In order to move on, Rob must leave this attitude behind and learn to appreciate people as individuals instead of judging them on superficial grounds. The fact that this attitude is preventing the protagonist from moving on is underscored by mise-en-scène and framing when he is at the shop. The first time Rob arrives at the shop, he is framed behind bars, suggesting that his business and, by extension, the music world, has become imprisoning. Additionally, he does not always support Barry's antics and complains that he is driving customers away, which reflects his changing point of view of the shop from an identity-defining site to a place of work. Consequently, the space Rob occupies within the shop physically isolates him from his friends and their immature ways, which highlights his growing disconnect from their immature attitude. Instead of sharing a space with them, Rob is often in his office, a place from which he can observe his friends without partaking in their behavior. The shop's office serves to mark Rob as different from his friends, but it also marks him as different from Laura. When they speak on the phone, editing highlights the

differences between Rob and his ex. Laura's office is tidy and it looks professional, just like her outfit and hair. In contrast, Rob's looks like an extension of his living room, and his oversize knit is far from what could be considered a professional outfit. Additionally, Laura's office is in a high-rise building, whereas Rob's is at street level but with a window that is positioned so high it makes the office look underground, which emphasizes their different positions on the road to adulthood as well as her higher socioeconomic status.

Both *Say Anything* and *High Fidelity* feature conflict with adults. In the former, the absence of Lloyd's parents and the corruption and materialism of Diane's father position adulthood as a time when one is ready to compromise one's values for profit. Lloyd's older sister Constance, played by John Cusack's real-life sister Joan, represents a different view of adulthood that is closer to the one displayed in *High Fidelity*. Lloyd believes adulthood has made his sister boring and jaded, and he laments this loss of fun and lightness, which can be seen when he reminds her that she used to be "warped, twisted and hilarious" and asks her "how hard is it is to decide to be in a good mood and then be in a good mood?" In *High Fidelity*, adulthood is equated with conformity and a loss of individuality, which is embodied by Laura's change of attitude and look when she began to focus on her career. When Rob openly holds this against her he tells him that the reason why she is not happy is because she has changed and he has remained the same, not changing "so much as a pair of socks" since they met years ago. To Rob, Laura's changes are a sign of conformity and surrender to the rules of adulthood. In order to grow up, Rob needs to let go of the superficiality and music snobbery that has characterized his youth. In fact, it is through music that his growth is signaled at the end of the film. Rob uses mixtapes to express himself and to communicate his feelings towards someone, using other people's words to speak for himself in a way reminiscent of adolescent inarticulateness and emotional immaturity. Through the making of a compilation take, which Rob considers an art, the protagonist expresses his feelings while increasing his subcultural capital, making sure the object of his affection knows that he knows a wide variety of music and adopting the role of tastemaker, which puts him above the tape's recipient. In the last scene, the tide has turned and Rob is making a tape full of songs that he knows Laura will like. Instead of showing off his coolness and authenticity, he wants to make Laura happy. This emotional development is marked by the diegetic use of the song "I Believe (When I Fall in Love)" by Stevie Wonder, an artist that his Barry mercilessly criticized in the store. This action shows a move away from selfishness and superficiality while highlighting the protagonist's readiness to make a lifelong commitment to Laura.

Say Anything ends with Lloyd and Diane on a plane to England, where Diane is going to study, and her father in prison for taking money off the elderly. Lloyd has stayed true to his intention of making dating Diane his main occupation and the couple have overcome the main obstacle standing between them: Diane's father,

his materialism and his lack of morals. The ending, although happy for the couple, is bittersweet for Diane, whose father's endeavors were hugely disappointing to her. When it comes to their relationship, neither the narration nor the characters express any doubts that their moving to England together is the right thing to do. However, the spectator is aware both of the transient nature of teenage love and of the fact that major life changes make people evolve and change in different ways, which lends the ending a doubtful tinge. In *High Fidelity*, the ending is also happy, but not overly celebratory. When Rob proposes to Laura, she declines and tells him that he has not been the most trustworthy person. Even though Rob has shown a willingness to change and the first steps towards emotional maturity, whether he follows through with them remains to be seen. While Lloyd makes a major life change by following Diane to England, Rob's moves towards adulthood are smaller. As is typical in emerging adult films, the focus is not on rites of passage that lead to lifelong commitment but, rather, on small, gradual changes. That is, the film places an emphasis on the process whereby adult roles are negotiated, highlighting the fact that the attainment of contemporary adulthood is not marked by rites of passage but by internal changes that take place gradually and depend largely on the individual (Arnett and Taber 533–534).

Both films present a rejection of adulthood to some extent. In *Say Anything*, adulthood is criminalized in what can be read as a critique of the materialistic values of the 1980s. While *High Fidelity* does not go as far, it portrays conventional transitions into adulthood as the giving up of one's authenticity. Emerging adult films often end with the protagonist's evolution towards some sort of greater maturity, but their evolution never implies a complete surrender of their identity. Instead, emerging adult characters like Rob have to figure out how to move on without losing themselves in the process. Often, as in *High Fidelity*, the protagonist's evolution consists in finding new uses for skills they already possess or in seeing those around them (and, by extension, adulthood) in a new light. Rob uses his musical know-how to launch a small record label and learns to accept the fact that Laura has changed. The obstacle standing between Rob and Laura is not the fact that she has changed but, rather, his emotional immaturity, which involves an unwillingness to settle down lest something better comes along and the idealization and rejection of people based on superficial aspects like their clothes or their music taste. In contrast, in *Say Anything*, as in most teenage films, the obstacle standing between Lloyd and Diane is external, in this case Diane's father. While Lloyd and Diane never doubt whether they are ready to be in a relationship or whether moving to England together is a good idea, Rob constantly doubts himself, questioning his skills as a lover and whether he is "doomed to be rejected." This difference results in opposing depictions of romantic love: while in *Say Anything* the romanticism of key relationship moments is emphasized through the *mise-en-scène*, framing and the use of music, *High Fidelity* undermines the idealization of romantic love and emphasizes companionship as a key element in relationships.

6. Conclusion

As has been shown through the analysis of *Say Anything* and *High Fidelity*, teenage films and emerging adult films share a number of common elements, such as an opposition between youth and adulthood, conflict between the protagonists and their peers, a focus on heterosexual romance and coming-of-age plots. As we have seen, the youthfulness that the two films analyzed display is different in nature: while in *Say Anything* youthfulness is generational and it creates conflict between teenagers and the older generation, in *High Fidelity* youthfulness is represented by an attitude and an outlook on life. In emerging adult films, conflict between the protagonist and adulthood does not necessarily imply conflict with the older generation. Instead, as in *High Fidelity*, the main source of conflict is often a character who is the same age as the protagonist but has crossed the threshold into adulthood. In emerging adult films, then, the scale of adulthood replaces high school cliques, and a characters' status is marked by their clothes, their behavior and the spaces they inhabit. Intra-generational conflict is central to emerging adult films just like it is to teenage films, but the nature of the conflict varies in that it is no longer related to popularity but to maturity. Finally, emerging adult films represent a more cynical view of love, often choosing not to idealize overly romantic moments and emphasizing everyday moments of shared intimacy or activities rather than grand romantic gestures. This shift may come from the fact that emerging adult protagonists, unlike teenage protagonists, are almost always sexually and romantically experienced. As a consequence, emerging adult films focus on serial monogamy and on the process of finding the right person to settle down with, while teenage films underscore the momentousness of the protagonist's first romantic and sexual experiences. The differences between both films therefore reflect the trials and tribulations of the life stage of their protagonists, each one of which possesses unique challenges that lead to different onscreen depictions of youth.

Despite the large age gap between the two protagonists, both *Say Anything* and *High Fidelity* are, at their core, films about becoming an adult. The fact that two films about growing up can have such a wide age difference between the two protagonists is symptomatic of the lengthening of the transition to adulthood in the past decades. The boundaries of youth have elongated at both ends, which in turn has widened the scope of the coming-of-age film. The narrative conflicts, themes and character types that predominate in tween films, aimed at the pre-teen demographic, are different from those that feature in teenage films, which in turn differ from those that abound in emerging adult films. Although the films discussed in this article depict the adolescence and emerging adulthood of a generation that is now firmly in middle age, the conflicts that the protagonists navigate remain relevant. Teenagers today still experience first loves and have complicated relationships with their peers and parents, while emerging adults today still wonder whether their partner is the one and struggle to make a

living doing something they love. If anything, the transition to adulthood today is even more fraught with uncertainty than it was at the turn of the millennium. Economic downturns have hit millennials at key points in their transition to adulthood: the Great Recession had a great impact on the oldest millennials as they were entering the workplace, while the COVID-19 pandemic and the recession may have affected those who were beginning to settle into adulthood. The emerging adult film is about to go through a generational takeover as the core of Gen Z enter their third decade, which they are doing against the backdrop of a health crisis, an economic recession, political polarization and social unrest, all of which will undoubtedly affect their transition to adulthood and its subsequent cinematic representations. Recent emerging adult films, like *The King of Staten Island* (Judd Apatow, 2020) and *Spree* (Eugene Kotlyarenko, 2020), feature protagonists who are yet to leave the parental home, whereas others, like *Buffaloed* (Tanya Wexler, 2019) explicitly address the difficulty of lower-class individuals to access an increasingly elitist higher education system. These characters have had fewer opportunities than *High Fidelity*'s Rob and, as a consequence, their emerging adulthood is much more unstable and less independent than his. While Rob remains immature and refuses to let go of his youth, his immaturity is a choice. In contrast, the protagonist in *Buffaloed* resorts to criminality to fund her college education, while the protagonist in *Spree* drives for a ride share app while he dreams of internet fame. Whether these films indicate a turn towards depictions of more precarious and treacherous roads to adulthood remains to be seen, but what has been made clear by three decades of emerging adulthood is that coming-of-age now refers to a wider range of experiences than ever before, which the coming-of-age film duly reflects.

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ANDREA SOFÍA REGUEIRA MARTÍN is a lecturer at the University of Zaragoza's Department of English and German Philology, where she also completed a PhD in English Studies, a Master's degree in Textual and Cultural Studies and a BA in English Philology. Her PhD thesis (2022), entitled *Growing Up Is Hard to Do: The Emerging Adult Film*, analyzes filmic depictions of delayed transitions to adulthood. Her research interests include onscreen representations of youth identities and the challenges of the transition to contemporary adulthood. She is a member of the research project "Between Utopia and Armageddon: The Spaces of the Cosmopolitan in Contemporary Cinema."

Eva Pelayo Sañudo
 https://*orcid*.org/0000-0003-2786-5437
University of Cantabria

American Migrant Fictions. Sonia Weiner.
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Sonia Weiner's *American Migrant Fictions* (2018) concentrates on a lesser-known yet varied corpus of migrant writers in the US pertaining to the late 20th and early 21st centuries, a wave which was fewer in numbers than the previous "great migration" and also substantially different regarding national origins: rather than immigration arrived from Europe during the late 19th and early 20th centuries, Weiner approaches more recent waves predominantly from Latin American, Asia and a slight European portion from the former Soviet Union. Specifically, the author focuses on post-1965 migrants as an effective turning point when the Hart-Cellar Immigration Act opened the door to immigration after the Johnson-Reed Immigration Act had banned it since 1924. Weiner also argues that another significant change perceived in the artists examined is the transition from cultural anxiety to the celebration of diversity. While earlier migrants were concerned with assimilation, discrimination and the uncomfortable state of in-betweenness, later representatives of the so-called "Literature of the Arrival" emphasize difference and multiplicity, "benefit from an excess of roots and propose new visions of American selfhood" (6–7). The book is an enlightening study of core notions relevant to the fields of migration and diaspora studies about the ever-going construction of identity and the growing relevance of space as a tool of social and cultural analysis (Brady 2006). These concepts are particularly refreshed by shifting attention to the question of narrative form, with the tentative claim that this is intimately related to the identity issues reflected in the works.

Weiner's study presents a familiar structure that makes it easy for readers to follow as the book is neatly divided into separate sections each corresponding to one of the five authors discussed: Bosnian Aleksandar Hemon, Vietnamese GB Tran, Dominican Junot Díaz, Russian Boris Fishman, and IndianVikram Chandra. In the "Introduction: The Spatial Aesthetics of Transnationalism and Translingualism," Weiner presents a coherent corpus in an otherwise disparate array of writers by presenting her theoretical and methodological approach (transnationalism, space,

identity) based on works which share a strong transnational dimension and a heightened spatial sensitivity mostly resulting from an increasingly globalized world. Yet the study lacks a more detailed discussion regarding the selection of the primary works in terms of women's representation given that all of the authors are male and gender is also generally missing as an analytical category. For a study interested in the plurality of spaces and perspectives, feminist theory, no doubt, would have proved invaluable supporting material. Specifically, immigrant and ethnic women writers have usually been at the forefront of contesting dominant power structures and paradigms of representation, as well as (re)imagining alternatives for cultural transformation including altering conventional narrative forms towards more suitable expressions of identity (Karafali 1998).

The first chapter, "Double Visions and Aesthetics of the Migratory: Aleksandar Hemon's *Lazarus Project*," deals with the effect of concrete visual expressive means such as photographs to reflect migrant identity. They are commonly privileged "as tangible configurations of space they endorse an ontological status that differs from that of words" (34). For this reason, this is an apt choice in which aesthetics informs content through a "dual-verbal and visual storyline" that is "indicative of a consciousness that embodies multiple perspectives, typical to the migrant" (39). By combining text and image, Weiner demonstrates the afore-mentioned emphasis on excess and difference (or here "doubleness") to successfully capture immigrant experience such as the fracture of time and space, the link between the past and the present, the fact that migratory phenomena often entail the persistence of "'other' spatial and temporal dimensions" (40). Accordingly, Weiner also discusses the essential usefulness of photographs to the deconstruction of history and (re)construction of identity inasmuch as these are primarily understood as "elaborately woven fictions" (43) and thus challenge the authority traditionally exerted by conceptions of photographic referentiality and truth through their overpowering role as faithful "documents" (Sontag [1977] 2001: 6). The second chapter, "Cohesive Fragments: GB Tran's Graphic Memoir *Vietnamerica*: A Family's Journey," similarly addresses the function of images to reflect a double consciousness which is aimed at integration after the experiences of war, dislocation and migration. This visual narrative is here crafted using the comic, a genre that "eschew[s] linearity and two-dimensionality by employing techniques that have the effect of conflating, bridging, expanding, condensing and intensifying space and time" (35). Importantly, Weiner is again acute in signaling not only the ontological but also the creative power allowed by images, emphasizing constructedness and questioning traditional limited claims of objectivity and accuracy. In this way, rather than simply being tools of unequivocal referentiality, images can also work to activate equally valuable processes such as memory or storytelling.

The third chapter, "Shape Shifting and the Shifting of Shapes: Migration and Transformation in Junot Díaz's *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*," discusses the infinite possibilities in the experimentation with form, varying from the

continuous shift of narrative genres – comic, sci-fiction and fantasy– to the alteration of conventional techniques – de-centering narrator omniscience in favor of marginal voices or including "'underground' storytelling modes, such as hearsay, footnotes and silences" (117). The aim of this intense formal experimentation, labelled as "intertextuality to an extreme," is again to reflect issues grounded on the experience of migration, the author's "transnational and transatlantic make-up" (123–124). In particular the writer's explicit concern lies in preventing his work "from being authoritarian," which is explained as being due to the traditional equation between authorship and authority as well as his own familiarity with dictatorship (117). Regarding literary theory, certain narratives are imbued with notions of truth and completeness that do not necessarily correspond with the plurality of perspectives and accounts intrinsic to most events and people. Particularly, the migrant condition shows that no story can be finite as, for example, Dominican historical accounts are full of erasures, silences and competing versions. In this vein, since identity is also a kind of narration, formal strategies are appropriately heightened in that they are "not merely playful aesthetic tools" but a declared means "to combat the claustrophobic notion of One Story" (121).

The fourth chapter, "Weathering the Divide between There and Here: In-between Spaces in Boris Fishman's *A Replacement Life*," focuses on the intense spatial awareness of the migrant subject which provokes the perception of boundaries in all type of everyday locales and encounters, thus undermining the traditional clear-cut distinction between the spaces and times allotted to the act of migration: the past and the old country (Russia) versus the present and the host country (US). As a consequence, this chapter develops a similar questioning of dominant means of expression or cultural understandings, in this case the map as an instrument that "creates and maintains boundaries," "a system that communicates a social order, which is then experienced and reproduced by those who use it" (151). Contesting maps' traditional associations with authority (e.g. for the creation of states), accuracy and objectivity means destabilizing the "spatial hierarchies" which guarantee social inequalities (152). Precisely, although the border's materiality exerts a strong power, it is essentially a construction that can also be transgressed and reconfigured due to the very "porousness of boundaries" (153). In other words, the characters analyzed are again resisting marginality and seen as capable actors who shape their multiple worlds through both a visual aesthetics and ethics.

The final chapter, "Translation and Transcreation in Vikram Chandra's *Red Earth* and *Pouring Rain*," returns again to storytelling to explore different temporalities and the representation of spatiality. Using the form of an epic through embedded stories that constitute the visual image of a labyrinth and by borrowing themes or techniques from filmic spectacle, Weiner sustains that these aesthetic strategies of genre crossings and the interweaving of traditions serve the purposes of mediation and translation inherent to the migrant condition. Stories rather than linear history are thus located within a cultural tradition based on exchanges,

mutual influence and re-appropriation, and are therefore reflective of transnational lives. Storytelling is the expressive means that can usefully capture not only the multiplicity of individual identity but also the collective imagination of a given nation due to the possibilities of reinvention (the act of retelling and rewriting) that such narrative form enables.

On the whole, *American Migrant Fictions* points towards the conciliation of different cultural backgrounds. As a consequence, the state of in-betweenness is celebrated as a particularly positive critical and ontological framework that can lead to transformation, as is emphasized by Weiner from the outset by quoting from Salman Rushdie's well-known belief that migrants can bring newness into the world. This is not to imply that resistance and subversion are always embraced or that satisfactory narratives are ever finally reached. Departing from simplistic approaches, Weiner rightfully acknowledges that identity is never finite but a never-ending process and usefully foregrounds that the migrant experience may need further accommodation particularly through the possibilities of manifold expressive means. Although the study would have benefitted from a more comprehensive analysis in terms of a gender balance, it is an engaging and inspiring book that establishes an insightful interpretive framework by delving into the tripartite relation between form, space and identity, opening up new avenues for the analysis of migrant narratives in our increasingly plural and shifting times.

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EVA PELAYO SAÑUDO received her PhD in Gender and Diversity from the University of Oviedo, Spain. Her fields of research are Italian/American literature, gender, diaspora, urban and postcolonial studies. She completed her PhD in July 2017, with a thesis entitled "Genre, Gender and Space: Family Sagas and Streets in the Italian/American Experience," for which she received the 2017 Prize of the Italian American Studies Association 'IASA Memorial Fellowship Distinction of Outstanding PhD Dissertation.' She has conducted research at the John D. Calandra Italian American Institute (Queens College, NY), the University of Calabria (Italy)

and Stony Brook University (NY), and participated in an international research project funded by the Spanish government about gender, ethnic and urban studies: 'MultipliCity. Embodied Encounters and Alternative Knowledges: Inhabiting and Creating the Transnational City.' She has recently published *Spatialities in Italian American Women's Literature: Beyond the Mean Streets* (Routledge; 2021), which has been awarded the Research Prize 'Enrique García Díez' in English Literature by the Spanish National Association of North-American Studies (AEDEAN). She is currently teaching at the University of Cantabria. She is a member of the research group "Transnational Cultural and Literary Studies."