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# SHAKESPEARE AND WITCHCRAFT IN NEIL GAIMAN'S *MARVEL 1602*

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Representing the cultural phenomenon of witchcraft and showcasing liminal existence was of great importance in the literature of 16-17<sup>th</sup>-century England. From political pamphlets to Shakespearean stage plays, the character of the witch and the marginalized have become a central topic of conversation in early modern texts. The primary goal of this research paper is to examine how Neil Gaiman's comic book series, *Marvel 1602* adapts aspects of certain early modern English works to create a graphic narrative that explains liminality and the modern 'witchcraze.'

*Keywords:* William Shakespeare, early modern England, witchcraft, liminality, comic book

“By the pricking of my thumbs,  
Something wicked this way comes.”  
— William Shakespeare, *Macbeth* (4.1.44–45)

”Omnia mutantur, nos et mutamur in illis.  
All things change, and we change with them.”  
— Neil Gaiman, *Marvel 1602* #2 (3:2)

## 1 Introduction

In early modern popular culture, the presence of witches and witchcraft was of great significance in both political and religious affairs, as well as in works of art in England, particularly in literary texts, such as pamphlets, stage plays and prominent ballads. Besides creating a captivating, fictitious tale that is set during the early years of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, Neil Gaiman's and Andy Kubert's eight-part graphic narrative *Marvel 1602* (2003-2004) does not solely introduce the Shakespearean era, with all its English cultural peculiarities, to the modern reader, but it also delves into the phenomenon of witchcraft and the psychology behind living on the threshold. This liminal existence is exemplified by the

Weird Sisters in *Macbeth*, and, in the case of Marvel Comics, the X-Men, who are here referred to as the so-called “witchbreed.” With the introduction of the “witchbreed,” the writer, in collaboration with the artist, provides an in-depth look into the lives of a group of outcasts, who live on the edge of society, falsely stigmatized or branded by the common people. As graphic narratives are both textual and visual at the same time, which will be elaborated upon later in this text, they are perfectly capable of conveying complex messages through a specific mingling of text and image, as well as expressing corresponding human emotions, including states of awe, wonder or horror.

First of all, as the essay focuses on the analysis of liminal characters and the state of being on the threshold, the concept of ‘liminality’ itself needs to be addressed and properly defined. Victor Turner’s *The Forest of Symbols: Aspects of Ndembu Ritual* (1967) describes it as a marginal period or an “interstructural situation,” an in-between state when one individual undergoes a process of transformation, a rite of passage (Turner 1967, 93). The emphasis is on the very transformation that occurs in one’s status, indicating a change from the past self to the future self. By analogy, a liminal character is, as explained below, a figure who is still in a state of constant flux until the rite of passage is finally completed. Bjørn Thomassen, who refers to liminality as a universal concept involving both experience and performance, reiterates that moments of transition are an integral as well as unavoidable part of our lives that not only transform society on a cultural level, but also affect us on an individual level, changing our very existence as human beings (2014, 4). The experience, which is gained by the end of the rite of passage, leaves a distinctive mark that forever alters one’s personality. Gaiman’s words, which are quoted at the beginning of this article from *Marvel 1602*, relate not only to the graphic narrative and its fictional characters, but also echo Thomassen’s theory on liminality. As society conforms to the inevitable changes of time, the individual has to adapt and change too for the sake of self-preservation.

However, what happens to those individuals, who remain trapped in a perpetual state of change, stuck between their old and new selves? Turner argues that members of society do not tolerate or accept by any means the so called “transitional being” or the liminal persona, due to the fact that they cannot be placed under the well-established societal norms. They become indefinable and unclassified (1967, 95). In this manner, the figure of the outcast is born, who, despite not necessarily being evil, is forced to live a life on the peripheries. The outcast is stigmatized and marginalized by the community for being different from what the governing majority categorizes as natural. This unnatural state of in-betweenness, which may or may not be visible for the human eye at first glance, makes the liminal persona simultaneously wonderful, unique, but also terrifying and disruptive from the

point of view of a society that is bound by its norms. The strange complexity of these characters, who exist on the peripheries of life, is a worthy and rich topic of discussion. Therefore, the objective of this paper is to examine liminality within the narrative of the chosen comic book series, to see how liminal situations and the power of storytelling affect the development of liminal characters, and at the same time explore a plethora of allusions to William Shakespeare and his oeuvre.

## 2 The Witch in Early Modern England

Gaiman's "witchbreed" from *Marvel 1602* are fictional, transitional beings, who are modelled after the early modern practitioners of witchcraft. Witches, who are prominently featured in early modern English texts, are outcasts and liminal characters themselves, because they are caught in a perpetual state of transformation. Stigmatized and hunted by the common folk for their unusual practices as well as their occasionally unusual physical traits, individuals who were branded as witches inevitably created mass hysteria due to their 'otherness.' They were sent to trial, where they were ultimately found guilty and sentenced to death by hanging or, as it happened more commonly on the continent, to death by fire. As stated by Natália Pikli, although there are no precise records at our disposal, out of approximately one-hundred thousand European witch trials, which occurred between 1450 and 1750, an estimated number of forty thousand defendants were actually sentenced to death, with a staggeringly high percentage of those accused witches being women (2018, 21). There is a vast amount of literary texts from the early modern period that provide examples for such cases, enabling a detailed insight into the method of investigation, as to how and why the accused were prosecuted by the superstitious and witch-hating communities of early modern Europe, specifically that of England and Scotland.

One such popular example is a witchcraft pamphlet from the end of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, *Newes from Scotland* (1591), detailing the case of Doctor Fian and his alleged coven of witches, as they confessed their unholy crimes to a court, which also included King James VI of Scotland. The text, which was printed before the release of James's *Daemonologie* (1597), a book on contemporary necromancy written and published by the Scottish king himself, offers insight into the infamous North Berwick witch trials (1590), where, among others, the likes of John Fian and Agnes Sampson were accused of practicing the dark arts. The aforementioned individuals were suspected of—besides having committed other malevolent crimes—conjuring a storm that threatened the very life of the Scottish king and his wife:

Againe it is confessed, that the said christened Cat was the cause that the Kinges Maiesties Ship at his comming foorth of Denmarke, had a contrary winde to the rest of his Ships, then being in his companye, which thing was most strange and true, as the Kings Maiestie acknowledgeth, for when the rest of the Shippes had a faire and good winde, then was the winde contrarye and altogether against his Maiestie [...]. (Carmichael 1816, 16)

According to Normand and Roberts, the aforementioned trials were a product of a large-scale conspiracy in which a number of seemingly interrelated cases were connected on the basis of witchcraft to form a complex narrative event. They argue that the witch hunt itself began with banal accusations made by suspicious and frightened neighbours, ultimately culminating in a series of stories about the stigmatized individuals that warranted the attention of the state and the church (2000, 3). The most striking aspect of these reports appears to lie in their level of attention towards the details regarding the sinful act as well as the suspect. The vivid and detailed descriptions have the power to convince even the most sceptical minds about the truthfulness of the testimony, no matter how absurd they may seem at first glance. As Normand and Roberts also discuss, witch trial cases of early modern England and Scotland can be regarded as fabricated narratives, especially when considering that the accused were forced, through various forms of physical torture, to confess to every false allegation, regardless of whether the suspected crimes were actually committed or not (2000, 3). This undoubtedly proves the power of storytelling. Regardless of their truth value, stories have the ability to completely rewrite one's identity.

*The Witch of Edmonton* (1621), a drama written by William Rowley, Thomas Dekker and John Ford, exemplifies such a change of public perception and the transformation of identity through its narrative. The Jacobean play, which drew inspiration from Henry Goodcole's text, *The Wonderful Discoverie Of Elizabeth Sawyer, A Witch, Late Of Edmonton* (1621) and capitalizes on the misfortunes of the eponymous witch, tells the tale of Elizabeth Sawyer, who, after being accused of practicing the dark arts, becomes the most hated and feared person within the parish of Edmonton. The metamorphosis occurs when the false word of mouth of the neighbours spreads and through these fabricated stories she is unwillingly stigmatized and forced to become an outcast, living on the fringes of society. The pamphlet of Henry Goodcole, which immediately begins with the author's apology towards the Christian readers of the text for what they are about to discover, describes the witch's grotesque bodily appearance with meticulous detail:

1. Her face was most pale and ghost-like without any blood at all, and her countenance was still dejected to the ground.
2. Her body was crooked and deformed, even bending together, which so happened but a little before her apprehension.



3. That tongue which by cursing, swearing, blaspheming and imprecating, as afterwards she confessed, was the occasioning cause of the Devil's access unto her, even at that time, and to claim her thereby as his own by it discovered her lying, swearing and blaspheming. (Goodcole 1999, 137)

The distinctive physical features of the apprehended criminal, as illustrated by the detailed description of the pamphleteer, emphasize the character's malevolence and the allegiance to her unholy master, the Devil himself. While the heavily distorted and monstrous body signals the witch's 'otherness,' the woman's cursing and blasphemous tongue further strengthens her wickedness, and they provide additional and irrefutable proof for the Christian reader that she is not solely a simple sinner, but, more importantly, also a devilish practitioner of witchcraft.

Unlike Goodcole's text, the drama showcases the unfairly treated Mother Sawyer in a more sympathetic manner. Her contract with the devil and her subsequent actions against the accusers are presented as a rightful response towards cruelty. Despite chronicling the tale of the same character, the pamphlet retains its 'objective' stance regarding the subject. In light of all the evidence, which was collected during the investigation, Goodcole's accounts unambiguously announce her as a wicked and sinful woman, who has sold her soul to the devil for no apparent reason, but to cause destruction and harm in the community of Edmonton. The report determines two heinous acts of crime as the final decisive reason for the alleged witch's arrest. First of all, she reportedly threatened to curse her neighbours' children as well as their cattle to death, because they refused to purchase her brooms. Secondly, in another act of revenge, Elizabeth Sawyer also supposedly bewitched Agnes Ratcliffe, who, on the evening of her verbal argument with the elderly woman, fell extremely ill and passed away in excruciating pain within a matter of four days. Ratcliffe, whose death-bed confession was recorded by her husband and presented before the court, named Sawyer as the primary cause for her suffering and apparent death (Goodcole 1999, 138). The pamphlet continues to gather evidence to prove the guilt of the alleged criminal by declaring that the unnatural transformation of the elderly figure, which resulted in the growth of a third breast (the devil's pap), which supposedly functioned to nourish the familiar spirit, is a dreadful sign of practicing witchcraft. Despite the prisoner's objection to comply with the investigating authorities, the three female witnesses, who were randomly selected for this inspection by the appointed officers of the Bench, each confirmed the existence of this strange deformity on the body of the accused witch:

And they all three said that they a little above the fundament of Elizabeth Sawyer, the prisoner there indicted before the Bench for a witch, found a thing like a teat, the bigness of the little finger and the length of half a finger which was branched at the top like a teat and seemed as though one had sucked it, and that the bottom thereof was blue and the top of it was red. (Goodcole 1999, 140)

The aforementioned mark or malformation itself signified the connection, the unholy alliance that existed between the subject and the malevolent supernatural forces that were at her command ever since the deal was sealed with a kiss on the devil's buttocks. As Goodcole notes, in the eyes of the Court the discovery of this slight deformation or growth on her aging body, which could have been a wart or a lump, and the prison confession were enough evidence to prove the guilt of the alleged witch (1999, 149).

Contrary to the pamphlet, the Jacobean stage play's goal is to provide more context to the tragic events that unfolded in the community of Edmonton. Rowley, Dekker and Ford's drama explains Mother Sawyer's reasons for aligning herself with the Devil, whose assistance allows her to punish all those who have falsely accused her and marginalized her. Although her actions, which lead to her eventual arrest and execution, remain despicable, the reason for committing those acts of revenge becomes more justified. As exemplified by the play, she is marginalized and cast out, due to her physical appearance, by the parish of Edmonton before she even attempts to practise any kind of witchcraft:

MOTHER SAWYER: And why on me? why should the envious world  
 Throw all their scandalous malice upon me?  
 'Cause I am poor, deformed, and ignorant,  
 And like a bow buckled and bent together  
 By some more strong in mischiefs than myself,  
 Must I for that be made a common sink  
 For all the filth and rubbish of men's tongues  
 To fall and run into? Some call me witch,  
 And being ignorant of myself, they go  
 About to teach me how to be one; urging  
 That my bad tongue – by their bad usage made so –  
 Forspeaks their cattle, doth bewitch their corn,  
 Themselves, their servants, and their babes at nurse.  
 This they enforce upon me, and in part  
 Make me to credit it; and here comes one  
 Of my chief adversaries. (Thomas, Ford and Rowley 2006, 2.1, 1–16)

The title character of the drama questions whether she should be judged and ridiculed by the members of the parish just because she lives under poor conditions and has a crooked and decaying body, due to her old age. The role of a witch is enforced upon the aging woman, rather than voluntarily assumed by her. Since they have already branded her as a servant of the Devil, instead of trying to prove her innocence, the alleged criminal starts to give credit to the accusers' charges, to ultimately confirm their suspicions regarding her true nature. Sawyer's monologue, which is quoted above, clearly suggests that the witch is not a self-created figure,

but rather a product of society's hatred and its fear of the unknown, the 'other.' Thus, they create a scapegoat, an individual, who, according to them, is responsible for all of their misfortunes, including the failed harvest, the death of their cattle and the passing of their loved ones. Despite their vastly different approaches regarding the character's agenda, which is reflected in the sympathy or lack thereof of the authors demonstrated towards Elizabeth Sawyer, both the pamphlet text and the Jacobean play operate with the exact same stereotypical representation of the witch, who is characterized as a poor, old, grotesquely disfigured and (in most cases) female figure. Signs of natural aging and social status are misinterpreted and placed into a different context by these early modern texts. Ultimately, it is the narrative, which is crafted by the accusers, that transforms the accused woman into the character of the witch.

William Shakespeare's *Macbeth* (cc. 1605) also follows the aforementioned traditional depiction of witches with the introduction of the Weird Sisters as they meet the eponymous tragic character at the beginning of the drama. Their arrival in Act 1, Scene 3 of the Shakespearean play is marked by the sound of thunder, lightning and rain, as they approach the battlefield where Macbeth, the thane of Glamis, and Banquo stand. Before delivering their prophecy, the witches give a detailed list of their previous wicked punishments or "*maleficia*" that they have delivered to various members of society, who have wronged them in some form. Banquo, while questioning the true sex of the three women, who have beards and thin lips, promptly classifies the sisters as otherworldly creatures. The witches, whose prophecy sends Macbeth on his destructive journey to insanity, qualify as perfect examples of liminal characters. Their physical appearance, which emphasizes that they are not inhabitants of the mortal world, strongly suggests that these mysterious clairvoyants are stuck in an in-between state of being both alive and dead. In addition to this, they also appear to be trapped between two sexes. They are neither women nor men, despite possessing attributes of both. Moreover, as both Banquo and Macbeth clearly indicate after the sudden vanishing of the supernatural forces, the Weird Sisters are not solely in control of the weather, but they are also strongly connected to the four basic elements, such as earth, fire, wind and water:

BANQUO: The earth hath bubbles, as the water has,  
And these are of them. Whither are they vanish'd?

MACBETH: Into the air; and what seem'd corporal melted

As breath into the wind. Would they had stay'd! (Shakespeare 2015, 1.3, 181–184)

Pikli points out that the seemingly missing fourth basic element, fire, is still present and it is marked by the verb "melted," as heat is required for any solid matter to become either a liquid or a gas like substance (2018, 26). The witches' sorcery,

which allows them to shift from one state of matter to the other, not simply signals their otherworldly status, but also showcases their capability of transgressing the boundaries of the body and the mind, essentially making them transitional beings. This sudden and unusual disappearance yet again reiterates the liminal as well as ambiguous nature of the three hags, who have seemingly surfaced from the water like liquid, were at one point tangible and afterwards simply vanished, melted into thin air, leaving the two Scotsmen to wonder whether they were actually witnessing a meeting with the denizens of the supernatural world or not:

BANQUO: Were such things here as we do speak about?  
Or have we eaten on the insane root  
That takes the reason prisoner? (Shakespeare 2015, 1.3, 185–187)

Besides the already mentioned character traits, the witches' language is also a source of their ambiguity. According to Diane Purkiss, the witches' lines can be interpreted in multiple ways similarly to their obscure physical appearance (1996, 211). They do not engage in a conversation with the Thane of Glamis, they simply convey a message, a vision of a possible future that is open to a number of interpretations. There is only one-way communication between the sender and the receiver of the encrypted data, where the latter cannot demand any sort of clarification. This idea is further reiterated during Macbeth's second and final encounter with the Weird Sisters, who provide yet another cryptic prophecy with a double meaning, but ultimately refuse to give a proper explanation to the king, who in return curses the three women in his desperate search for answers.

These early modern texts, from Goodcole's pamphlet to Shakespeare's tragedy, not only describe the physical outlook and the peculiar practises of the witch, but they also highlight the character's liminal nature. The collected narratives, which consist of the reports provided by the witnesses and the investigators, are showcased as the main reason for the character's transformation into an outcast of society. The witch's status as a transitional being is emphasized through their visual description as well as their ambiguous use of language. Ultimately, the witch becomes a perfect liminal figure, because she is forced to live on the threshold of two worlds: the human realm and supernatural sphere.

### 3 Shakespearean Allusions and the “Witchbreed” of *Marvel 1602*

The previously highlighted early modern concepts of witchcraft, stigmatisation and liminality become the main topics of discussion in Neil Gaiman's and Andy Kubert's *Marvel 1602*. However, one might rightfully ask, what exactly makes

this particular narrative so suitable for discussing the aforementioned concepts? The question could be partially answered by observing the comic book medium's very own liminal nature. The comic book is the product of the writer's and artist's partnership. This complex art form is perfectly capable of expressing liminality because it tells its narrative on both a textual and a visual level. The medium is defined by and interpreted through this double nature that allows it to tell more intricate stories as well as to convey human emotions. Mario Saraceni makes a clear-cut distinction between what is specified as the "blending" and the "collaboration" of words and pictures within the framework of comic books. While Saraceni refers to the blending of these two components as the language of the medium, he defines their collaboration as the grammar of graphic narratives (2003, 27). This assumption entails that the graphic narrative is born through this unique language, which is governed by its own special grammar. Thus, the readers of comic books are required to search for a meaning that is inseparable from the textual and the visual components, despite them still being separate parts of the same composition.

Gaiman and Kubert's *Marvel 1602* illustrates the liminal nature of comic books not solely with its use of language and imagery, but also with its clever use of Shakespearean allusions and references. The story of the eight-part series, which is set in the Shakespearean age, presents an alternate version of early modern England that is already on the threshold of a new era, due to the failing health of the English monarch. The writer changes history with the introduction of the modern heroes of Marvel Comics, who are transformed to fit into the narrative landscape of early modern English culture. They are to construct a new world, which is later threatened and deconstructed by the witch-hunting King James I, who becomes one of the main antagonists of the narrative, after seizing the crown of England in the wake of the former monarch's untimely death. However, before this happens, the readers are introduced to the two most important members of Queen Elizabeth I's court. Sir Nicolas Fury and Doctor Stephen Strange serve as substitutes for the characters of Sir Francis Walsingham (1532-1590), principal secretary to Elizabeth I, and John Dee (1527-1608/09), man of science and advisor to the Queen, respectively. The two fictional characters closely mirror the physical attributes and qualities of the above mentioned historical figures. Thus, on the first pages of *Marvel 1602#1* Sir Nicolas Fury receives the title of the "intelligencer," or the "master of spies and cutthroats." Doctor Stephen Strange is transformed into the Queen's loyal master of medicines, the sorcerer, who is tolerated by the English crown up until the point where King James I ascends to the throne, after which he is branded as a heretic and beheaded for his witch-like practices. However, even after his apparent demise, which occurs in the penultimate chapter of the series, the sorcerer still has an important task that is fulfilled when he conveys one final message in a very Shakespearean manner to his

wife. Similarly to the first apparition from Act 4, Scene 1 of Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, the bodiless head of Doctor Strange tells a prophecy, which, unlike in the Jacobean tragedy, leads to the resolution of the overall conflict of the comic book. This scene marks one of the many Shakespearean allusions that the writer and the artist employ within their graphic narrative.

As the narrative continues to unfold, we are introduced to the most crucial figures of the comic book series, the transitional beings of this fictional world, who must live on the thresholds of society due to their otherness. These liminal characters, who are collectively referred to as the "witchbreed" throughout the eight-part series, are the early modern equivalents of the X-Men, a group of fictional characters from the lore of Marvel Comics, who were born with special, superhuman abilities and stigmatized because of this by society. Back in 1963 Stan Lee and Jack Kirby created the original company of the X-Men, which consisted of Angel, Beast, Cyclops, Iceman and Jean Grey with their leader Professor X. Gaiman and Kubert transform the original team; however, they still retain crucial aspects of the X-Men mythology. According to Andrew Miller, throughout their entire publication history, the stories of the X-Men and their supporting cast of mutants were seen as an obvious metaphor for liminal groups; these narratives always included themes of racism, extreme prejudice and hate towards otherness, and fear of the unknown (2003, 283). One could argue that they introduced a type of modern 'witchcraze' to the contemporary reader. In the comic books, mutants are feared by the public, because they are perceived as a threat to humankind. This fear is not unlike the early modern English period's mass hysteria regarding witchcraft and its practitioners.

The X-Men, or the "witchbreed" conform to major theories about the 'Other.' Zoltán Imre argues that the presence of the 'Other' is necessary, because it maintains the social hierarchy by highlighting the contrasts between social and asocial, normal and abnormal, culture and subculture. This order, according to his argument, can only be achieved and preserved, if individuals, who are branded as deviants, are marginalized by society and historically stripped of their characteristics of being exotic or primitive (2018, 252). The mere existence of such characters, which could be a result of either ethnic, religious or gender-related differences, challenges and threatens the authority of the governing majority and that of the established order. Whether society refers to these certainly norm-defying characters as witches, witchbreed or mutants, is only a question of labelling. Thus, it is no wonder that the X-Men, including the characters with whom they share their stories, are so easily altered to fit the *Zeitgeist* of an era, in which individuals were branded and marginalized for being different from what society considered as normal.

In the context of *Marvel 1602*, the comic book figures remain the same liminal characters as their modern counterparts; however, they also exhibit some features of

the stereotypical early modern witch. When Carlos Javier, the spiritual leader, or, as Victor Turner would probably categorize him, the instructor of the witchbreed, introduces himself and his school of gifted students, readers start to assume that Gaiman has drawn some inspiration from the North Berwick trials' main suspect, John Fian, when he crafted his own character. Similarly to that historical figure, who also had his own students in the form of his alleged coven of witches, Javier is presented as a type of teacher, who prays with his pupils to God for the well-being of his kind in their own church. The early modern witchcraft pamphlet, *Newes from Scotland*, which chronicles the apprehension and trial of Doctor Fian, Agnes Sampson and the rest of their coven, refers to the notable sorcerer and his apprentices as individuals "who suffering themselves to be allured and inticed by the Diuell whom they serued, and to whome they were pritiatelye sworne: entered into the detestable Art of witch-craft" (Carmichael 1816, 8). After Sampson's apprehension and torture, during which she revealed the names of the group members, the alleged witches were brought before the Court of James VI of Scotland, who hated and relentlessly hunted their kind. They confessed their numerous crimes that they had committed against their fellow Scotsmen as well as against their king. Although the Scottish king is similarly portrayed in *Marvel 1602*, the witchbreed of Carlos Javier evade being captured by his witch-hunting inquisition, as they successfully escape from England to the New World (America), which they later on refer to as their new home.<sup>1</sup> Still, Gaiman's depiction of these fictional characters retains a close resemblance to that of the North Berwick coven. Akin to John Fian, they have their own church, but in addition to that, they also have a personal prayer, which is supposed to save them from their enemies, including the hateful English monarch among others:

Dear God, who made us what we are. Who gave us our talents, making us each different, who gave us our gifts. In your infinite mercy and wisdom, allow us to share our gifts with the world, and not to hide our talents beneath a bushel. Grant us freedom from those who hate us, and would destroy us. And let us, while hated, not in turn give in to hate. Amen. (Gaiman and Kubert 2003b, 13:5)<sup>2</sup>

Javier's prayer functions as the witchbreed's very own *pater noster* that praises God, instead of the Devil, for receiving such wonderful abilities, which they would like to employ in the service of others, for the benefit of all mankind. Thus, the early modern incarnation of Marvel Comics' X-Men are presented as a type of religious cult that is, in certain aspects, similar to Doctor Fian's coven of witches.

<sup>1</sup> The potential postcolonial aspects of this geographical transfer from England to America are interesting as well, though in the present essay the focus falls elsewhere.

<sup>2</sup> The fifth panel on page thirteen depicts a scene in which the witchbreed and their headmaster pray to God in their own church.

Nevertheless, this is not their only feature that aligns with Turner's concept of liminality or early modern culture's idea of witchcraft. Another crucial attribute, the mark of witchcraft is also showcased here, although, unlike in the example of Elizabeth Sawyer, it is not a third breast that appears on the body of the witchbreed, but the letter X, with which these individuals were branded for their otherness. Some members of the group have other, much more visible attributes that reiterate their liminal existence. Henry McCoy, also known as "Beast," is such a transitional being. His in-betweenness manifests in his appearance as a half-human, half-ape-like creature, not unlike *The Tempest's* Caliban, who is described in the play as a monstrosity himself, a hideous mixture between a man and a fish.<sup>3</sup> On the pages of the comic book series he is represented as a brutish barefoot man, albeit blessed with an exceptional intelligence, almost like the noble savages that are described in Montaigne's essay (2006). Another such figure with an evident bodily deformity is Werner, nicknamed "Angel," who, as his name suggests, possesses huge, angel-like wings. Both Henry McCoy and Werner are depicted as monstrous creatures, hybrids, who appear as cross-overs between a human being and some sort of animal. They defy the laws of nature and the laws of the social system by simply existing. According to Cohen, the monster is terrifying, because it lives on the threshold of multiple worlds and therefore, it resists being categorized in the natural "order of things" (1996, 6). Essentially, the monster, which appears to be another product of culture, much like the witch, is marginalized and transformed into a scapegoat by society, due to its state of being different from the established social norms culturally, politically, sexually or otherwise. However, being a product of culture also signals that the meaning behind the phenomenon, just as culture itself, can change with the passing of time.

While Angel and Beast are both trapped in their half-human and half-animal forms, the character of Jean Grey is mistaken throughout the narrative for being John Grey, a man instead of a woman, warranting some comparison with the Weird Sisters from Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, who also appear as gender-fluid entities. Similarly to Banquo, who is unable to determine the true sex of the Weird Sisters when he first encounters them alongside Macbeth, Werner is also confused by Master Grey's initial physical appearance, due to her clothing and seemingly masculine features, and he believes her to be another male apprentice. The secret of Jean Grey being a woman is eventually revealed to the characters of the graphic

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<sup>3</sup> "TRINCULO: What have we here, a man or a fish? Dead or alive? A fish, he smells like a fish – a very ancient and fishlike smell, a kind of not-of-the-newest poor-John. A strange fish." (Shakespeare 2011, 2.2, 25–28)



narrative and to the reader, but only after her sacrifice and tragic passing. Pikli describes this gender-related confusion regarding the witches of the Shakespearean tragedy as another attempt at blurring or completely dissolving boundaries (2018, 25–26). Thus, Jean Grey, akin to Angel and Beast, is also a liminal character, although, from a different perspective: her liminal existence is defined by her gender fluidity, rather than any bodily mutation. The remaining two pupils, Roberto and Scotius, nicknamed “Iceman” and “Cyclops” respectively, are depicted as liminal characters almost solely through their status of being witchbreed. However, the former student’s abilities allow him to shift his corporeal form, changing from his ice state to his normal, human appearance, which is not unlike the transformation of the Shakespearean Weird Sisters. In spite of the outcome of their respective fates, it can be confirmed through the observations mentioned above that Gaiman and Kubert’s iteration of the X-Men in *Marvel 1602* not only draws inspiration from the historical events involving the alleged criminals of the North Berwick witch trials, but also expands upon their tales, while simultaneously incorporating some elements from Shakespearean plays, such as *Macbeth* and *The Tempest*.

One final attempt at showcasing liminality, as well as the power of storytelling in the graphic narrative, arrives in the form of another Shakespearean allusion, and an interesting case of meta-narration. In the fifth part of the comic book series, “In Which a Treacherous Course is Plotted,” the writer and the artist appear to intrude the story for a fleeting moment in order to retell what has occurred in it so far. This sequence is arguably inspired by another scene that was taken from Shakespeare’s late romance, *The Winter’s Tale* (1610–11), in which the allegory of Time appears on the stage to propel the events of the drama sixteen years into the future. Gaiman and Kubert play the same role in the fifth issue: they essentially embody the Chorus, which summarizes the various plot threads of the previous issues and then goes on to develop the rest of the narrative, foreshadowing future events that have yet to transpire:

In the past, England has offered a haven to the Witchbreed, and turned a blind eye to the activities of Carlos Javier, their leader. But Elizabeth’s death has propelled James VI of Scotland to the English throne. James has elected to blame the Queen’s death on those he hates and fears. He has sent Fury to capture or kill Javier and his Witchbreed. Fury sent his young assistant, Peter, on ahead, to warn Javier. (Gaiman and Kubert 2004, 2)

The dialogue between the artist and the writer, which also evokes a play-within-the-play situation, frequent in Shakespearean drama, is shown in a contemporary environment with Kubert at the drawing board and Gaiman in front of him with further instructions and remarks on the plot. In this scene a plethora of books, involving various themes, such as the “Middle Ages,” “Castles” or “Knights,”

are showcased in the background, which provide a small glimpse and a vague hint at the sources that were consulted before and during the creation of *Marvel 1602*. The conversation between the two creators implies that they relate to each other like Prospero and Ariel. While the writer assumes the role of the magician, the artist becomes a type of servant, a familiar spirit, who executes the will of the creative leader. Interestingly, the illustrator seems to have doubts regarding the general course of the narrative and he questions whether certain inclusions into the tale, such as tiny dinosaurs, are truly necessary; thereby, he challenges Gaiman's authority. However, those concerns are rapidly laid to rest by the determined writer, who, as the final authority, ultimately decides what direction the comic book series needs to take. The creative leader reassures, not just the artist, but also the reader, that he knows what he is doing and everything will be unveiled at the right time. This comedic example, which provides a rather ironic look behind the scenes of a comic book's production, arguably proves that the writer and the artist need to collaborate with each other in order to successfully complete the graphic narrative. Essentially, they become equal contributors to the same product, despite their distinct roles. Ultimately, this meta-scene aims to exemplify the liminal nature of graphic storytelling, as it implies that the narrative itself is created in an in-between space, which in this instance not only symbolizes the gutter, the blank area between the panels, but also the creative mindscape that is shared by Gaiman and Kubert.

#### 4 Conclusion

In conclusion, while Gaiman and Kubert's eight-part narrative highlights the double nature of the comic book medium and graphic storytelling in general, its primary focus remains on the reintroduction of the concept of liminality to the contemporary reader. With the help of ingeniously crafted Shakespearean allusions and the utilization of some of the most beloved heroes and villains of Marvel Comics, some of which are redrawn to mirror historical figures from England, the writer and the artist of the series bridge history and fiction to create a completely new narrative landscape. By drawing inspiration from a long list of early modern English texts, which includes works such as *Newes From Scotland*, *The Wonderful Discoverie Of Elizabeth Sawyer, A Witch*, *Late Of Edmonton*, *The Witch of Edmonton* and *Macbeth*, *Marvel 1602* designs its very own transitional beings, who replace the stereotypical character of the witch. The careful analysis of concepts such as the 'Other' and that of the outcast also proves to be pivotal in understanding how exactly the phenomena of the early modern 'witchcraze' and Marvel Comics'

X-Men relate to each other and how they are both reimagined, combined and incorporated into the story of the selected graphic narrative. Through the study of the literary references included, both textual and visual, and the meticulous examination of the aforementioned fictional figures, who are collectively referred to as the “witchbreed,” the paper has ultimately explored the characteristics of liminal existence, the ramifications of a life lived on the threshold as well as the transformative power of storytelling in Gaiman and Kubert’s *Marvel 1602* series.

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## SELF-(DE)CONSTRUCTIONS IN J. M. COETZEE'S *DUSKLANDS*

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The Nobel Prize-winner South African author, J. M. Coetzee in his debut novel, *Dusklands* (1974), allows the reader to take a look into the astonishing worlds of vulnerability and violence through the juxtaposition of two locally and temporally discrepant narratives, whose fictional world is dominated by authority. This paper attempts to explore the collapse of the individual identity of the narrators, along the prevailing literary discourses around the time of the novel's publication, with special regard to the changing concept of the self in post-modern works and to the manners of rewriting its Cartesian concept.

*Keywords:* Cartesian self, post-modernism, narrative, authority

### 1 Introduction

The density of the syuzhet of J. M. Coetzee's *Dusklands* (1974) does not only explicitly derive from its undeniably complex narrative proceedings, but also from those components of its (meta)fictional reflections which engage in dialogue with current and apparently obsolete philosophical trends. Provided that one makes inquiries about the etymology of the word *humanism*, the corresponding definition might be found in dictionaries: it is the "belief in the mere human nature of Christ" (Onions et al. 1966, 451). Though the concept is slightly older than two hundred years (first applied in 1812 by Coleridge), the signified it refers to traces back into the fifteenth century. Humanism, being one of the prevailing conceptions in the Renaissance era, has redirected the attention of many artists, scholars and philosophers to focus on the human as an individual. It was the prominent theoretician of modern philosophy, René Descartes (1596–1650), who first determined himself and human beings as independent substances: "From that I knew that I was a substance [...] so that this 'me,' that is to say, the soul by which I am what I am, is entirely distinct from body, and is even more easy to know than is the latter; and even if body were not, the soul would not cease to be what it is" (Descartes 2003, 23). Although Cartesian philosophy has received a special significance through centuries, it has also been partially degraded in the postmodern era, together with its definite dichotomy of the object and subject, and

with the possibility of getting to know the only truth. Furthermore, the humanistic epistemological world view in the centre of thought since Renaissance has started to lose its significance along with its Christocentric concept of the human being.

Immediately at the beginning of his monumental psychoanalytical study, Jacques Lacan (1901–1981) proclaims his detachment from the philosophy deriving from the *Cogito* (Lacan 2005, 1). Despite this declaration, Lacan frequently refers to Cartesian philosophy in his works, mostly with undisguised criticism. For Lacan,

‘I think, therefore I am’ (*cogito ergo sum*) is not merely the formula in which is constituted, with the historical high point of reflection on the conditions of science, the link between the transparency of the transcendental subject and his existential affirmation. (Lacan 2005, 125)

Lacan has reversed the meaning of this statement as follows: “I think where I am not, therefore I am where I do not think” (Lacan 2005, 126). This reinterpretation of the Cartesian *credo legitimates* scepticism related to knowability and to the mere dichotomy of subject and object.

The characterisation of postmodern literature has become a central issue for a multipolar theoretical debate and a considerable amount of literature has been published on this, two of which are presented briefly in this study. On the one hand, the theoretical work of Ihab Hassan, who compares the features of modern and postmodern literature in a multiphasic table; and on the other hand, the study of Linda Hutcheon, who argues—among others—that the poetics of the postmodern tends to be more concerned with post-colonialism and feminism (Hassan 1982, 267–268; Hutcheon 1988). These studies together provide important insights into the changed self-determination of postmodern works, contrary to the methods of modernism:

Postmodern texts like *The White Hotel* or *Kepler* do not confidently disintegrate and banish the humanist subject either, though Eagleton says postmodernism (in his theoretical terms) does. They do disturb humanist certainties about the nature of the self and of the role of consciousness and Cartesian reason (or positivistic science), but they do so by inscribing that subjectivity and only then contesting it. (Hutcheon 1988, 19)

In general, therefore, it has commonly been assumed that the self can be defined differently in postmodern literature: it is marginalized, destabilized, and it has been shifted from its central position. The self has become an equal being among the other entities of the world, in which the subject is not able to identify himself/herself anymore.

This paper attempts to show that Coetzee in his debut novel, with multifarious manifestations of self-(de)construction, dismantles the Cartesian concept of the self through different narrative techniques applied in the novel. In particular, this essay seeks to examine three main research questions: firstly, in what ways the

narrators of *Dusklands* (de)construct their own selves; secondly, how Cartesian philosophy (dis)appears in the novel, and finally, how the creed of Descartes has been transformed into 'I doubt, therefore I am', which in itself resonates with certain literary discourses on postmodernism.

## 2 The Elimination of the Author

Along with the epistemological turn prevailing after modernism (McHale 1987, 3–11), similar issues had emerged in literature, including the changing function of the author. This is quite relevant in the discussion of Coetzee's *Dusklands*, as in both of the two temporally and locally separate short narratives<sup>1</sup> the name of the author is born by one of the characters; furthermore, in the second narrative, Jacobus Coetzee is the protagonist of the story.

In the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, such questions as 'How should an author and its text be related?' were replaced by others, which offered an essentially different point of view, for example, 'What is an author?' or 'How could an author be characterized as a substance independent from the text?' Preliminary work on the contentious status of the author was undertaken by Derrida and Foucault (among others), as in the basic theories of deconstruction, then post-structuralism and postmodernism, the marginalization of the subject had become a starting point in literary reception (Derrida 1976, Foucault 1998). Those discourses of deconstructionist philosophy which proclaimed the death of the author were judged by several critics; however, they probably misunderstood the "non-existent position" of the author, as it undoubtedly does not follow that its function can be abandoned. It does not mean either that the author would not exist. What this "position" refers to is the complete separation of the author and the text, the elimination of an authentication process based on the text in relation to its author (and vice versa), and the fact that the additional meaning deduced from the association of these two ceased to be a part of literary interpretation. It is only the text which stands in the centre,<sup>2</sup> more precisely, the text and its speaker do "not refer, purely and simply, to a real individual since it

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<sup>1</sup> In Coetzee literature, they are mostly referred to as narratives or "novellas," see (Head 2009, 38; Danta, Kossew and Murphet 2011, 37; Know-Shaw 1996, 107). In fact, the entire text is hardly longer than a "novella," though its immense complexity fully justifies its status as a novel. Narrative is the usual term, though this is problematic at various levels—if for nothing else, then because "The Narrative of Jacobus Coetzee" consists of four narratives, or texts.

<sup>2</sup> See Derrida's famous line, "Il n'y a pas de hors-texte," i.e. 'There is nothing outside of the text' (Derrida 1976, 158).

can give rise simultaneously to several selves, to several subjects—positions that can be occupied by different classes of individuals” (Foucault 1998, 216).

The current study was not specifically designed to demonstrate a theoretical analysis on the function of the author in *Dusklands*, although on the above basis it may be inferred that the characters named Coetzee in the narratives are in no way equal to the author or his biographical data. Additionally, there are some softly pulsating hints in the text around the character of Coetzee, which are the inconspicuous comments of the narrator, and engage in dialogue with current literary theories. To quote some of these: “In Coetzee I think I could even immerge myself, becoming, in the course of time, his faithful copy, with perhaps here and there a touch of my old individuality” (Coetzee 1983, 31), or “Coetzee hopes that I will go away. The word has been passed around that I do not exist” (1983, 32). These can be interpreted (with caution only) as hidden reflections of the author, and the identity crisis of the narrator, Eugene Dawn, at the same time. With the gesture of indicating that he, as a subject, is present in the fictional world of the novel, Coetzee subverts the procedure specific to fiction in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century which resulted from the literary turn detailed above. Concomitantly, Jane Poyner draws attention to the fact that “by placing himself as a character in his novel, J. M. Coetzee makes self-ironizing claims to authenticity (in this case via the genres of documentary, travelogue and historical document).” This authorial gesture has agglutinated with the genre of historiographic metafiction (Hutcheon 1988, 105–123; Kohler 1987, 1–41), which overtly attempts to undermine the reliability of historical sources or facts, to blur the boundaries between fiction and reality, while it also forces the reader “to sift through the narrative for elements of truth” (Poyner 2009, 17).<sup>3</sup>

### 3 Narrators and Narrative Techniques

In 1972, Gérard Genette published his book, *Narrative Discourse*, in which he demonstrates his own categorization of narrative techniques, types of narrators, focalization etc. and which has become a standard work of literary analyses focusing on narration. This work of Genette provides the theoretical basis of this section,

<sup>3</sup> In her essay Teresa Dovey has reflected on Peter Kohler’s 1987 paper, as he had failed to recognise *Dusklands* as a critique, and not an undertaking of the historiographical project (Dovey 1987, 16). Dovey also argues that all of Coetzee’s novels incorporate a critique of a particular sub-genre (e.g. the pastoral novel, colonial travel writing, historiography, or various canonical novels [Coetzee and Barnett 1999, 293]) of white South African writing (16). Head (2009, 39), Knox-Shaw (1996, 107–119) and Parry (1996, 37–65) have also stated that Coetzee’s tools for operating his critique are irony and parody, that is why it is so difficult to reconcile them with the horrors of imperialism.



the examination of the different types of narrators and techniques in *Dusklands*, which have a significant impact on the self-constructive processes of the characters.

The story of the “Vietnam Project” takes place during the last years of the Vietnam War, and this narrative includes a longer theoretical piece of writing about psychological warfare against Vietnamese soldiers, which has a decisive significance in dismantling the self (see in detail in section 4). “The Narrative of Jacobus Coetzee” chronologically occurs earlier, thus it could be concluded that the disruption of linearity may be another aspect of deconstruction. “This structure allows us to read the novel from front to back (starting with ‘The Vietnam Project’), or from back to front (starting with the Deposition), in order to provide an answer to the ontological query, ‘I have high hopes of finding whose fault I am,’ situated at the novel’s centre” (Dovey 1987, 17). In contrast, Dominic Head suggests that the extraordinary arranging of the narratives is a conscious contribution to the “cumulative process of reading” (Head 2009, 39). The narrator of the “Vietnam Project,” Eugene Dawn, is a first-person autodiegetic narrator, so Eugene himself is a participant of the story he tells. “The Narrative of Jacobus Coetzee” is much more complicated, as its title page informs readers that it was “Edited, with an Afterword, by S. J. Coetzee, Translated by J. M Coetzee” (1983, 51). So, it features three Coetzees in three different ages: the character in the original narrative of Jacobus Coetzee, an editor and even a translator with the same surname. Furthermore, at the end of the novel in an Appendix, a translation of Coetzee’s official 1760 deposition is given, in which Jacobus is referred to as the “Narrator.” Even though he is reporting his own experiences, he is a heterodiegetic narrator. Therefore, it is expedient to involve the concept of “middle voice” in the analysis.

The literature focusing on Coetzee’s self-reflexive writing circumstantially discusses the author’s unique narrative strategy, applying the term “middle voice” (Macaskill 1994; Dovey, 1998). Coetzee himself wrote numerous essays addressing this issue and characterized middle voice as a morphological possibility of interpreting “to write” depending on the threefold nature of active, passive and middle verbs (Attwell, 1992; Coetzee 1984, 94). For Coetzee, “[t]o write (middle) is to carry out the action (or better, to do writing) with reference to the self” (94). This revelation appears to be relevant in understanding the type of narration in the “Appendix.” Jacobus is the agent of the acts narrated by him, although the actual writer is not Jacobus. In a technical sense, the *Appendix* was not written by Jacobus, as it is clearly stated in the first lines of the 1760 “Deposition” that the narrative was noted down by councillor Rijk Tulbagh; furthermore, Jacobus being illiterate, he authenticates the noted “Deposition” with an X instead of his signature. How is it possible then to read the “Narrative” as his own intellectual property, originally written in Dutch in the first person? Angelika Reichmann

suggests that the authenticity of the source text (on which the translation is based), the translator and Jacobus himself are contentious in several ways, so the “Preface,” the “Narrative,” the “Afterword” and the “Appendix” aggregately represent a complicated metafictional metaphor of the translator, the author and the narrator (Reichmann 2020, 46–55). The fictional world of the novel is sorely complex in its integrated fusion of contemporary literary criticism and philosophy and in the juxtaposition of precarious narratological methods. Additionally, Macaskill consistently describes Coetzee’s middle voice as a “speculative” phenomenon, and draws the final conclusion in the analysis of *In the Heart of the Country* that “Coetzee’s fiction as a doing-writing [...] takes place in the median between ‘literature’ and ‘theory’” (Macaskill 1994, 471), which ascertainment might be extended to the whole oeuvre, including *Dusklands*. The results of the correlational analysis can be compared in this table below:

	<b>Narrator(s)</b>	<b>Type of narration</b>	<b>Voice</b>	<b>Narrative technique</b>	<b>Grammatical category</b>
<b>“The Vietnam Project”</b>	<i>Eugene Dawn</i>	<i>1<sup>st</sup> person</i>	<i>Eugene Dawn</i>	<i>autodiegetic</i>	<i>Singular</i>
<b>Translator’s Preface</b>	<i>J. M. Coetzee</i>	-	<i>J. M. Coetzee</i>	-	-
<b>“The Narrative of Jacobus Coetzee”</b>	<i>Jacobus Coetzee</i>	<i>1<sup>st</sup> person</i>	<i>Jacobus Coetzee</i>	<i>autodiegetic</i>	<i>Singular/Plural</i>
<b>Afterword</b>	<i>S. J. Coetzee</i>	<i>3<sup>rd</sup> person</i>	<i>S. J. Coetzee</i>	<i>heterodiegetic</i>	<i>Singular</i>
<b>Appendix: Deposition of Jacobus Coetzee</b>	<i>Jacobus Coetzee</i>	<i>3<sup>rd</sup> person</i>	<i>“middle voice”</i>	<i>heterodiegetic</i>	<i>Singular</i>

Fig. 1. Dimensions of narration in J. M. Coetzee’s *Dusklands*

This table is quite revealing in several ways. Most importantly, it demonstrates that the narrators tell their stories in the first person, although the grammatical categories are not obviously the same, which indicates, of course, a huge difference in interpretation (see later). Secondly, it highlights that the “Narrative” was written in the first person, whereas the “Appendix” in the third person, and these two separate parts narrate the same journey with the Hottentots. Thirdly, neither in the “Afterword,” nor in the “Appendix” does the narrator give an insight into the thoughts of Jacobus, ensuring a more personal tone for the first-person storytelling. The following sections of this paper primarily examine the two novellas and their narrators.

#### 4 Self-(de)constructions in the Narratives

Coetzee scholarship is meticulously diversified, and a certain part of these writings has focused on the manifestations of the self in his novels. Carroll Clarkson's monumental theoretical study includes detailed literary analyses of *Life & Times of Michael K*, *Boyhood*, *Youth*, *In the Heart of the Country*, *Diary of a Bad Year*, *Homage* etc.; however, it lacks the detailed discussion of the self-constructions in *Dusklands*. W. J. B. Wood's contribution to Coetzee reception is more unobtrusive than Head's or Clarkson's; nevertheless, the analytical part of his paper is quite convincing in offering various aspects of and transparent reflections on the "I" crises of *Dusklands'* main characters ("I" can stand for intellectual, individual, identical, or inner), often based on their relations to authority (Wood 1980, 13–23). Canepari-Labib in her analysis applies the Lacanian concepts of language and identity, reaching the conclusion that in Coetzee's novels "identity, understood as the Cartesian notion of a fixed meaning or a fundamental truth about the individual, does not exist" (Canepari-Labib 2000, 122).

The following two sections attempt to elaborate on the self-constructing procedures of the narratives in *Dusklands*. Both Eugene Dawn and Jacobus Coetzee are struggling with their own self-crises and the reader can get a close insight into this misery from the narrators' first-person point of view. Firstly, the theoretical work of Eugene Dawn is worth mentioning, in which he sets up a plan of psychological warfare against the Vietnamese. The key for the mental weakening of Vietnamese soldiers, Dawn states, is a total grinding down of team spirit, as Vietnamese determine their own selves as members of a community. "It is the voice of René Descartes driving his wedge between the self in the world and the self who contemplates that self," (1983, 20) writes Eugene, and while elaborating this strategy, he renders a new perspective for the creed of Descartes by rewriting it: "I am punished therefore I am guilty" (1983, 24). Concomitantly, he raises this non sequitur or (to apply Lyotard's terminology) this "paralogy" (Lyotard 1984, 60-67) as the basic premise of the psychological warfare. At the same time, Eugene is struggling with self-identification and trying to find answers for the circumstances of his existence: "I have high hopes of finding whose fault I am" (Coetzee 1983, 49).

Further, self-constructions seem to be more complex and multi-levelled in "The Narrative of Jacobus Coetzee." Right at the beginning of the narrative, Jacobus reveals his own superiority over Hottentots ("The Hottentots are a primitive people," [1983,71]), although he talks in first person plural, so he places himself as a member of a group of higher order: "There are those of our people who live like Hottentots..." (1983, 57), "The one gulf that divides us

from the Hottentots is our Christianity” (1983, 57). Jacobus presents the way of life in Hottentot and Bushman tribes from his own point of view, and here it is quite relevant to evoke the content of those discourses of orientalism and imperialism whose cardinal starting point is the restricted perspective of the European, “civilized” man. These studies on orientalism claim that everything that can be learned from literary works about the Eastern world is just one perspective, not a complete representation of reality, simply “a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient” (Said 1979, 3). Otherness is always grounded on quality, and certain qualities opposing each other are established by the group in hegemony, in this context, by western culture and ideology. Coetzee places his main character into an 18<sup>th</sup>-century South-African setting, into a world in which he (Jacobus Coetzee) is able to identify himself only in terms of power relations.<sup>4</sup>

In addition to this, the configurations of the narrator’s self-image have an instructive significance, aside from the subordinate relations. Having spent a long time among the Hottentots, Jacobus finds that his unwavering self-image represented at the beginning of the journey (“They saw me as their father. They would have died without me.” [Coetzee 1983, 64]) has been transformed into an uncertain identity<sup>5</sup> seeking his own limitations:

With what new eyes of knowledge, I wondered, would I see myself when I saw myself, now that I had been violated by the cackling heathen. Would I know myself better? Around my forearms and neck were rings of demarcation between the rough red-brown skin of myself the invader of the wilderness and slayer of elephants and myself the Hottentots’ patient victim. I hugged my white shoulders. I stroked my white buttocks, I longed for a mirror. (1983, 97)

Lacan developed his remarkably complex philosophical theory about the mirror stage, which does not lack some crucial elements of personality and developmental psychology. According to Lacan, the moment when a human infant realises his/her own reflection in the mirror is the starting point of an identification process, during which the subject identifies himself/herself as an independently existing individual (Lacan 2005, 1–6). This inference has gained interdisciplinary attention and opened new avenues for literary criticism, as well. From the literature of the antiquity to today’s postmodern tendencies, the mirror has generally been interpreted as an overarching metaphor: looking into a mirror is a special act of facing or confronting

<sup>4</sup> According to Head, Jacobus’s revelation that “I am a tool in the hands of history” may be understood as Jacobus being the current representative of all-time aggression and the violence of white men over the indigenous culture (Head 2009, 41).

<sup>5</sup> In relation to this passage, David Atwell suggests the concept of a “chimera-like identity” (Atwell 1989, 515).

ourselves, as well as the (re)cognition of a particular reality. Narcissus and his mythological story is a significant example of self-identification, which also remained prominent for (re)interpretation in the post-modern era, e.g. in Kristeva's reading of Narcissus in *Tales of Love* (Kristeva 1987, 103–121). Indubitably following her own conceptual apparatus bound to intertextuality, but also integrating Lacanian terms of the mirror stage to her work, Kristeva has also pointed out the *raison d'être* of the mirror metaphor in the 20<sup>th</sup>-century literary interpretation. Reflections on Lacanian terms of the mirror stage can also be noticed in *Dusklands*. Jacobus Coetzee is not able to circumscribe his subject, instead he is trying to grab those after-images which remind him of his life so far, which can be described by such words as power, white skin, penetration and superiority. It might add another perspective to the analysis of self-deconstruction to note that gradually from the beginning of the "Narrative," where Jacobus stands unshakeably in the centre of his own reality, he seems to lose his confidence regarding his position, as the declarative sentences referring to him as an invader slowly fade into the background and they are replaced by interrogative ones: "To these people to whom life was nothing but a sequence of accidents had I not been simply another accident? Was there nothing to be done to make them take me more seriously?" (1983, 98).

## 5 Reflections on the Self

The final section draws upon the entire thesis, tying up the various theoretical strands in order to support the idea of the changed self-defining methods of post-modern fiction as exemplified by *Dusklands*. This section is focused on three key themes: 1) *The 'dark' and the 'bright self'*, 2) *The 'inner' and the 'outer' self*, and 3) *The 'superior' self*, categories which may be the broadest to point out the different self-(de)constructions in the two narratives and which seem to disrupt the Cartesian concept of the self.

### 5.1 *The 'Dark' and the 'Bright' Self*

Eugene Dawn has serious dilemmas about himself regarding his place in the world. He tirelessly attempts to find such existing categories in the surrounding world which enable him to locate his thoughts and acts, and he finds out that the self is not unified but split into two pieces: a dark and a bright one: "The self which is moved is treacherous. [...]. The dark self strives toward humiliation and turmoil, the bright self toward obedience and order. The dark self sickens the bright self with doubts and

qualms” (1983, 27), or “I speak to the broken halves of our selves and tell them to embrace, loving the worst in us equally with the best” (1983, 29–30). This theory is adopted when Eugene is hospitalized at the end of the narrative because he has stabbed his own son with a knife: “I was not myself. In the profoundest of senses, it was not the real I who stabbed Martin” (1983, 44). But this explanation does not seem to be the right answer to the questions stated, as he is confused and unstable: “Eugene Dawn?’ My name again. This is the moment, I have to be brave. ‘Yes’, I croak. (What do I mean? ‘Yes?’ ‘Yes?’)” (1983, 40). Eugene strongly longs for an answer which helps him to get to know his own nature, the causes of his acts and the origin of the chaotic thoughts in his mind, that is the reason why he appreciates his doctors’ toils (“They have my welfare at heart, they want me to get better. I do all I can to help them”) (1983, 43).

## 5.2 *The ‘Inner’ and the ‘Outer’ Self*

The other interesting self-type is seemingly the same as the Cartesian body and soul, but in *Dusklands* the inner and the outer parts are not in line; moreover, they contradict each other.

A meaningful realisation of this encounter is Eugene Dawn complaining about Coetzee’s indifference. He says “[Coetzee] cannot understand a man who experiences his self as an envelope holding his body-parts together while inside it he burns and burns” (1983, 32). This duality of the self is somewhat different from that of the dark and bright pair in the previous section, as it obviously severs the body’s physically perceivable part from what is inside. Harmony is not available between inner and outer self, and the I remains imperceptible: “There [inside] I seem to be taking place” (1983, 30).<sup>6</sup>

In the “Narrative,” Jacobus Coetzee also reflects on this dichotomy while thinking about his death: “the undertaker’s understudy will slit me open and pluck from their tidy bed the organs of my inner self I have so long cherished” (1983, 106). Jacobus here refers to the organs of his body, implying a physical nature of the inner self. But how is it possible to cherish our organs? One is more likely to do this with one’s mind or soul, so it indicates here a multi-levelled interpretation of the inner and the outer.

Recalling that episode in which a Hottentot child stands by Jacobus’s bed, the reader could discover another aspect of the inner self in the text:

<sup>6</sup> The Hungarian translation provides a perfectly accurate illustration: “Valahol ott benn történekm én” (Coetzee 2007, 48).

It had no nose or ears and both upper and lower foreteeth jutted horizontally from its mouth. Patches of skin had peeled from its face, hands and legs, revealing a pink inner self in poor imitation of European colouring. (Coetzee 1983, 83)

This passage deserves special attention from two perspectives. Firstly, Jacobus refers to this child with the neuter pronoun “it,” as if the child was not a human being; thus, the enthralling authorial bravura of describing power relations appears not exclusively in the plot, but also on the microstructural-grammatical level of the text. The other aspect connects the scene to the inner self, which is, in that sense, covered with skin and the peeling of the upper layers allows the viewer to identify this “poor imitation.”

It is clearly stated in the first page of the “Narrative” that the quality by which Jacobus distinguishes between “us” and “them,” which also determines subordination, is religion: “We are Christians, a folk with a destiny. They [Hottentots] become Christians, too, but their Christianity is an empty word” (1983, 57). Skin colour is another distinctive mark which makes it impossible for Hottentots to be treated as equal. Consequently, religion as principally intellectual in nature, and skin colour as a physical characteristic of a human, together can be interpreted as the inner and outer self of a subject, whose existence is irreversibly predestined according to the discriminative judgement of the narrator.

### *5.3 The ‘Superior’ and the ‘Inferior’ Self*

Authority has a great impact not only on the elephant hunter’s but also on Eugene’s life. Eugene’s (supposedly) arrogant boss, Coetzee, who is introduced in the first few lines of the narrative, is a “powerful, genial, ordinary man, so utterly without vision” (1983, 1), and Eugene clearly says that he is afraid of him: “Here I am under the thumb of a manager, a type before whom my first instinct is to crawl” (1983, 1). Being in a subordinate position, he wants to work even harder to prove his talent in writing: “In Coetzee I think I could even immerge myself, becoming, in the course of time, his faithful copy, with perhaps here and there a touch of my old individuality” (1983, 31). So much so that his job becomes his obsession, and this leads to injuring his own son.

It is worth noting that authority receives more emphasis in the “Narrative,” as Jacobus is only able to construct his self as a creature being superior to all primitive people, he is the “tamer of the wild” (1983, 77) and the “[d]estroyer of the wilderness” (1983, 79). Jacobus has a quite materialistic statement about the gun’s role in constructing the self: “The gun stands for the hope that there exists that which is other than oneself” (1983, 79). On the one hand, this shows another aspect of demolishing the

Cartesian concept of the self, as Descartes proclaimed that substances (including the self) are independent from every other thing, and are autonomous entities which do not require anything to maintain their own existence; therefore, Jacobus's dependency theory can rather be linked to the philosophy of materialism (Descartes 2003, 23). Further, continuing his meditation on the essence of being, Jacobus draws the final conclusion that "Savages do not have guns" (Coetzee 1983, 80), meaning that they do not have the "mediator" which links their existence with the world. In other words, from the perspective of a European "destroyer," they do not exist. As he is spending more and more time among Hottentots, he gets into the maze of his own theories (the longer passage quoted at the end of section 4 mirrors his confusion) and tries to convince himself about the only certainty he could accept: "Hottentot, Hottentot, / I am not a Hottentot" (1983, 95). Jacobus is longing for a mirror (another material) to see who he is. This materialistic, self-constructing function of the mirror is presented in the "Vietnam Project" as well: "I see my face in a mortifying oval mirror. To this dwindling subject I find myself more or less adequate" (1983, 36).

Lacan in his theory of identification differentiates the "idealised I" and the "I idealised," ideas which are closely related to the mirror stage. Antony Easthope clearly points out the fundamental contrast between the two in Lacan: the former occurs at "that point at which he<sup>7</sup> desires to gratify himself in himself" (Lacan 1977, 257) and the latter at "the point [...] from which the subject will see himself, as one says, as others see him" (Lacan 1977, 268; Easthope 1999, 62). Both cases of identification are idealised: they involve the subject as he would like to see himself and as he would like to be seen by others. This is a transformation during which the subject builds his *imago* "from a fragmented body-image to a form of its totality" (Lacan 2005, 3). In Coetzee's writing, both Eugene Dawn and Jacobus Coetzee need a mirror to construct an ideal image of themselves, but for Jacobus, the Other<sup>8</sup> has a crucial role in this process:

I longed for a mirror. Perhaps I would find a pool, a small limpid pool with a dark bed in which I might stand and, framed by recomposing clouds, see myself as others had seen me [...]. (Coetzee 1983, 97)

The above passage suggests the appearance of the Lacanian "I idealised," as self-construction also depends on social factors and is determined by the Other to a large extent. Therefore, Jacobus (being able to characterize himself only in terms of

<sup>7</sup> Easthope explains in a preceding section of his study that "'subject' has to be 'he' and 'his' because it translates the French '*le sujet*'" (Easthope 1999, 59)

<sup>8</sup> Here I rely on the Lacanian concept of the Other as explicated by Easthope: it should be understood as one's surrounding, all of the signifiers and social factors that can have an impact on our identity (Easthope 1999, 59).



power relations) demands a mirror not for identifying himself as an independent subject, but for realising himself as a subject being identified somehow by other people. In this context, Jacobus's self-image changes according to his position in the colonial hierarchy. Experiencing superiority both in European and South-African communities, Jacobus appears to be more self-identical with his *imago* as an invader. Nevertheless, deprived of his gun, Jacobus describes himself similar to Bushmen, as "a retrogression from well set up elephant hunter to white-skinned Bushman" (Coetzee, 1983, 99). Ironically, in that same clause he evaluates this retrogression as "insignificant," whereas the traces of his inconvenient feeling of inferiority are constantly present in the "Narrative."

## 6 Conclusion

The purpose of the current study was to determine those narrative proceedings which are possibly related to the protagonists' self-constructing methods in Coetzee's *Dusklands*. The most obvious finding to emerge from this study is that the protagonist and narrator of the second novella, Jacobus Coetzee, is only able to specify his status as a subject, when he belongs to the group in hegemony, more precisely, when he is in the role of the "domesticator of the wilderness" (1983, 80) equipped with a gun, the motif of power (which can be related to the post-colonial interpretation of the text). The present study provides additional evidence to previous analyses integrating Lacanian terms into the examination of Coetzee's oeuvre, especially *Dusklands*. Further, it reveals the deconstruction of the Cartesian concept of the self, as far as the protagonists of the narratives are not able to identify themselves as independent substances. The dichotomies related to the specific self-types in section 5 are intertwined in the text, with the binary terms contradicting not only their appropriate opposites but also the other self-types. It is now possible to state that in the first novel of the Nobel Prize-winner author, Cartesian knowability has been replaced by doubt; furthermore, the mere dichotomy of the subject and the object has been demolished.

Both Jacobus Coetzee and Eugene Dawn are explorers. In addition to the several staples that connect their destinies, an "exploring temperament" (1983, 31) may be the strongest. Eugene longs for a past two hundred years ago in the hope of having "a continent to explore" (1983, 32), whereas Jacobus, the explorer has a mission "to open what is closed, to bring to light what is dark" (1983, 106). Notwithstanding the exploratory nature of Eugene and Jacobus, neither in 1760, nor in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, is it feasible to make the greatest discovery – to determine that "dwindling subject."

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## CULTURAL AND NATURAL ROOTS OF PUERTO RICAN MESTIZAJE IN ROSARIO FERRÉ'S *THE HOUSE ON THE LAGOON*

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The paper explores the conversational orchestration of family anecdotes as a dominant experimental narrative strategy underlying Puerto Rican author Rosario Ferré's historical novel, *The House on the Lagoon*. The study reads Ferré's narrative through Mikhail Bakhtin's philosophy of the dialogic nature of language to highlight the interplay between environmental and cultural images of hybridity. The close reading of this representative piece of US Caribbean literature elucidates how Ferré utilizes the dialogic form to contest the Puerto Rican cultural and national politics that tend to suppress and silence the non-white (black and indigenous) components of Puerto Rican identity.

*Keywords:* dialogism, environment, cultural hybridity, US Caribbean literature

### 1 Introduction

As a prominent representative of the post-1970s Puerto Rican literary tradition, the *nueva narrativa* (new narrative), the island-born Rosario Ferré has always been considered an author of ambivalence. Her first works—*Papeles de Pandora* and *Maldito Amor*, published in 1976 and 1986, respectively—established her reputation among the island-based literary community as a writer who constantly pushes the boundaries of Puerto Rican literary traditions by engaging with the contradictions underlying Puerto Rican national identity, gender, and racial politics. Ferré's oeuvre attests to the innately political sensibilities of her works which reflect the ways Puerto Rican cultural identity is complicated by the island's Spanish colonial history and its twentieth-century political status as an unincorporated territory of the United States. Accordingly, most of Ferré's works reflect the author's personal conviction regarding Puerto Rico's Commonwealth status—a semi-autonomous form which economically and politically ties the country to the US—and challenges the internal division within Puerto Rican culture this status has created by tearing the country into largely two political camps, the supporters of statehood and the advocates of independence.

Ferré's novel, *The House on the Lagoon*, exposes the complex and multilayered roots fueling these national frictions. As a result, it presents the readers with a historically

imbued family narrative that discloses the racial, political, and national differences that plague Puerto Rican society. However, it is not only the addressed themes of cultural identity, racism, feminism, and national autonomy that, following the publication of the novel, generated a torrent of harsh criticism targeting Ferré's literary and political persona. Breaking with the conventional Puerto Rican literary practice of writing in Spanish—a gesture signaling the island's independence from American cultural and linguistic influences—Ferré published *The House on the Lagoon* in English first and self-translated the novel into Spanish in 1996, with the title *La Casa de la Laguna* (Esplin 2015, 23). Her linguistic choice was characterized by many island-based writers and cultural representatives as “an unthinkable heresy” committed against her own island roots (Johnson 2008, 239). As Marlene Hansen Esplin thoughtfully notes, Ferré's language politics epitomizes her underlying poetics of contradiction that unsettles the binary constructions of mainland and island and opens up the dialogue between the American and insular Puerto Rican conceptions of cultural, ethnic, and national identity (2005, 25). As Lyn Di Iorio Sandín remarks, the theme of ambivalence surrounding bicultural identity constitutes an underexplored connective link between US Caribbean and US Latino/a literatures (2004, 11). In line with Sandín's thought, I contend that my analysis highlights the value of Ferré's work for a hemispheric approach to US Caribbean literature and demonstrates the ways the culturally hybrid formations of identity transgress national and geographical borders.

Addressing the ambivalences undergirding the cultural history of Puerto Rico, the ensuing analysis demonstrates how Ferré's transgenerational family novel, *The House on the Lagoon*, uses a multi-dimensional dialogic structure to subvert the erasure and silencing of Puerto Rico's collective history of cultural hybridity. Through the investigation of the experimental form and innovative narrative techniques evident in metatextuality and the fragmentation of time and place, I will demonstrate that the novel foregrounds the complexity and the multiple dimensions of the Puerto Rican cultural identity. Set on the island, Ferré's novel centers on writer-poet Isabel Mendizabal, whose manuscript—written in the course of the novel—narratively challenges her husband, Quintín Mendizabal's family genealogy and debunks the bourgeois merchant family's falsely maintained pure Spanish bloodline. The novel is organized as a written dialogue between husband and wife, in which Quintín's notes on her wife's writerly aptitude and, especially, his evaluative remarks regarding the truth value of Isabel's family accounts constantly interrupt the narrative. Considering that, I argue that the conflicting voices and narratives presented in the novel expose an insular anxiety over the Puerto Rican *mestizaje*, the culturally hybrid identity which, in Marisel C. Moreno's definition, was developed through the intermixing of African black, indigenous Taíno, Spanish European, and American cultures (2012, 52).

To highlight the dialogic structure of Ferré's narrative, I draw on the liberating potential Mikhail M. Bakhtin attributes to his narrative concept of dialogism. Bakhtin's notion of dialogism underlines that the inherently hybrid construction of every single utterance—which always contains within itself at least “two utterances, two speech manners, [...] two semantic and axiological belief systems” (304)—liberates the consciousness from monologism, that is, “the hegemony of a single and unitary language [...] as an absolute form of thought” (1981, 367). Bakhtin's liberating configuration of dialogism and his related concept of heteroglossia are appropriate analytical tools to uncover and discuss different facets of the insular perspectives of the hybrid Puerto Rican identity the selected work portrays. To substantiate Ferré's novel as heteroglot, I will demonstrate “the co-existence of socio-ideological contradictions” (Bakhtin 1981, 291) between the unofficial and official histories of Puerto Rican *mestizaje*. I explore how the family narratives give voice to silenced Puerto Rican social groups—including women, blacks, and mulatto/as (referring to people with a mixed African and Anglo-European ancestry)—to expose and interrogate the insular politics of effacing the collective histories of cultural mixture. The operation of Bakhtin's dialogic force related to heteroglossia in *The House on the Lagoon* will reveal how the work's dominant theme regarding the interplay between the Caribbean discourses of nature and culture also yields interpretations of the sub-themes of home and matrilineal heritage. The following analysis will examine the interplay of environmental and cultural images as they engage with and problematize the hybrid nature of Puerto Rican cultural identity.

## 2 Home and Hybridity

Home as an intersubjective space binding together humans and nature is a central metaphor in *The House on the Lagoon*. In the novel, home is deeply grounded in the Caribbean natural environment; the characters have an interdependent relationship with their surrounding ecosystem, which sustains their families economically, physically, and mentally. Ferré's rendering of the eponymous house on the lagoon sheds light on harmful insular discourses that efface the symbiotic relationship between the cultural arena of the house and its surrounding amphibious environment. The decentralizing power that Bakhtin ascribes to heteroglossia to disrupt monolithic ideological discourses (1981, 367) is evident in the dialogic interplay between the Mendizabals' house and its surrounding aquatic environment. The fluidity of the waterways that connect the wealthy Puerto Rican family's home on the lagoon and the swamp populated by native black people shatters the dominant Puerto Rican national myth of clear-cut racial and class boundaries between the white upper-

class and the black working-class population. The easily permeable natural borders between the house and the swamp ensure regular contacts between these two sides resulting in a transgenerational family history of tabooed miscegenations. The male members of the family cross the waters for economic purposes and erotic pleasures: on the one hand, they ship blacks from the slum of the Morass Lagoon to employ them as house servants, and on the other, they frequent those places to gratify their sexual desires with Afro-Mestiza women.

The natural world of the mangrove swamp—the crossroads of the waterways upon which the Mendizabal house is built—is a central ecological motif that reflects the conflicting narratives between cultural hybridity and the national ideology of whiteness. In an interview Ferré points out the metaphoric significance of the botanical feature of the mangrove swamp and the location of the house:

The title [of the novel] refers to the fact that the Mendizabals's [sic!] house is built on a mangrove swamp, which is halfway territory: half earth, half water. [...] And Puerto Rico is a lot like that, it's a borderline country. Puerto Ricans are hybrid people: Hispanic and American, part Caribbean Indian and part African, and many other things. [...] This ambivalence has been our problem, because it's very hard to be two things at the same time. (qtd. in Kevane 2000, 66)

The double-rooted terrain of the swamp, which provides the architectural foundation of the house, unveils the hybrid construction of the Puerto Rican identity, which the Mendizabal family—as the national representative of racial purity—denies, yet, frequently exploits. Thus, the simultaneously aquatic and terrestrial ground of the house also mirrors the ambivalent foundation of the twentieth-century Puerto Rican nation which, as Moreno stresses, seems to welcome *mestizaje* yet, at the same time, conceals the ongoing colonial ideologies of bloodline purity (2012, 53).

The diverse ecosystem of the mangrove swamp functions as an ecological representation of the Mendizabal family's mixed bloodline that metonymically foreshadows as well as foregrounds the complexity of the family relations and roots. The first chapter of Isabel's family saga, "Foundations," describes how impenetrable and inexplicable this territory is:

The swamp was a mysterious place, full of exotic wildlife and strange botanical specimens, with creatures both amphibious and terrestrial. The mangroves had bushy tops with all sort of birds nesting in them [...] But the mangroves were also aquatic, and their roots spread an intricate maze over water. Inside the labyrinths of knots and sinews a whole universe of mollusks, crustaceans, and fish proliferated freely, half immersed in the mud, half encrusted in the mossy cartilage of the wood. It was a strange territory to navigate in, and although several wide channels crossed it from end to end, if one were to get lost in its tangle, there was only a slim chance of finding one's way out. (Ferré 1996, 10)



This “intricate maze over water” (Ferré 1996, 10) that encompasses diverse classes of species metaphorically mirrors the composite nature of the Mendizabals’ cultural foundations. Analogously to the entangled and hybrid ecological roots which the house is architecturally constructed on, the family is prefigured to be a heterogeneous unit in which different genealogies encounter and merge. The subsequent chapters of Isabel’s family narrative in the novel—which trace her lineage as well as her husband, Quintín’s—lift the veil from the family secret that the allegedly white Mendizabal bloodline mixes with the family of the Mendizabals’ Afro-Caribbean servant, Petra Avilés.

### 3 Matrilineal Dialogues and Environmental Images

Dialogism in Ferré’s work enables Isabel to present the complexity of matrilineal connections by giving voice to women who are conventionally excluded from the official, patriarchal accounts of Puerto Rican historiography. In *The House on the Lagoon*, the notion of matrilineality extends beyond blood-relations, since the female figures portrayed also establish intersubjective relationships with women outside the immediate genetic bond between mother and daughter. This specific cultural practice of the Caribbean families is appropriately described with the anthropological term of “fictive kinship,” which challenges blood kin and marital relationships as the only accepted cultural models by which familial bonds can be established (Chatters, Taylor, and Jajakody 1994, 297).

The gendered aspect of the multivoiced, heteroglossic narrative form of *The House on the Lagoon* is substantiated by the multiple stories of women that Isabel’s manuscript presents as part of the family narrative. These incorporated stories underline that Isabel—due to her barely present dysfunctional mother, who suffers from mental illness—builds fictive kinship with women she identifies with across generational, racial, and class differences. These female figures are all victims of some form of patriarchal or racial oppression: Quintín’s domestically abused mother, Rebecca Mendizabal; the publicly humiliated mulattas Doña Ermelinda and her daughter, Esmeralda Márquez; and the slave-descendent Carmelina, who is raped by Isabel’s husband.

The most complex intercultural female bond, however, exists between Isabel and the Afro-Caribbean family servant, Petra. The interconnectedness between these women manifests on both character and narrative levels. Isabel’s original structuring principle to interweave hers and Quintín’s family genealogies considerably alters through the incorporation of a third lineage, Petra’s bloodline, into the basic narrative fabric of family genealogy. As Isabel admits at the beginning of the novel,

“My original purpose was to interweave the woof of my memories with the warp of Quintín’s recollections, but what I finally wrote was something very different” (Ferré 1996, 6). This narrative gesture by Isabel to include Petra in the family saga does not only challenge the structure of the novel as a dialogue between the husband’s and the wife’s versions of the Mendizabal family history, but also elevates the black woman into a family member.

The family servant clearly embodies a destabilizing, or in a Bakhtinian sense, a “centrifugal force” (Bakhtin 1981, 272), and threatens to break down the integrity of the patriarchal historical narrative of national unity, the discourse that Quintín both stands for and maintains. Quintín’s perception of the pure bloodline through generations of the family is endangered by Petra’s interfering with Isabel’s story, as well as Petra’s mere existence and her familiarity with the family’s past history. Serving three generations of Mendizabals, the black matriarch’s extended family knowledge constantly haunts Quintín. He is convinced that Isabel’s misrepresentations of the Mendizabal genealogy are influenced by Petra, who wants to take revenge on him for disinheritting Willie, his mulatto son born out of Quintín’s rape of Petra’s granddaughter, Carmelina. This is how Quintín expresses his overwhelming fear of Petra’s invisible infiltration into Isabel’s narratorial voice: “And behind Isabel’s lens he felt Petra’s malevolent eye following his ever step, listening to his every word” (Ferré 1996, 294). His suspicion toward Petra gradually increases and toward the end of the novel Quintín discovers that Isabel “was Petra’s ally, and they were writing the manuscript together in order to destroy him” (Ferré 1996, 374).

As a representative of the slave-descendent, silenced black woman, the infiltration of Petra’s voice into the genealogical stories of the elite family is highly subversive, since it fragments and stratifies the unitary construction of Puerto Rican nationality into further, internally dialogic layers of gender and racial differences. The novel’s dialogic mobilization of these layers reconfigures the insular erasure of *mestizaje* into a relational and equally participatory dialogic discourse partaking in the construction of the collective Puerto Rican historical identity. Although Petra’s voice remains confined within Isabel’s narrative throughout the novel, she is agentic in deconstructing the semblance of racial and cultural homogeneity the Puerto Rican nation upholds. The maid fits into Bakhtin’s notion of a posited author that the philosopher considers one of the basic ways of incorporating heteroglossia into the novel (1981, 323). As a posited author Petra’s family knowledge is sedimented within Isabel’s white authorial voice through which she conveys the family story. Thus, in Bakhtinian terms, Petra “speaks (albeit in a refracted way) by means of this story and through this story” (Bakhtin 1981, 314), in other words, through the novel-in-the-novel story written by Isabel.

Petra's association with the slum area of the swamp, and more broadly, with the natural element of water accentuates that it is the Afro-Mestiza people and their spiritual energies gained from nature that nurture the bourgeois family and maintain their social hegemony. A predominant poetic image of the encounter between black spirituality and the white Puerto Rican elite is Petra's guardianship of a spring of curative waters located in the maze-like living quarters of the servants, the cellar. Isabel's accounts accentuate that as soon as the founder of the family, Spanish immigrant and Hispanophile Buenaventura Mendizabal brings Petra to the house, he takes advantage of her spiritual powers to maintain his class dominance and patriarchal family control. As Isabel describes: "Petra ran Buenaventura's bath with perfumed bay leaves every day, and once every two or three months she boiled all kinds of roots which she said had magical powers [...] Buenaventura was convinced Petra's baths helped him do good business" (Ferré 1996, 238).

The connection between water imagery and African spiritual powers is further enhanced by Petra's worship of an African deity, Elegguá, the God of crossroads in the Afro-Cuban belief system of *Santería*.<sup>1</sup> Being a curandera (a folk healer) herself, Petra considers water as an extended kinship through which people can reconnect with their ancestors. The black matriarch's spiritual contact with Elegguá prompts reading Petra as the ultimate transmitter of family secrets about the racially and culturally mixed Mendizabal lineage. Toward the end of the novel the Catholic raised Isabel sacrificially offers her manuscript to Elegguá to protect it from Quintín, who decides to destroy it. In the retrospective narration in the last few chapters of the novel, Isabel reveals that it is due to her belief in the African deity that she could publish her writing, since the card-box where Petra hid Isabel's manuscript—along with other sacrificial objects offered to Elegguá—survives the arson in which the house on the lagoon burns to the ground. The house falls victim of a terrorist attack by Quintín's son, Manuel, a member of a radical political party, the Independistas. As Quintín is killed in the accident, the destruction of the house metaphorically alludes to the collapse of the Puerto Rican nationalism Isabel's husband represents.

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<sup>1</sup> *Santería*, or "the way of saints," originates from sixteenth-century Cuba. It was developed by African slaves who fused their own spiritual practices with the belief systems of the Roman Catholic Church and French Spiritism (Norat 2005, 109 n5).

#### 4 Concluding Remarks

As I have demonstrated, the intersectional analysis of environmental theme and narrative form highlight the multilayered and multi-voiced structure of Ferré's family saga. Reading the conversational structure of the novel through the Bakhtinian concepts of dialogism and heteroglossia reveals how Ferré's portrayal of the domestic sphere of the Mendizabal family is deeply informed by competing political discourses of nature and culture, man and woman, working class and upper class, and the national myth of racial purity and the heterogenous nature of Puerto Rican cultural identity. Drawing on the interplay of ecological and cultural hybridity, Ferré demonstrates that in *The House on the Lagoon* the environment is not a mere setting, an inert backdrop against which plot events unfold. The water-bound images analyzed above are central to Ferré's decolonizing poetics through which she uncovers how Puerto Rican cultural hybridity is exploited in order to maintain the hegemony of the Mendizabal family, and by extension, the national ideology of whiteness they represent. As such, the novel recognizes the inherently diverse natural environment of Puerto Rico as a discourse which is instrumental for Ferré to narratively challenge the hegemonic political and national constructions of Puerto Rican identity.

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## THE HYSTERIC BELONGS TO ME: HELEN OYEYEMI'S *THE OPPOSITE HOUSE*<sup>1</sup>

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The term *hysteria* has undergone several substantial changes throughout its history. A charged concept, deemed for a long time as pejorative and offensive to womanhood, it has lately been re-appropriated for literature under the concept of the “hysterical narrative.” This new trend purports to redeem hysteria and, together with it, redeem the feminine and show all its complexity. Helen Oyeyemi's 2007 novel, *The Opposite House*, conflates the private and the public in two female characters, one human, the other divine. Through this double perspective the work self-reflexively re-evaluates hysteria both in the self and in the community.

*Keywords:* Oyeyemi, hysteria, femininity, humanity, gods.

### 1 Introduction

Helen Oyeyemi's 2007 *The Opposite House* invites its readers to embrace the hysterical nature of its narrative, and it consciously and purposefully chooses the 'hysterical' adjective as its central characterisation. The novel's main character is Maja, a young British daughter of Cuban immigrants, who, while expecting her first child, strives to come to terms with her identity, with her hybridity. In parallel to her story, interspersing Maja's struggles with highly poetic segments, is the fantastic story of a Yoruba Goddess, Yemaya Saramagua, through whom the novel reworks the transatlantic journey of Nigerian slaves and their faith.

*The Opposite House* blends Africa and Europe: distant places, differing cultures and various religions. Maja and Yemaya, the two protagonists are different versions of the same persona: they come to represent not just the complexity inherent in identity, but also the difficulties in recognising and embracing a hybrid identity, one that spans continents and cultures. Maja's struggles are manifested through an alter ego she calls her personal “hysteric,” an entity that takes over control in moments of crisis and actively shapes the fate of the protagonist. And Yemaya with her own parallel fate mirrors this life and further deepens the femininity of the girl.

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Nowadays, we can talk about the so-called “hysterical narrative,” a new trend in literary criticism burgeoning in the 1980s, which, in Elaine Showalter’s words, “has developed at the busy crossroad where psychoanalytic theory, narratology, feminist criticism, and the history of medicine intersect” (1993, 24). Showalter presents an acute diagnosis and criticism of this “hysterical narrative” that was born at a time when psychoanalysis and doctors rarely utilise the concept anymore, instead moving into the sphere of literature and media. As she maintains, hysteria enjoys great attention and a new interest as it is “spread by stories circulated through self-help books, articles in newspapers and magazines, tv talk shows and series, films, the Internet, and even literary criticism” (1997, 5).

Showalter’s misgivings lie in the recognition that the “hysterical narrative” has become synonymous with women’s writing in general (1993, 24). Hysteria has become the term for all things feminine, for literary texts written by female authors, for fragmentary, complicated narratives, for artistic works problematizing remembrance and time. Indeed, it is a dangerous label, carrying substantial historical weight one cannot bypass. It seems that women writers, critics and thinkers wish to re-appropriate it, to make it their own. This may be the motivation behind a contemporary novel’s focus on such a controversial concept, deemed for a long time pejorative and offensive to womanhood. Oyeyemi’s text chooses a self-reflexive and ironic take that, nevertheless, is combined with the wish to redefine and redeem hysteria for femininity, for humanity at large.

Hysteria as diagnosis has been around for centuries: as psychoanalyst Anouchka Grose states, the term “*hysterikos*” was used as early as before the fourth century BC for different “feminine” complaints such as “bad moods, seizures, and morbid thoughts—all of which were believed to be brought about by problems of the womb” (2016, xv). As the name itself means “of the womb,” the tight association of the diagnosis with the female sex became inevitable. One of the most emphatic examples is the theory of the wandering womb, originating from ancient Greece. The theory is based on the supposition that the womb moves inside a woman’s body, causing her numerous ailments. It was believed that pleasant smells attract it, whereas it flees foul ones, and thus it can be enticed into floating back into its place. Interestingly, although the theory was discredited quite early, the use of smelling salts in the 19<sup>th</sup> century attests to it still being accepted as an issue (see Gilman et al. 1993, 14–28).

The greatest motivation behind many of these theories lies in attempts at understanding woman, her physical and psychological states, her self. Hysteria as a clinical condition was “invented” (Didi-Huberman 2003, 3) only at the end of the nineteenth century, by Jean-Martin Charcot, who in the 1880s demonstrated symptoms in lectures where he used live subjects (Devereux 2014, 23). Charcot’s



student, Sigmund Freud turned his attention towards hysteria and, together with Joseph Breuer, developed the new science of psychoanalysis (Devereux 2014, 24).

The real change came with Freud, whose theories turned from physicality to the psyche as he started looking for internal scars produced through trauma or repression. Freud furthered his theory by focusing on women and deducing that hysteria is a gendered pathological state, the result of women lacking male genitalia, and hence being scarred from as early as being born. As he writes, “the hysterical neurosis is nothing but an excessive overaccentuation of the typical wave of repression through which the masculine type of sexuality is removed and the woman emerges” (1962, 124).

Oyeyemi's novel chooses to take stock of this history of hysteria: it does not shy away from reactions to these earlier theories concerning femininity, such as Maja's stern claim that “[h]ysteria has got nothing to do with an empty womb” (2007, 223), reflecting on the wandering womb theory of earlier times. It does not purport to erase the painful, even embarrassing past, but rather intends to face and challenge it in order to reappropriate hysteria.

There is a constant ironic undertone to the quasi-character of the hysteric. To use Mark S. Micale's words, hysteria became a term used “as a dramatic medical metaphor for everything that men found mysterious or unmanageable” in women (1989, 320), and indeed Oyeyemi takes advantage of that. The novel embraces its characters' femininity, their complexity, and it constantly moves at the threshold of sanity/insanity. One of hysteria's greatest appeals for the novel can be summed up by Derritt Mason and Ela Przybylo's introduction to *ESC*: “hysteria is a ‘great disorder’ because it exceeds definition, escapes conclusive analysis, and persists as a slippery, enigmatic possession of the body; hysteria is a disorder that, in turn, disorders” (2014, 1). As I will show, in *The Opposite House* the hysteric is the embodiment and manifestation of the complexity of feelings and issues the protagonists exhibit and face. It is the very symbol of the ineffable.

The power the hysteric emanates in Oyeyemi's novel makes us recognise that it is actually more than a disorder: it is a statement. As Cecily Devereux formulates it, when hysteria becomes an integral part of feminist theory, it is no longer understood as a medical disorder, but a cultural condition, “an embodied index of forms of oppression” (2014, 20) that represents the “feminist reaction and resistance to the patriarchal oppression it indexed” (2014, 21). Although numerous feminist critics embrace hysteria and wish to reclaim it, Showalter feels that Freud's work has had such a negative effect on the conflation of womanhood with hysteria that as a result the label “hysterical” denigrates women's writing as art, and “has long been a device of ridicule and trivialization” (1993, 33).

Although Showalter's misgivings about this re-appropriation of hysteria by the feminists raise important issues to consider, the focus of this essay is dictated by

Oyeyemi's novel, one that seems to coincide in its creed with that of the second-wave feminists "to recuperate hysteria and its hysterics from those silences and invisibilities perpetuated by the patriarchal legacy of psychoanalysis," as Mason and Przybylo put it (2014, 7). Devereux defines this new approach as a "process and a methodology [...] of destabilizing the system within which the meaning of femininity is fixed, by mobilizing a language that separates words and meanings" (2014, 29).

In the next section of the essay, I wish to outline the different manifestations of hysteria in *The Opposite House* and the multifarious motivations behind them. I propose to show how Oyeyemi chooses to utilise the various conceptions about womanhood and about hysteria, many of them problematic, and makes them the novel's own. Albeit sometimes with irony, the novel consciously appropriates all supposed aspects of the hysteric, by choosing female characters who embrace their personality in its complexity, even showing signs of madness. This novel chooses to guide its readers into the innermost depths of these women, and thus hysteria (and ultimately womanhood itself) is redefined. Placing in the centre of my investigation one of the novel's protagonists, Maja, I examine her femininity and relation to her hysteric (sometimes together with the other female characters of the novel). I start from the greatest manifestation of her hysteric, achieved by her pregnancy and captured through the German concept of *Gelassenheit*. In this unit the novel's two protagonists (Maja and Yemaya) are presented as having interlinked fates. Yemaya Saramagua, the Yoruba goddess of pregnant women, is proven to possess the pregnant characters of Oyeyemi's novel and to bring out the hysteric in them. The third unit of the essay analyses Maja and her hysteric through a close look at Alfred Hitchcock's *Vertigo* (1958), a film that shows the complexities of womanhood, most emphatically through the conflation of female autonomy and the male gaze.

The fourth unit investigates woman's relation to food, her problematic link to consumption and the novel's various foci on how woman is defined through these. As women in *The Opposite House* all exhibit different aspects of this relation, their analysis further broadens the view on the various aspects of womanhood itself. It is telling that in connection to consumption the hysteric appears to take possession of the women of Oyeyemi's novel: aggressive possession that leads to signs of madness on the women's part.

The last section purports to show the process through which Oyeyemi's novel appropriates hysteria, how it turns the hysteric into an inseparable component of woman's identity. The novel seamlessly weaves opposing states, differing spheres together, thus creating free passage between various worlds that come to symbolise the complexity of woman. Dichotomies are annulled, and instead woman is presented as an amalgam of states, of impressions, of selves, even.

The four distinct units come together to present a detailed view on how Oyeyemi, through her 2007 novel, redeems hysteria for womanhood, takes charge of it, together with its complex, problematic history, and with its help, sheds light on the intricacies, on the beauties, but also on the dangers and hardships of womanhood itself.

## 2 “The Longing to Let Go”

In *The Opposite House* two worlds—the ordinary and the supernatural—seamlessly weave into one another, with the characters becoming doubles or alter egos for each other. The hysteric, Maja's alter ego, both nurturing and destructive, is a force that creates the link between the two worlds, a force that links Maja with Yemaya Saramagua, the Orisha of the Yoruba religion. Maja's hysteric creates a deep, instinctual connection that seems to truly unfold in her pregnancy. Pregnancy and motherhood are central aspects of the formation of womanhood in Oyeyemi's novel. Showing women under the influence of their hysterics, the text reaches its apex through the depiction of pregnancy, one that shows the complex, often problematic relationship woman has with her body, and with the foetus growing inside her. This very complexity is captured through the different manifestations of the hysteric, and through the phenomenon of *Gelassenheit*.

Maja and Yemaya are two facets of the same self, one human, the other supernatural. With names that mirror each other, the women connect again and again, they unite and then split again, and thus show how their fates are inextricably linked. The textual organisation of Oyeyemi's novel reflects this interconnection, with two narratives that are not separated by chapter titles: they alternate in every chapter, often seamlessly weave into each other, almost imperceptibly take over, and shift voice, point of view, time and place.<sup>2</sup>

Maja's first-person narrative, the personal, intimate story of a black Cuban girl living in London is extended and opened into the exotic and intricate world of Yoruba mythology, one that creates the link between Lagos and London (literally

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<sup>2</sup> In the novel we can notice a heightened attention on the intermingling between prose and poetry, which creates the textual fluidity of Oyeyemi's prose, and seems to be the manifestation of femininity itself. Furthermore, it also seems to function as a reflection on the state of the hysteric, as a manifestation of woman's inner and outer conflicts, the symptom of a deep-seated anxiety. Emily Dickinson's poetry suffuses the stories: creating an amalgam of different realities, with the help of the fluid style of the poetic segments, Dickinson's poetry heightens the eerie atmosphere of the novel. Oyeyemi borrows most of her chapter titles from her, with “tell it slant” becoming the motto of a writing that is both prose and poetry: it is elusive, defying all expectations, with no linearity, with no logicity.

through the two doors found in the basement of Yemaya's *somewherehouse*), or rather Lagos–Habana–London, three places that together comprise a difficult hybridity. Part of this hybridity manifests itself through *Santería*, which is “a complex of religious cults in the Afro-Cuban population, combining Yoruba African and Spanish Catholic traditions, especially concerning the saints (*santos*) who are identified with the spirits (*orisha*) of the Yoruba pantheon” (Bowker 1997, 856). It became the symbol of resistance and perseverance, the migrant's only tie to their lost home. *Santería* is defined by this visible duality of worlds, identities and religions. Slaves brought it to Cuba, where it was further developed in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. The narrator of *The Opposite House*, however, tells a slightly different story. The Orisha become more than symbols or detached deities, they suffer together with the humans:

The Yoruba gods discovered their Cuba in the dark, hidden in bigger emergencies and cries of warning as patrol ships tried to intercept the cargo. The gods were hidden in the fear of being drowned. They were hidden in the unseen smack, smack, smack of the next man's head on the ship's boards as he tried to damage his brain and decrease his market value. The gods were not afraid, but they wept. (Oyeyemi 2007, 23–24)

These images make the journey, the fates of the gods and of people more present than ever, wounds and pains are palpable in this poetic language. The journey of the Orisha reframes the hardships suffered by the slaves, and it reflects on the fate of black people in Cuba as they embraced this mixed religion: “On arrival, Orishas became beloved in secret. Slaves had to be Catholic and obedient or they'd be killed, or worse” (2007, 24). Chabella, Maja's mother touches upon the religion's great significance when she states: “I suppose El Jefe was right to be nervous that something was going on with *Santería*. Something is going on. Those West Africans brought another country in with them, a whole other country in their heads” (2007, 107). This shows that even though physically Afro-Cubans were robbed of their home, their memories and beliefs could not be taken away from them.

Yemaya Saramagua, an Orisha, or goddess of *Santería*, is a highly elusive character in the world of *The Opposite House*, a spirit that is worshipped by the followers of the religion, but also a person who suffers together with them, who shares their fate, their hardships. She becomes the symbol of the migrant, the symbol of hybridity, and thus she provides a rich projection of Maja, the novel's human protagonist, and her struggle to find herself. The poetic, elusive narration recounting Yemaya's life in the *somewherehouse* is both a counterpart to Maja's more prosaic, more ordinary life and a key to understanding the complexity of feelings identified in Maja and her peers. As Kamila Shamsie remarks, the two women “reflect a condition of being adrift” (2007).

Yemaya, who is the patron of pregnant women, is the one whom Maja needs as she is expecting her first child. "I have strangeness in my family" (Oyeyemi 2007, 120) resonates with a shared history (or "hystory," to use Showalter's term, 1997) of possession, of women identifying with the Yoruba goddess. As the goddess protecting pregnant women, Yemaya visits Chabella, too, during her pregnancy with Tomás, Maja's younger brother.

Witnessing her possessed mother becomes a defining memory for Maja. One day her *Mami* descends the stairs "wrapped in nothing but a cloth of preternatural white, with strands of her hair swimming around her face, strands of her hair tied with little flags of white cloth" (2007, 107). Her entire body becomes a canvas for an overflow of feelings, and for the life slowly developing inside it: "Tomás became part of the outfit too: [...] it was he that made the white flow" (2007, 107). Chabella is in a trance, looking "wild, wilder than animals," a trait pregnant women seem to share in the world of *The Opposite House*. As she dances, Chabella becomes "Yemaya Saramagua, a sure, slow swell in her arms and her hips like water after a long thirst, her arms calling down rain, her hands making secret signs, snatching hearts" (2007, 108).

Similarly, Maja's entire body gets under the influence of her hysteric, which is re-enforced by her son growing inside her. She senses that "something is happening here, something that doesn't fall into good, OK, or bad" (2007, 120). Maja is not alone in this disturbing state; she acknowledges herself as a member of a long line of women who might have gone through similar experiences ("I have strangeness in my family, a woman who was a priest when she wasn't supposed to be," [2007, 120]), struggling to affirm themselves, to find their true selves.

Mother teaches daughter about *Gelassenheit*: "the longing to let go and collapse under holy madness" (Oyeyemi 2007, 10). This *Gelassenheit*, according to Anita Harris Satkunanathan, is the result of these women's state of being between realities, with a hybrid voice, which results in an elision between cultures (2011, 57). The German concept's accentuated position further complicates the texture of the novel, since it activates a Western philosophical idea that interweaves with the Yoruba mythology. The *Gelassenheit* Maja inherits from her foremothers seems to coincide with Heidegger's concept, explained by Nathan A. Scott as "the spirit of *disponibilité* before What-Is which permits us simply to let things be in whatever may be their uncertainty and their mystery" (1969, xiii). *Gelassenheit* overpowers Maja in moments of crisis. The word resonates in her ears, and its power takes charge:

I lift my head from his shoulder and touch my lips to the skin that crinkles over his Adam's apple. My teeth latch onto him and I clamp down hard, so hard that my teeth find each other again through his skin  
(he *shouts*)

and I am not thinking anything in particular, just that I have to hurt him. (2007, 181, emphasis in original)

We see a woman who has lost control, has become a monster, driven by a hunger for pain. She is reminiscent of the Western image of the vampire, or the embodiment of the *soucouyant*, the Caribbean soul-eating entity (Satkunanathan 2011, 44). Alison Rudd rightly points out the composite nature of the soucouyant, a phenomenon that comes to represent the mixture of cultural influences the women of *The Opposite House* internalise: in Rudd's words, it is a "hybrid of vampire, ghost and zombie" (2010, 51). The phenomenon captures Maja's liminal state and her resulting obscurity, her desperate search for some cultural certainty.

Besides this aspect, however, one cannot ignore the sexual charge of this manifestation. Bloodsucking itself is sexual "with its penetration of a supine body and exchange of bodily fluids," and hence the soucouyant embodies female sexual voracity (Anatol 2015, 65). Maja's outburst becomes part of her being under the influence of her hysteric, her alter ego that reinforces her female identity. Her sexual body becomes the centre of all experiences, the outlet through which she expresses herself. That is how her previously cited instance of *Gelassenheit*, her surrender to madness, condenses the complex nature of her mental and physical state in pregnancy.

Maja's body, tightly linked to the new life gradually forming inside it, takes over language, becoming the most accurate communicator of her intricate state. It projects her mental state, it reflects all her struggles and conflicts. Although she has been waiting for her son since she was a young child, Maja's relationship to her unborn son is complicated, often inimical. Just as with Chabella expecting Tomás, the foetus is at once part of the mother's body, but is also given autonomy and power. Maja dreads her son's approach, and as a result her own body becomes dangerous and even alien: "I am scared to touch my stomach, not because it is tender, but because it has begun to swell beyond the point where it can be comfortably rubbed with one hand. If I cup it with both hands the bump might rise to the space I allow it" (2007, 98). The gothic traits of this relationship are evident (see Buckley 2017, 41).

Pregnancy is thus presented as a highly problematic issue, raising great insecurities, even conflicts inside a woman. There is an inherent resistance which shows that motherhood is problematic. In Helen Cousins's words, "[f]or Maja, who has always expected to have children [...] pregnancy is experienced as an almost malign seizure of her body" (2012, 14). She resists her son by "eating crap," but later gives in to his demands: "the boy needs seeds and fresh fruit and oily fish and folic acid and carefulness and stuff" (2007, 8). This portrayal of motherhood is another instance of the novel going against traditional representations of womanhood/motherhood: it refuses to present pregnancy as a perfect, blissful

state in which the woman radiates happiness, and instead chooses to exhibit the darker aspects of this state through the various connotations of the hysteric.

### 3 “A Vast Wound”

Maja and her childhood friend, Amy Eleni are deeply preoccupied by the phenomenon of doubling, of having an alter ego, which in their case manifests itself as their personal hysteric. It is no wonder, then, that Alfred Hitchcock's 1958 *Vertigo*, a film that builds heavily on doubles, on *doppelgängers*, catches the attention of the girls. As critic Peter Matthews notes, at the core of *Vertigo* there is a “delirious excess that paradoxically borders on abstraction and renders the film a true nonpareil in Hitchcock's career” (2018, 55). Maja and Amy Eleni are so infatuated with Hitchcock's film that its viewing becomes a regularly enacted ritual. Seemingly each viewing enriches the array of interpretations and, alongside them, the two girls' relation to the film and to themselves. I interpret the film to function in the fictional world of Oyeyemi's novel as a further deepening of the main focus: of the focus on the intricacies of womanhood, on the array of personalities housed in woman, but also of a focus on madness.

The two girls' infatuation with *Vertigo* in Oyeyemi's novel seems odd at first. The first half of the film is pronouncedly governed by the perspective of its male protagonist, Scottie Ferguson, as it is his gaze through which one views Madeleine. Maja and Amy Eleni's interest in *Vertigo* is even more accentuated because of Scottie's overbearing transformation of Judy Barton into Madeleine Elster, coupled with her obvious reluctance and unease. But this film represents many experiences for the fictional characters of Oyeyemi's novel. Madeleine becomes a symbol that stands for womanhood on the one hand, and trauma on the other. Maja interprets her in the following way:

You know that Madeleine is in big trouble because she's a vast wound in a landscape where wounds aren't allowed to stay open—people have to shut up and heal up. She's in trouble because the film works to a plan that makes trauma speak itself out, speak itself to excess until it dies; this film at the peak of its slyness, when people sweat and lick their lips excessively and pound their chests and grab their hair and twist their heads from side to side, performing this unspeakable torment. (Oyeyemi 2007, 34)

Madeleine is the embodiment of painful memory, of the past intruding into the present and robbing the character of her present. Maja, in her sensibility, recognises this and identifies a similar experience in herself being separated from her past life but still under its influence. In the movie Scottie believes that Madeleine is haunted (which seems like a common motif the film shares with Oyeyemi's novel), even

possessed by the spirit of a woman who had been taken advantage of, robbed of her own child and cast aside. Carlotta Valdes, this spirit from the past enters the present through her *doppelgänger*, Madeleine Elster, who wants to commit suicide similarly to her ancestor. Through Carlotta the film turns into a “meditation on time and its illusory conquest,” to use Richard Allen’s words (2011, 578). Madeleine becomes the embodiment of both Carlotta and Judy; the three fates are interlinked, and they all are “objects of love reincarnated, remade, over and over” (Duncan 2004, 132).

Madeleine is doubly abstracted and manufactured: first by Judy and Gavin Elster, who together create the image of a disturbed woman whose fate is doomed; secondly, Judy is again transformed, this time by Scottie, into the Madeleine he believes he knows. And this woman is never real; not only because she is created, but because she exists through Scottie, through his gaze. He never sees the flesh-and-blood human being; he falls in love with a romantic mirage. Madeleine herself is never present, instead she is an unattainable, lost past: her entire persona, her mostly wordless, expressionless detachment gives her an eerie quality. For instance, as Susan White remarks, her trancelike state among the sequoias “speaks of the invasion of the present by the past, of Madeleine as an immutable object of desire” (2011, 189).

After Madeleine’s (both real and symbolic) death, Judy could gain existence as herself, but Scottie’s supposed memory of his lost love forbids the present from manifesting itself, and thus Judy from existing. Nevertheless, although the male perspective seems to rule the film, and to rule the women, the issue is more complex. When Judy appears, the viewers encounter a woman who has recovered her reality and abandoned her abstract nature. Through this shift in portrayal and approach, I believe, together with Nicholas Haeffner, that Hitchcock’s film reveals “an oscillation between identification with and objectification of women” (2005, 80). The numerous doubles and dichotomies the film operates with are appealing to the two girls of Oyeyemi’s novel, who being young and on the brink of womanhood, find themselves between the male gaze and their own autonomy.

Maja and Amy Eleni can identify with the two states symbolised by Madeleine and Judy, played by the same actress. The great difference in sameness, in one person is what the protagonist of *The Opposite House* and her best friend defiantly embrace. This is what they call their “personal hysteric” (29, 31, 223): a denomination that in itself signifies the duality of man and woman, object and subject. Oyeyemi’s characters take charge of the concept of the hysteric, and redefine it, turning it into a symbolic gesture of women reclaiming their selves and the gazes projected at them. Although it seems that Scottie dominates Madeleine/Judy, the film gradually reveals woman as an autonomous entity that *chooses* to play the roles ascribed to her.

*Vertigo* is the symbol of Maja’s own complex, compound subjectivity, with the woman both as herself and as seen by the male gaze. She is accompanied by her



personal hysteric, and haunted by a memory, by a country that may prove to be an illusion. Her experience and her persona in *The Opposite House* are mirrored by the spiral of vertigo, which “suggests the impossibility of attaining a final truth about woman – and hence about man” (Modleski 2011, 180). The particular feeling of unsettledness, or a specific unease is what pervades Maja’s world in Oyeyemi’s *Opposite House*, and this is the state that draws her to Hitchcock’s movie.

#### 4 “Stapled [...] stomachs”

Womanhood and its complex nature reach another manifestation in the novel through the issue of consumption. Food and eating have been recognised as a constant issue for women, and this relationship shows different aspects for different races and cultures. Oyeyemi’s novel presents women coming from different backgrounds, who all exhibit signs of a very distinct relation to consumption. As I intend to prove in the following, these signs ultimately connect consumption with hysteria, where eating or, more often, the refusal to eat is the hysteric’s statement of resistance.

The complicated relationship between mother and son is presented through consumption: “Food: everything I eat, my mouth lets it go, my stomach heaves painful, sour streams,” notices the pregnant woman, drawing attention to pains, or even to possible resistance against the foetus (2007, 16). Food and eating become the exteriorisation of Maja’s psychological states. Her entire body seems to decay: “My breasts are rotten lumps hooked into my ribcage, and I can’t touch my body at all, I can’t” (2007, 16). Maja is distanced from her own body and from her sanity. This body, taken over by the baby, feels alien and distant, forced into eating. When Aaron, Maja’s boyfriend rather forcefully feeds her, she becomes objectified into a body that needs to pass food to the foetus inside: “In his eyes I am a throat working down red juice, I am a shaking hand and a spoon and beyond that his baby” (2007, 231). Buckley recognises that “[i]n this novel, both children and mothers regurgitate food, expressing a double abjection that suggests this pouring of desire into the child is insupportable on either side” (2017, 54).

Besides her pregnancy, Maja’s life story shows other instances when her relation to food symbolises her hardships. The girl is caught between two worlds, and she struggles to conform to one or the other when, for instance, in her adolescence, she decides to lose weight and starts living on the smells of things. “When Chabella showed me recent pictures of my dimpled, glossy-haired cousins in Habana Vieja,” says Maja, she is happy, because—despite all their obvious advantages—she still considers herself more beautiful, simply because she is thinner than them (2007, 51). Eating and other bodily functions connected to it are complicated by the historical

and cultural backgrounds of the characters, which seep through the dinner table. Sarah Illott recognises the special importance given to food in the novel, noting its role as a link to the past, with the mouth becoming “a site of historical memory” (2017, 147). She calls the mouth an “open wound” that signals the difficulties of the migrant state, the incompleteness of identity formation (2017, 148).

Another instance of eating and its entailments sheds light on the connections between consumption and womanhood, showing how the former can become an expression of the latter, and ultimately of the resistance of the hysteric. Amy Eleni’s mother Despina refuses to eat and even though, according to her daughter, she is not anorexic and “doesn’t give a shit about her weight” (2007, 141), her looks are unnatural, possibly even approaching the monstrous: “Despina is thin like being naked in public—you can see the beginnings of her teeth stamped in her face; you can see them through her skin when her mouth is closed” (2007, 115). Her effect on the girls is akin to that of the formerly mentioned *soucouyant*, who sucks the life out of all the girls around her. Only the father can eat freely, but “Despina stapled our stomachs with a tranquil gaze,” remarks Maja (2007, 116). The girl parallels Despina with mothers from Chabella’s *apataki*, creatures of mythology who are feared to eat their children’s spirit (2007, 116).

And indeed, mothers in the world of *The Opposite House* are fearsome, and now and again they attack their own children. Despina, with her piercing gaze, forbids her daughter from eating, and hence strips her of power, of autonomy. Between Chabella and her daughter there is also a constant friction sensible through Maja’s narrative. The mothers in this novel present the often inimical relationship between mother and child, the imperfections in its dynamics. They all show signs of hysteria, which becomes the manifestation of all their tensions. In psychoanalyst Bracha Ettinger’s words, hysteria “is a mode of subversion and resistance” (2005, 135). It seems that in Oyeyemi’s novel hysteria becomes, above all else, a mode of resistance: resistance against patriarchy, against social conventions, against assimilation.

The volatility between Chabella and Maja reaches its apex when the mother tries to strangle her own daughter. Chabella attacks her daughter in a complex scene in which Maja and her mother witness a woman being raped on the street below their home. When Maja starts dialling the police, it seems that Chabella is overtaken by her hysteric: “Mami kissed my forehead, her arms dropped down around me; I stiffened because she was laughing and crying at once and I didn’t know what it meant. Her hands clasped around my throat, and when I looked into her eyes I couldn’t find her. Instead I saw something inky and strange rising” (2007, 149). Chabella loses control and, overwhelmed by her hysteric, tries to rob her daughter of her voice, because she herself does not have one: Chabella does not speak English, she cannot communicate with the police, and thus she feels threatened.

This becomes a paradigmatic moment in Maja's life, one through which she learns that she needs to protect her throat, her voice (2007, 149). Her throat becomes her most feared treasure, one that she always shields with all her power. Knowing this, the instance of Aaron force-feeding her gains further weight, as her most cherished member is under attack. Her throat, her voice thus becomes a central motif for Maja's "struggle for articulation and expression" in *The Opposite House* (Satkunanathan 2011, 41). The digestive system and the vocal chords are closely tied to express the protagonist's identity crisis, who is caught between two worlds, between two selves. What her throat, her vocal chords represent to Maja is a "struggle for agency" (Satkunanathan 2011, 42) that is extended to become the central focus of Oyeyemi's novel.

## 5 "Like Every Girl"

Maja's alter ego, her *personal hysteric* seems to be an integral part of her psyche, an entity that accompanies her everywhere: "she is blank, electricity dancing around a filament, singing to kill" (2007, 29). It is elusive and dangerous, both appealing and repulsive: "designer made [...], flattering and comfortable," it is always lurking, waiting to take over (2007, 29). The hysteric as a distinct aspect of Maja's subjectivity is a defining element of her life, and it gets special attention in her narrative. The emphasis is peculiar, since it invokes more than one issue in connection with hysteria, femininity and trauma, through which, on the one hand, the novel destabilises the boundary between sanity and insanity, and on the other, it presents hysteria as an integral part of womanhood.

In an interview given to Michel Martin, Oyeyemi seems to imply that Maja's hysteric reflects on the hardships of being a young woman, of getting by in general.<sup>3</sup> And indeed, the first presentation of the hysteric does facilitate a reading of communal sentiments ("Like every girl," Oyeyemi 2007, 29) standing behind

<sup>3</sup> "MARTIN: I don't know why I love this so much, but I think—well I guess I wanted to ask you: Why does Maja have a hysteric? Does she have a hysteric because she's so out of place in the world? Does she have a hysteric because she's a young woman and it's just not that easy being a young woman in the world these days?

Ms. OYEMYEMI: Yeah. I think it's the young woman thing very much. I feel that very much as well. And it's just this whole kind of almost a pressure to appear and not to be, as if there are parts of yourself that you need to tuck away. And, I mean, this is the whole expression of anger, for example, and like raising your voice and stuff. That's actually quite an interest thing that my sister and I were recently talking on, and we realized that we both talk quite quietly. People are always asking us to speak up and stuff. And we realized it's because, when we were younger, our dad used to say stop shouting when we were just talking at normal pitch of voice. And we were like, we're not even shouting." (Martin 2007)

the conception of the hysteric, presenting it as something ordinary and normal. Through the generalisation that claims that every girl has her own hysteric, through the casual relation to instances of self-abuse and suicide attempts, the hysteric becomes a vehicle through which mental instability is approached by the novel. In some instances, the manifestation of the hysteric is presented as something “normal,” and sometimes it is enveloped in such a heightened lyricism that it makes even self-mutilation beautiful:

One night, drunk, drunk, drunk, I dropped my empty shot glass and a full for Luke, sat down beside the pieces and arranged them in my skin, twisting clear flowers planted to grow from my soles, my arms. It hurt. But wearing my hysteric, it became a matter of art and pain and so on. It was extreme, it was because of tension. (2007, 29)

As reviewer Olutola Ositelu remarks, by “presenting it in an everyday—almost mundane”—manner, Oyeyemi “makes the reader aware of how easy it could be to cross the sanity line, how things that should raise alarm can become quite routine and ordinary to the sufferer” (2007). There is an effortlessness to the hysteric as it takes over, as Maja gives in to it.

Oyeyemi’s *The Opposite House* filters the traumatic experience and the crisis of the self through the phenomenon of hysteria. Great emphasis is placed on the relationship between hysteria and time, the subject’s connection to their past in particular. As Mason and Przybylo maintain, “hysteria dwells in a kind of forgotten time or timelessness”, it always has a problematic relationship to time: “hysteria seems to collapse, stretch, and distort time, resisting linear temporality” (2014, 14). It is Freud who first formulates the hysteric’s peculiar relation to time. In one of his lectures entitled “On the Psychological Mechanism of Hysterical Phenomena,” he writes that in hysterical patients there are only impressions that they cannot evade (1962, 37), which means that reality and imagination (or impressions) are interchangeable, and an impression can become more real than the real. The hysteric’s relation to time is paradoxical: the hysteric is “*before* and *elsewhere*” (Kristeva 2010, 132, emphasis in original), inhabiting a sort of “dead time” (2010, 132).

The protagonist of Oyeyemi’s novel is stuck between past and present, between Cuba and London. Her relation to time, to her life is contradictory: sometimes she wants to get rid of her past life, forget all about it, other times she believes her entire identity depends on her *Cuba memory*, shards of memory leading her back to a time when she was very young, still living in Habana. She both wishes to discard this past self and clings to it madly. The reader finds her in this conflict, which is polarised by her pregnancy. Bringing a new life into the world prompts a crisis of meaning in the protagonist, who starts to desperately pursue her own self and meaning.

Maja's hysteric manifests itself in peculiar ways, and it is symbolised by her different body parts, such as her hair. Hair is a complex motif in *The Opposite House*, one that represents the greatest intimacy, closeness, expressed through corporeal connection. It "is at the cutting edge between the material and the figurative" (Cooper 2008, 53). Showalter's redefinition of hysteria as "a universal human response to emotional conflict" (1997, 7) reveals it to be a visceral experience of crisis, caused by a past trauma that the subject is incapable of processing. Maja's hair is gradually revealed to be the representation of her femininity, of her identity, and it also comes to represent the traumatic experiences the girl goes through. When a boyfriend makes her cut her hair, she exhibits signs of disturbance, which the boy registers: "he said he was unhappy that I didn't seem to love my hair in its natural state" (2007, 30). This instance shows a poisoned individual who is coerced into surrendering herself. The result is visceral: "I ran a bath; the hysteric came and I was persuaded to try and drown myself" (2007, 30). Maja and her reaction show how her body becomes the communicator of her inner struggles. As psychologist Richard A. Chefetz states, "hysteria is not always describable via language because traumatic emotional experience is partly embodied" (2017, 83).

Maja's hair and hysteric belong together, and they are there to forbid Maja from surrendering her power, her identity. It is not surprising then that her hair is difficult to manage, and it is Amy Eleni (who also has a very distinct idea about her own hysteric) who can handle it. Amy Eleni knows Maja, knows her hair, and thus she brings out a new "personality" from them: "really my hair is simple—once it is washed and fed with coconut oil, it sighs and falls asleep" (2007, 67). Maja's hair emphasises her femininity, separates her from men, but it also highlights her African origins. In Brenda Cooper's words, "[t]he visceral texture of African hair stands for the racism that unites black people's experience outside of Africa" (2008, 53). This realisation brings the hair closer to Maja's hysteric, since both manifestations prove to have dual roles for her. They anchor her to her past, to her origins, and thus they are meant to help her maintain her identity; but this anchoring, since it happens in the Western world, always singles her out, never allows her to truly belong. It ultimately leads to a sense of liminal existence, Maja finding herself between two cultures, belonging to neither of them.

Cousins discusses the alien aspect of this experience, too, when she focuses on the subject's positioning between two cultures. As she states, women are "expected to retain aspects of the 'traditional' through multiculturalism's insistence on diversity (often reinforced by their own patriarchal cultures), they are also required by multiculturalism to conform to the host culture by dispensing with aspects of

traditions which discomfort the host” (2012, 13). In Maja’s case hair is a visible link connecting her to her African identity, and she notices how African mothers ban their daughters “from straightening [their hair] and [instead help them] comb [it] out into a fan” (Oyeyemi 2007, 93). But this, and its manifestation as her hysteric, is exactly the force that prevents Maja from conforming to the Western world, and thus finding a new home there.

The destructive nature of the hysteric is revealed most expressively through instances when it urges Maja to take her life, such as her realisation that “[t]here’s someone inside of me, and she says I must die” (2007, 35). Although sometimes liberating, the hysteric is rather possessive, keeping Maja under her influence. It takes over her body, just like Amy Eleni’s hysteric does with hers: it “walks three paces behind me at all times, and when it’s all a bit much, I kind of hang back and she kind of hurries forward, and she jumps on my back and takes me down. Then she stands up in my place” (2007, 31).

Oyeyemi’s novel shows hysteria in all its complexity: how it is an integral part of being a woman, at once protective and destructive. *The Opposite House* sheds light on the quasi-paradoxical nature of the hysteric, of its characters’ alter egos, through building heavily on a system of dualities (sanity/insanity, nurture/inhibit, ordinary/supernatural, physical/metaphysical, etc.). The threshold between the opposites is constantly surpassed, and woman in the novel easily navigates between the two states. Through this presentation of the hysteric as natural, as visceral, womanhood itself is redefined and hysteria is reappropriated.

## 6 Conclusion

Maja’s life, her ego and alter ego (a.k.a. her hysteric) is sometimes mirrored, other times overtaken by one of the Goddesses of Santería: Yemaya Saramagua. The girl finds herself between two worlds, between her past self and present life, and the novel presents her struggles to find herself, to anchor her existence somewhere in this in-betweenness. The hysteric, which is sometimes malevolent, other times benevolent, expresses the protagonist’s identity crisis in the novel. However, the acceptance of this complexity, of the character’s psyche is what ultimately gives her solace.

The women of *The Opposite House* move freely through the spheres of the physical and metaphysical, achieving this freedom through their hysterics. They give in to the practice of *Gelassenheit*, slowly descending into holy madness, at the limit of voice and silence. Despite all her struggles to voice herself and thus understand her identity, Maja needs to realise that there are things that will never be uttered.

It is the hysteric through which the characters in *The Opposite House* reach utter dislocation: they relinquish their body and become passive witnesses to the actions their alter ego—the hysteric—performs. This state plunges the psyche into an abyss, dislocating it from its body, from its surroundings. This holy madness is a powerful trance-like state, connecting the physical world to the otherworldly dimension inhabited by the Yoruba gods.

Maja's willingness to give in to her hysteric is ultimately the sign of her autonomy over her own body, over her fate. The entire novel is angled towards the redefinition of hysteria with the purpose of redeeming it for womanhood. Making use of the rich history of the term, of the psychological state commonly associated with womanhood, meant to denigrate it, Oyeyemi's novel appropriates all these traits and by showing us the intimacy, the ordinary and extraordinary nature of this feminine existence, it redefines hysteria. Maja, as a twenty-first-century woman defined by her past and present, by her personal history and the history of her people, by the advent of her son and the future it brings into motion, retains her essence, her true self through her hysteric. This alter ego is there as a reminder of herself, as a resistance in an oppressive society.

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POSTMODERN CHILDREN  
AND *THE CEMENT GARDEN* OF IAN MCEWAN

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Postmodern childhood narratives often explore disturbing themes, break social conventions and taboos. In order to comment on this kind of representation, this study will introduce Ian McEwan's controversial novel *The Cement Garden* (1978), the story of four children who, in the middle of a particularly hot summer, find themselves orphaned. The novel narrated by fourteen-year-old Jack explores such themes as sexuality, incest, death, the struggles of coming of age, isolation, gender roles and parent-child relationships.

*Keywords:* child, childhood, postmodern, Ian McEwan.

## 1 Introduction

The twentieth century or the “century of the child,” as called by James and Prout (1997, 1), witnessed a great increase in the attention paid to childhood and children. Psychologist James Sully, the author of *Studies of Childhood*, wrote at the very end of the nineteenth century: “With the growth of a poetic or sentimental interest in childhood there has come a new and different kind of interest. Ours is a scientific age, and science has cast its inquisitive eye on the infant [...] we now speak of the beginning of a careful and methodical investigation of child nature.” (1993, 4) He was right. By the 1970s psychologists, sociologists and anthropologists have offered extensive accounts on various aspects of childhood and the child. In 1960 French historian Philip Ariés published his controversial book *Centuries of Childhood*, in which he questioned some of the existing assumptions about the nature of childhood. Even though some of the book's arguments no longer stand their ground, Ariés should be credited for his “underlying assumption [...] that childhood and its subculture are always, in some sense, made and not found” (Immel and Witmore 2006, 1). What Ariés questioned is the belief that childhood is simply a biological state, that of immaturity. Instead, he put forward the suggestion that childhood is a social construct, a product of a particular cultural setting, rather than something natural. The biological immaturity of children was of course not denied, but it was pointed out that “ways in which that immaturity is understood

is a fact of culture” (James and Prout 1997, 7). To put it another way: childhood is not universal, the view of children and childhood has changed throughout history and it is understood differently across cultures. In contemporary Western society childhood is seen as a phase very distinct from adulthood, a separate world of its own—a phase that itself is divided into categories such as early childhood or adolescence. Of course, there are generally accepted ideas about what children in a particular phase should or should not do and be like. At the same time, we still seem to be rather confused about who the child really is and what our attitude should be towards that mysterious phase called childhood.

The literary representation of children has always revolved around the same, often opposing ideas: children have been considered vulnerable, savage, innocent, imaginative, sensitive, powerless, sexual creatures, often, as in our present age, all at the same time. Today, childhood is one of the major themes in British adult fiction. What critics tend to point out is that the vast majority of these authors seem to be fascinated with the “violation of childhood through various encounters with the adult world” (Childs 2007, 124). Ian McEwan is one such writer, and the controversy surrounding him stems from the way he explores disturbing themes, such as rape, incest or murder, and breaks social conventions and taboos in his short stories and novels, which centre around child characters. His books “provoked cultural debates, moral outcries” and also earned him the nickname “Ian Macabre” (Groes 2013, 1). His “literature of shock”—as Jack Slay puts it—is especially prevalent in his early works: *First Love, Last Rites* (1975), *In Between the Sheets* (1978), *The Cement Garden* (1978) and *The Comfort of Strangers* (1981); his desire to startle the reader, however, is “evident throughout his canon” (1996, 7). The purpose of these and numerous other childhood narratives of the postmodern age is to reflect on social conventions, cultural norms, and to open up a discussion about rarely discussed taboos. These narratives critique our societal assumptions about childhood, which is itself a new way to represent children in literature. They highlight that what ‘the child’ is cannot be defined, as children and childhood are ideas constructed by our understanding of what they should be like. This study aims to discuss some of the unconventional themes found in *The Cement Garden* and thereby reflect on the way it responds to moral concerns and to literary conventions that idealise children.

## 2 An Unconventional Narrator

One of the most obvious signs of McEwan’s unconventional approach to children can be observed in the voice of his narrator. Jack’s reliability, just as well as his grey, morose, and detached voice that seemingly lacks all emotions, have received a fair

amount of critical attention. These qualities seem to suggest that Jack, the “antithesis of the Romantic child is some kind of pathological monster.” (Williams 1996, 221)

First of all, I wish to argue that the function of Jack’s distinct voice is to draw attention to how this developmental stage, being on the brink of adolescence, is often lonely and isolated. David Malcolm in *Understanding Ian McEwan* investigates why one senses that there is “something not quite right” with regard to the narration in *The Cement Garden* (2002, 49). One of his main arguments is that Jack’s emotional reserve denies sentimental sympathy and fosters the alienation of the reader. However, I believe what Jack’s strange voice draws attention to is the very state he is in: he is an outsider, caught between childhood and adulthood, “between identities,” as Jim Byatt puts it (2015, 72). The reader’s sympathy for the character can very well emerge from this awareness. Jack’s search for identity is illustrated, for example, in the following scene:

For a moment I perceived clearly the fact of her death, and my crying became dry and hard. But then I pictured myself as someone whose mother had just died and my crying was wet and easy again. Julie’s hand was on my shoulder. As soon as I became aware of it I saw, as though through the kitchen window, the unmoving tableau we formed, sitter and stander, and I was unsure briefly which was me. [...] I wanted to go and look at myself in the mirror. (McEwan 2006, 53)

As opposed to critics who focus on Jack’s alienation, Christopher Ricks associates Jack’s life stage with the “shadow line.” He says adolescents are special in the sense that they are perfect outsiders, constantly irritated by what is coming, by what is on the other side of the shadow line (qtd. in Hunter 2007, 131). What this idea can also explain is why Jack’s voice is, in many ways, adult-like. This is illustrated, for example, in the following observations: “The people who slept on that mattress, I thought, really believed they were in the bedroom. They took it for granted that it would always be so. I thought of my own bedroom, of Julie’s, my mother’s, all rooms that would one day collapse.” (McEwan 2006, 35)

With regards to Jack’s reliability, two things need to be pointed out. Firstly, categorising him as unreliable due to his age is problematic. Young adult and child characters are also often considered unreliable due to their youth, which is associated with impaired judgment (Brugman 2014, 3). McEwan seems to be refuting this very idea by bestowing Jack with an insight that is far from innocent. Alyssa Brugman brings up the example of *Huckleberry Finn*, in which the narrator’s innocence leads him to make overly charitable judgments about the characters in the novel. Jack, however, is not only observant but also quite right in his judgments. For instance he describes his father as “frail, irascible and obsessive” (McEwan 2006, 2), with qualities which are perfectly in line with his actions in the novel. What also needs to be highlighted is the importance of the motif of unreliable memory. Malcolm’s other main argument concerns this topic:

In the course of the text, one comes to see Jack as an unreliable narrator. His evasions are not always clearly marked, but, already indicated in the strangely detached focus of the narration, they are emphasized in one passage where Jack is confronted with another's view of events, that of his sister Sue. In her diary, which she reads to him, she records some matters that the reader knows well from Jack's account—for example, his physical appearance. She, however, also records his violence toward the others in the house, a violence of which Jack has said little. (2002, 48)

This is how Sue records Jack's violent outburst: "Jack was in a horrible mood. He hurt Tom on the stairs for making a noise. He made a great scratch across his head and there was quite a lot of blood." (McEwan 2006, 91) However, Jack also records this event: "The day before I had made Tom cry by nicking his head with my fingernail" (2006, 84). The events are described from two different subjective perspectives: Sue's description presents it as a major incident, resulting in a 'great' scratch and a lot of blood. Jack also acknowledges it has happened; he, however, uses the word 'nick' to imply a small wound. Jack also tells of other times when he was violent: "I went to smack her hard on the back of her neck but Julie cried out, 'You dare!' so sharply that I drew back startled and my hand swept over the top of Sue's head" (2006, 110); or, "Leaning across the table I caught hold of Tom's bib and pulled him towards me. He gave out a little whimper and then a scream. [...] I had pulled Tom a good way along the table when I let go and he fell back into Julie's arms." (2006, 113) There is no evasion on Jack's part. What needs to be pointed out instead, is the unreliable nature of memory, a motif which recurs throughout the text. There are several instances when the children disagree about how particular events happened:

I said it was the first time it had rained since Mother died. Julie and Sue said it had rained several times since. When I asked them when exactly, they said they could not remember. Sue said she knew she had used her umbrella because it was now in her bedroom, and Julie said she remembered the sound the windscreen wipers made in Derek's car. (2006, 110)

They also discuss that no one can remember what Sue did the day Julie first 'knew' that their mother was dying: "And you sang 'Greensleeves,'" said Sue. 'But what did I do?' We could not remember what Sue had done, and she kept saying, 'I know I did something?'" (2006, 57)

### 3 The Wasteland and the Garden

The setting of the novel, the isolated, Gothic house surrounded by an urban wasteland, underlines the children's peculiar relationship with life: on the one hand their lives are just beginning, and on the other, they are surrounded with death

and destruction. *The Cement Garden* avoids any reference to concrete places: the location remains unnamed all through the novel, but it is argued by Malcolm that it is instantly recognisable for those who grew up in the 1960s urban Britain (2002, 55). The siblings' situation is rather a symptom of a broader social problem than an exceptional case. From Jack's description we learn that the family's house stands on a piece of empty land, as the other houses were knocked down for a motorway that had never been built. The rest of the city is filled with concrete tower blocks standing "on wide aprons of cracked asphalt where weeds were pushing through" (McEwan 2006, 24). Jack observes these buildings on more than one occasion, pointing out their uniformity and sadness and questions how a family can live inside a "rectangle of concrete" (2006, 124). Urban desolation is presented as general. This is further emphasised by McEwan's choice of simple, common names for the children and by the fact that the parents are only ever referred to as mother and father.

Most of this "grimly Gothic" (Bradbury, qtd. in Stierstorfer 2003, 307) novel takes place within the boundaries of the family home, a "domestic castle with thick walls, squat windows and crenellations above the front door" (McEwan 2006, 23). Gothic fiction often explores narratives of violence in the family and in late-twentieth century English Gothic tales the home is also often seen as a space "stalked by patriarchal control" (Quéma 2015, 178). The dark secret that the children guard is also a feature of the Gothic. In the cellar below the house the mother's corpse lies hidden while the odour of decomposition slowly fills the house.

The home is not only geographically isolated. Even before the death of the parents, contact with the outside world is limited, the children go to school and are allowed outside but the home itself is sealed from outsiders:

No one ever came to visit us. Neither my mother nor my father when he was alive had any real friends outside the family. They were both only children, and all my grandparents were dead. My mother had distant relatives in Ireland whom she had not seen since she was a child. Tom had a couple of friends he sometimes played with in the street, but we never let him bring them into the house. (McEwan 2006, 23)

The father's attitude mirrors that of the outside world: nature, the natural needs to be controlled. When his physical condition stops him from maintaining order in the garden, he decides to cover it in concrete:

It became apparent, probably through my mother, that the plan was to surround the house, front and back, with an even plane of concrete. My father confirmed this one evening. 'It will be tidier,' he said. 'I won't be able to keep up the garden now' (he tapped his left breast with his pipe) 'and it will keep the muck off your mother's clean floors.' He was so convinced of the sanity of his ideas that through embarrassment, rather than fear, no one spoke against the plan. (McEwan 2006, 16)

The garden under the hands of the father becomes a mere construction, void of life. It is not possible for the children to grow up in a Rousseauian natural environment, they are prisoners in a concrete house surrounded by a concrete garden and a concrete wasteland. The fate of the garden, however, the images of weeds pushing through concrete, serve as symbols that “nature returns no matter how hard it is pitchforked out” (Childs 2012, 177). If we consider the novel a characteristically postmodern work, this failed attempt to impose order on chaos can be seen as a criticism of modernism, which is seen to have a highly controlled attitude to reality by some scholars, such as Linda Hutcheon or Ihab Hassan. In this sense what we are presented with here is how in postmodernism chaos can no longer be contained. Here, the fathers and mothers are dead and chaos reigns.

#### 4 Homes and Boys

*The Cement Garden* is ultimately about “the absent parents” as McEwan stated in an interview (Deveney 2005). Of course, much of the novel focuses on the orphaned children; the parents, however, have been largely ‘absent’ even before their death. They fail to provide a proper nurturing environment and they are unable to transmit healthy values and attitudes or serve as role models for their children. Child characters left alone with the responsibility of building their own identities without parental guidance “often end up fearful or damaged” in childhood narratives of the 1970s (Sands-O’Connor 2012, 227). Jack is left alone in his wrestling with the problem of identity versus social norms. All through the novel there are references to his concern with masculinity. “I stood up and held the comic out of sight. I wished I had been reading the racing page of my father’s paper, or the football results. [...] I hooked my thumbs into my pockets, moved my weight on to one foot and narrowed my eyes a little.” (McEwan 2006, 9) His masculine behaviour mirrors that of the father’s: he is very insecure, yet he desires to be perceived as tough. This is emphasised in the scene when he is looking at himself in the mirror: “I stared at my own image till it began to dissociate itself and paralyse me with its look. It receded and returned to me with each beat of my pulse, and a dark halo throbbed above its head and shoulders. ‘Tough,’ it said to me. ‘Tough.’ And then louder, ‘Shit... piss... arse.’” (McEwan 2006, 21) Jack’s constant rereading of the science fiction book Sue had given him and his fantasies about Commander Hunt reveal his desire for a role model. Commander Hunt is the opposite of Jack’s father: a fearless leader and at the same time quite a domestic-minded person. Jack’s desire to become like him is evident in such scenes as when he is confronted with Julie’s boyfriend, Derek, a rich snooker-player with “broad shoulders” and at a “perfect age of twenty-three”: jealousy and the feeling of



inferiority drive Jack to run “upstairs with the book to the bedroom” and to slam “the door hard” (McEwan 2006, 94).

Jack feels the need to conform to expected gender roles but he also sees how superficial clothes are, as far as identity is concerned. In the scene when Tom dresses up as a girl for the first time, Jack’s views are confronted by those of Julie. Julie claims that for Jack it is humiliating to look like a girl because he thinks it is humiliating to be a girl. Jack is unable to defend his opinion, his answer signals that the view is not his own, it was passed on to him, it is the societal view:

Girls can wear jeans and cut their hair short and wear shirts and boots because it’s okay to be a boy, for girls it’s like promotion. But for a boy to look like a girl is degrading, according to you, because secretly you believe that being a girl is degrading. Why else would you think it’s humiliating for Tom to wear a frock?’ ‘Because it is,’ I said determinedly. (McEwan 2006, 47)

Jack’s view is contrasted with that of Tom’s friends from his own age group, who are not yet bothered by such social norms: “Quite often now Tom played in the street in Sue’s skirt. None of the other children teased him like I thought they would. They did not even seem to notice.” (McEwan 2006, 86) Jack himself is both excited and scared upon seeing a cross-dressed Tom: “How easy it was to be someone else. I crossed my arms and hugged myself. They are only clothes and a wig, I thought, it is Tom dressed up. But I was looking at another person, someone who could expect a life quite different from Tom’s.” (McEwan 2006, 77)

## 5 Matters of Sexuality

*The Cement Garden*, on the one hand, highlights the importance of proper sexual education and, on the other, calls attention to the dangers of misinformation and the repression of healthy sexual curiosity in children. Laurenz Volkmann argues that sexuality in *The Cement Garden* is extremely disturbing, which is often the claim made against the novel:

Sexuality and violence are incorporated in the novel in a uniquely shocking and appalling way. This is done in a seemingly unemotional rendering of how social taboos are broken, which on the one hand transgresses earlier modes of dealing with the topic; on the other hand, simultaneously by means of the novel’s becoming a cult novel due to its graphic and seemingly tasteless descriptions of sex and violence, it turns these transgressions into ‘marketable’ assets. (2003, 308)

Of course, there are numerous contradictory discourses with regards to the sexuality of children (Robinson 2013, 6). They can be considered asexual, innocent and vulnerable to adult exploitation. Some view children’s sexuality as dangerous to

society and to the moral development of the child, while others consider it normal and critical for the development of a vibrant society (Robinson 2013, 6). While during the twentieth century, the earlier denial of children's sexuality continued, a new discourse was introduced primarily through the works of Sigmund Freud, who challenged the ideas of childhood innocence and argued that children are sexual beings and they need to express their sexuality (Robinson 2013, 49). In the progressive era, children's sex-play was seen as healthy and its repression was thought to be one of the reasons behind neurosis in adulthood. So, parents were encouraged to accommodate their children's erotic impulses and curiosities, as they were perceived to be ways that children learned about the world (Robinson 2013, 90). By the 1980s another re-evaluation of childhood sexuality had started and once again it came to be considered something dangerous to children:

The re-evaluation was largely a result of the recognition of child sexual abuse as a widespread social phenomenon, and its reconceptualization from a practice in which the victims were often blamed for the behaviour. [...] In this context, children's vulnerability is linked to their lack of knowledge of sexual behaviours and to their limited access to power. (Robinson 2013, 50)

Most readers are shocked by McEwan's explicitness "by which they usually mean his description of sexual games: the narrator 'knowingly, knowing nothing' plays with his two sisters" (Walkowitz 2008, 507). Volkmann's phrase, "seemingly tasteless descriptions of sex," highlights how a taboo topic, such as sexual experimentation between children, ends up being labelled as tasteless, regardless of the mode of description. As it can be seen in the following excerpt, Jack's descriptions, explicit as they may be, are not tasteless or vulgar: "Sue was rather thin. Her skin clung tightly to her rib cage and the hard muscular ridge of her buttocks strangely resembled her shoulder blades. Faint gingerish down grew between her legs." (McEwan 2006, 11) The naked body is something strange and curious for the children, as it is highlighted in the game itself: they are scientists and aliens. Such games are widely recognised methods by which children try to understand the world and satisfy their curiosity (Goldman and Goldman 1988, 148). An important point brought up by Ronald and Juliette Goldman is that these games are very common because of all the sexual secrecy practiced by the adult world (1988, 148). This is emphasised in the novel through Jack's assumption that the reason why Sue put an end to their games is that she had learned something at school and was ashamed of herself. The other issue is highlighted in connection with Jack's masturbation. In this case the mother chooses to talk about it, but instead of accommodating Jack's "erotic impulses and curiosities," as parents were encouraged to do in the era (Robinson 2013, 90), she associates the negative aspects of Jack's coming of age with his giving in to the urge to masturbate:

“Yes, look at yourself,” she said in a softer voice. “You can’t get up in the mornings, you’re tired all day, you’re moody, you don’t wash yourself or change your clothes, you’re rude to your sisters and to me. And we both know why that is. Every time...” She trailed away, and rather than look at me stared down at her hands in her lap. “Every time... you do that, it takes two pints of blood to replace it.” (McEwan 2006, 29)

Jack’s response is rebellion: “I abandoned all the rituals of personal hygiene. I no longer washed my face or hair or cut my nails or took baths. I gave up brushing my teeth. In her quiet way my mother reproved me continuously, but I now felt proudly beyond her control.” (McEwan 2006, 21) This parental attitude is what Michel Foucault also refers to in the 1975 interview ‘Body and Power.’ He calls attention to the fact that this view on masturbation is a social construct as the restriction on it hardly started until the eighteenth century, when suddenly people started to be appalled by the fact that children masturbate. Sexuality became an object of concern, analysis and control; as a result, the body became “the issue of conflict between parents and children, the child and the instances of control” (1975, 55).

Committing incest can be seen as a cure for the children’s isolation, it is an attempt to keep the family together. As McEwan puts it “the oedipal incestuous forces—are also paradoxically the very forces which keep the family together” (qtd. in Hamilton 2010, 19). None of what happens is seen as abnormal or immoral by the children, rather as something completely natural. Childs compares the novel with *The Lord of the Flies* and says what we are reminded of is how the adult world “provides checks not on the children’s natural aggression but on their natural sexuality” (2012, 175). Byatt writes:

Reading sibling incest between minors is infused, beyond the instinctual resistance to incest, with the multiple dangers and stigmas associated with paedophilia, voyeurism, the sexually active minor and the private bodily exploration that takes place in the adolescent bedroom. On top of this, the failure in culture to distinguish fully between incest and rape creates an unease that is only alleviated by the exposition of the act in its non-abusive form, which is nonetheless subject to the same basic prohibitions as any other portrayal of alternative modes of sexuality. (2015, 65)

The growing fear of sexual abuse starting in the 1980s also resulted in the demonization of anything that can, in any way, be connected to paedophilia. The naturalisation of sexuality, which is derived from cultural assumptions about the asexuality of children both in mind and body, has achieved a moral ascendancy. Children and even adolescents are seen as innocent but susceptible to inappropriate sexuality. The problem with this is that anyone who “challenges the taken-for-grantedness” or “questions the validity” of these ideas, risks being seen as an apologist for the sexual abuse of children (Hawkes and Egan 2008, 194). Georges Bataille

in *Erotism* writes about how nakedness can be contrasted with self-possession: “It is a state of communication revealing a quest for a possible continuance of being beyond the confines of the self” (1962, 17). While previously there has been an emphasis on the external, on the voyeuristic gaze of Jack, the focus shifts to the internal in the last scene of the novel. The emphasis is not on the sexual act itself but on closeness and unity, as opposed to the feelings of loneliness, isolation and exclusion that permeate the rest of the novel: “I took her hand and measured it against mine. It was exactly the same size. We sat up and compared the lines on our palms, and these were entirely different. We began a long investigation of each other’s body.” (McEwan 2006, 136)

## 6 Conclusion

Ian McEwan and many other writers since, have tried to construct an unsentimental version of childhood, raising questions about the innocence and morality of children. The absence of moral concern is one of the main charges that has been levelled against *The Cement Garden*, while in fact, as it has been pointed out in this study, it discusses a number of serious issues, such as parental absence, physical and social isolation, the suppression of natural development or the harmful effects of certain ideas about childhood. McEwan’s uniqueness lies in that he constantly underscores his own uncertainty in treating these questions (Head 2013, 46), which points at how, at least from a postmodern perspective, there are no absolutes, no certainties, no universal understanding. Childhood, in fact, the whole world is socially constructed by us, humans (Dahlberg, Moss and Pence 1999, 23).

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## CLLOUD NINE ON PAGE AND STAGE: A CASE STUDY OF INTERNATIONAL ADAPTABILITY

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Caryl Churchill's *Cloud Nine* (1979) is regarded as a contemporary classic of British theatre. The play's formal innovation and revolutionary approach to gender and (post-)colonialism has been analysed thoroughly and often. However, several critics question *Cloud Nine*'s relevance and adaptability today. This case study aims to demonstrate how the European theatrical tradition mixed with original methods helped a Hungarian theatre group, K.V. Company adapt *Cloud Nine* to a contemporary European stage. The analysed performance is a testimony to *Cloud Nine*'s lasting relevance and international adaptability.

*Keywords:* contemporary British theatre, Caryl Churchill, *Cloud Nine*, performance analysis

### 1 *Cloud Nine* on Page

The 1970s was a decade of political playwriting in alternative British theatre. Feminism and socialism were popular points of thematic interest. Established fringe venues and experimental performance groups alike aimed to push the boundaries of theatrical expression that would suit these topics. *Cloud Nine*, developed near the end of the decade between 1978–79, is in many ways a typical 1970s play. However, it not only reflects the era of its creation, but points towards new, exciting forms of theatre. In the name of democratic artistic collaboration, Caryl Churchill joined the Joint Stock Theatre Group in a three-week workshop on sexual politics, where she, along with director Max Stafford-Clark, could work closely with actors from diverse sexual backgrounds. Geraldine Cousin describes the group's methodology as going "from the inside to outwards" (1989, 38), sharing personal experiences to discover larger patterns. They used improvisations techniques on stereotypes (Itzin 1980, 286) and status games (Cousin 1989, 38) to explore the topics of sex, politics and power. During the workshops, Churchill noticed that a common theme seemed to emerge: "the parallel between sexual and colonial oppression" (1985, 245), which became the main theme of the play. "For the first time I brought together two preoccupations of mine," she is quoted saying by Catherine Itzin, "people's internal states of being and the external

political structures which affect them, which make them insane” (1980, 287). The workshop method allowed her to experiment with new forms of playwriting.

The play has a diptych structure (Gobert 2014, 85): it is “divided into two dissimilar units” (Cousin 1989, 39). The first half is set in colonial Africa, focusing on a British family who have thoroughly internalised the sexual repression their stereotypically sexist Victorian society preaches. It propels them to engage in an absurd and shocking variety of sexual relationships with each other, friends, and visitors. “The first [act] is [...] fast-moving, and tightly structured, with clear, boldly-drawn characters,” Cousin observes. “The second half at first seems to be from a different play” (1989, 39). Act Two is set in 1979 London; but for the family, only twenty-five years passed. The children are all grown up, but they are just as unhappy as their parents were. The freedom sexual liberation promises seems unachievable as Victorian and colonial attitudes linger on. The family still have not reached “cloud nine,” i.e. the state of perfect happiness, but now they at least have the means to pursue it, and the play ends on a potentially hopeful note as Betty, the mother, embraces her past self after finding her sexual and personal independence.

*Cloud Nine* was written in an era of rapid cultural change, when new conceptions of history emerged: following the cultural turn of the early 1970s, the focus shifted to microhistories instead of grand narratives (Fischer-Lichte 2014, 73). History was no longer “a list of turning points,” but “an endless process” (Fischer-Lichte 2014, 75), the story of which is told in the unheard voices of everyday people. Churchill keeps returning to this idea with plays such as *Vinegar Tom* (1976), *Light Shining in Buckinghamshire* (1976), *Top Girls* (1982), *Fen* (1983) *Mad Forest* (1990) or *This is a Chair* (1999), where history is presented as a series of small actions by everyday, often marginalized people both *affected* by their time and *shaping* it. In *Cloud Nine*, Clive, the head of the family is the “controlling agent” (Cousin 1989, 39) of Act One: “the society it shows [...] is male-dominated and firmly structured. In Act Two, more energy comes from the women and the gays” (Churchill 1985, 246). Clive only returns as a ghost in Act Two, representing the heritage of patriarchy and colonialism which will take a while to exorcise, but he is rendered powerless as Betty, his wife, starts realizing her own power. He is no longer in the narrative focus, and history is told by and shaped through his sexually independent wife, queer son and bisexual daughter.

In both acts, the family is presented as a “unit of power relations” (Gobert 2014, 87) with “competing hierarchies of gender [...], rank, occupation, [and] age” (Gobert 2014, 95). As Darren Gobert points out, in Act One, these hierarchies are



kept intact through “discipline and punish” (204, 86).<sup>1</sup> Any sort of transgression is met with retribution, either through internalised discipline and self-control (Edward [to his father]: “I was playing with Vicky’s doll again and I know it’s wicked of me [...] please beat me and forgive me” [Churchill 1985, 276]), or external forces (in the form of a (grand)motherly slap). However, “discipline and punish” are revealed to be ineffective: while punishment follows minor transgressions, actual sins do not end in reckoning. The family’s friend, Harry, takes sexual advantage of the underage Edward, which is never discovered despite the warning signs. Clive punishes Betty for trying to elope with Harry, but the fact that Clive is cheating on her with their neighbour, Mrs. Sanders, never has any consequence for him, and in the end he banishes his lover, blaming that she was the one who initiated the kiss Betty witnesses. The lack of ethically motivated punishment, as well as the comedic framing of the events challenge the idea of “discipline and punish” as a device that is actually capable of upholding the competing hierarchies.

Indeed, Act Two shows the collapse of hierarchy based on gender, rank, occupation, or age. At the end Betty finds fulfilment as a senior, and her children, initially irritated by the helplessness of their aging mother, learn to accept her. Although Edward seems ashamed of his occupation as a gardener, and there is tension between the working-class Liv and her partner, the bourgeois intellectual Vicky, due to their status (Reinelt 1985, 52), the gap can be bridged despite occupation or rank, and the three of them end up in a relationship, living together as equals. Examining the gender roles in Act Two, Paola Botham observes that the contested gender role of “wife” seems to connect all main characters: “[r]eiterating the commentary on marriage from Act One, the struggle of Lin (Cathy’s mother), Victoria, Edward and Betty in Act Two can be summarised as a moving away from this given role in order to find autonomy, sexual fulfilment and more rewarding relationships” (Botham 2012, 119). However, despite these achievements, the cycle of patriarchy and colonialism is not yet broken. As Reinelt points out, “[w]hile Victorian sex-role stereotyping and political chauvinism were deadly [in Act One], contemporary role confusion and the residue of imperialism remain problematic [in Act Two]” (Reinelt 1985, 51). The confusion of gender roles will be discussed in detail in part II as I analyse how Ördög’s production (2017) reflects on the theoretical questions raised by the playtext.

Before concluding this short overview of *Cloud Nine*, I want to comment on the “residue of imperialism” (Reinelt 1985, 51). As Botham points out, critics of the play expressed the concern that *Cloud Nine* did not effectively challenge colonialism

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<sup>1</sup> Gobert is following Michel Foucault’s famous theories outlined in *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* [*Surveiller et punir: naissance de la prison*] (New York: Pantheon Books, 1977).

(2012, 120), as setting up a parallel between sexual oppression and imperialism might not be enough. Joshua, Clive's black servant, disappears from the play by Act Two, thus his narrative is broken and unresolved, unlike the white characters' story arcs. Doubling could be a saving grace, but since Joshua is played by a white actor,<sup>2</sup> this device cannot be used effectively to give resolution to his story (Gobert 2014, 98). Even though Act One ends with the powerful image of the loyal Joshua finally picking up a rifle and pointing it at his master, Clive, Act Two implies that Clive has survived the incident, and therefore this act of rebellion seems to have been effectively pointless. However, it can be argued that imperialism is still directly addressed in Act Two: in the middle of the orgy scene between Edward, Vicky and Lin, Lin's brother appears as a ghost, and we learn that he was a British soldier who died fighting in Northern Ireland. The ethno-nationalist armed conflict of The Troubles, and Britain's military involvement can doubtlessly be linked to imperial attitudes. The soldier's appearance seems to open a portal to other ghosts, as Clive, Edward, Maudy, Ellen, Harry and Betty from Act One re-appear shortly after his introduction. The British soldier quite literally brings colonial shadows with him, whose hauntings are all connected to sexuality and shame, uniting the focal points of colonial and sexual oppression. This nuanced structural trick may be easily lost in adaptation. Interestingly, the soldier was cut from Ördög's production, probably due to the fact that Hungarian audiences might not be familiar with the Northern Ireland conflict, and Hungary does not share Britain's colonialist history. However, with this cut, the re-appearance of the other ghosts was dropped, too, and thus Act Two does not reflect on colonialism at all, leaving Act One even more unresolved than in the original playtext. This raises the question whether the play is readily adaptable to European stages. Hungarian critic Natália Kovács argues that *Cloud Nine* is an essentially "British" play (regarding historical references, stereotypical characters, humour and politics), therefore a Hungarian audience is unable to fully relate to it, which decreases the play's emotional impact; she criticised Ördög's production for making no attempt to give it a Hungarian flavour (Kovács, 2017).

Another concern often mentioned in regard to the play's local and international reception is the criticism that Act Two, with its 1979 setting, is outdated (Botham 2012, 121–122), a sentiment shared by Hungarian critic Gábor Bóta (2018). Even the play's original director, Max Stafford-Clark noted after seeing a revival at the Old Vic in 1999 that "[...] the second half, which at the time had been absolutely contemporary, seems, twenty years later, to have become just as quaint and historical as the Victorian sex mores in the first half. So you thought, how

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<sup>2</sup> Joshua's cross-racial casting is to illustrate that "he wants to be what whites want him to be" (Churchill 1985, 245).

extraordinary that we all felt that at the moment and she captured it absolutely” (qtd. in Little and McLaughlin 2007, 195). However, Botham points out that the “machismo-in-disguise” attitudes in Act Two “serve as a warning for those who believe the age of post-feminism has arrived,”<sup>3</sup> and regards the piece to be a “relevant classic” (2012, 122).

These concerns will be examined in detail regarding Ördög’s production, focusing on the following questions: is the play adaptable to a non-British stage? Is it still relevant?

## 2 *Cloud Nine* on the Hungarian Stage

Ördög’s production is a somewhat unique adaptation of Caryl Churchill’s work in a Hungarian context. Although Churchill has been an internationally recognised contemporary playwright since the 1970s, her fame did not quite reach Hungary until 1993, when *Mad Forest*, directed by László Bagossy Sr., premiered at Kis Theatre, Pécs (Kurdi 2015). Hungarian audiences had to wait nearly a decade to see another Churchill production: *The Skriker* debuted in 2000 (dir. Sándor Zsótér, Víg Theatre, Budapest) and was revived in a new production in a collaboration of puppet and regular theatres in 2013 (dir. Gábor Tengely, Katona Theatre and Budapest Puppet Theatre, Budapest); *Far Away* and *A Number* premiered in 2005 (dir. Balázs Simon, Millenáris Theatre Company, Budapest), and the latter was revived in 2006 (dir. Edina Szántai, RS9 Theatre Company, Budapest); a student production of *Vinegar Tom* followed in 2015, directed by Natália Pikli and performed by the Ducking Witches Theatre Company at the 7th Veszprém English-Speaking Theatre Festival (Kurdi 2015).

Mária Kurdi points out that K.V. Company have a special interest in presenting Caryl Churchill on Hungarian stages: in 2008, they did a staged reading of *Blue Heart* (dir. Attila Grigor, MU Theatre), followed by a 2009 staged reading of *Cloud Nine* (dir. Pál Göttinger), which developed into a live performance, premiering in 2017 (Kurdi 2015). The 2017 production was directed by Ördög Tamás and premiered in Trafó House of Contemporary Arts, a popular independent venue in the heart of Budapest; the ensemble cast was invited by K.V. Company.<sup>4</sup> This section will analyse

<sup>3</sup> Note that following the #MeToo movement, where Stafford-Clarck was ousted for sexual harassment by *The Guardian*, his credibility regarding sensitivity to women’s rights and feminism came into question.

<sup>4</sup> The full cast was as follows: Zsuzsanna Száger (Mrs. Saunders/Lin) and Krisztina Ubranovits (Ellen/Betty) from KV Company; Sándor Terhes (Harry/Martin) from Krétakör; Zoltán Schmier (Clive/Cathy) from Central Theatre; Zoltán Szabó (Betty/Edward) from Pintér Béla and Company; independent actor Gábor Jászberényi (Joshua/Gerry); actor in training Emina Messaudi (Edward/Vicky).

this performance in detail to see whether *Cloud Nine* is adaptable to a European stage, and whether it is still relevant in the late 2010s. I will pay special attention to Brechtian and Grotowskian theatrical traditions, which significantly influenced the production, to argue that these traditional devices along the unique innovations of Ördög and K.V. Company made the play not only perfectly digestible to a Hungarian audience despite the reviewers' criticism, but also offered a contemporary, refreshing take on the play.

*Cloud Nine* was not performed on the main stage of Trafó House of Contemporary Arts, but downstairs, in the basement. Using a smaller space for the performance contributed to a forced familiarity between spectators and actors. The actors were waiting for the spectators in costume, playing their roles wordlessly in a tableau vivant. The members of the audience had to cross the playing area, thus entering the actor's sphere if they wanted to take their seat in the second row of chairs (see fig. 1).



Fig. 1. Seating arrangement in K.V. Company's *Cloud Nine*  
(the author's illustration)

This elimination of the elevated stage can be linked to Jerzy Grotowski's *poor theatre*, a performance style which aimed to remove everything that was not essential for theatre. Theatre, in Grotowski's terms, is the interaction between actor and spectator, a "direct connection between living human beings" (1999, 30).<sup>5</sup> Therefore, removing the stage removes a barrier between them. Once actors and spectators are literally on the same level, one can begin to experiment with seating arrangements to draw back the "psychological curtain" separating them (Grotowski

<sup>5</sup> Translations from Hungarian sources here and in the rest of the article are my own.

qtd. in Kékesi Kun 2007, 256). His collaboration with architect Jerzy Gurawski inspired Grotowski to re-arrange seating before each individual performance and see how it affects the spectators' reactions. (Grotowski 1999, 57). *Cloud Nine* did not go this far: while the seating arrangement was unconventional, it remained the same with each new performance. However, the arrangement reminds one of Grotowski and Gurawski's *Sakuntalá* (see fig. 2), and used the same mirroring effect: once seated, one group of spectators was facing the other, and thus made to confront their fellow spectators, not just the actors.

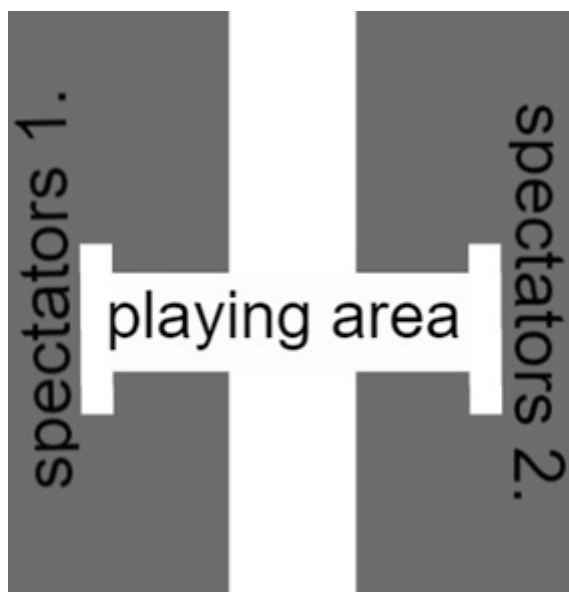


Fig. 2. Seating arrangement in Grotowski's *Sakuntalá*

(the author's illustration based on Árpád Kékesi Kun, *A rendezés színháza* [Budapest: Osiris, 2007], 524)

I believe that the small venue, the removal of an elevated stage, and the mirrored seating arrangement were fundamental devices to successfully adapt *Cloud Nine* for a contemporary Hungarian audience. Neither Grotowski nor Bertolt Brecht's practice or theories deal much with the unique connection that forms between the individual members of an audience removed from the usual position: both directors tended to treat the audience as a homogenous unit, and seemed to expect their reactions to the play to be rather uniform. This static understanding of the audience as a collection of witnesses (Grotowski), or a collection of critical viewers (Brecht) had still been innovative and shaped the way we look at European theatre. Zoltán Imre points out that usually, the audience is expected to behave as if they were simply *not present*: even though they may laugh at the jokes and are expected to clap at the end, otherwise the spectators need to be invisible and bodiless

(Imre 2003, 89). Just making the audience visible and accounting for their bodily presence is a significant step towards accounting for spectator/spectator relations.

The Ördög and K.V. Company production proved that the audience's emotional responses are far from uniform. For example, in the scene where the lesbian governess Ellen is made to marry the predatory and queer Harry, crying her heart out and holding a knife to cut the wedding cake or stab him, some members of the audience were shaking with laughter, others had a look of sympathy; there was shock on some faces, horror on others, nervous anticipation, even boredom or disinterest. Audiences will never react in the same way, and Ördög and K.V. Company highlighted this by using traditional theatrical techniques borrowed from Grotowski and Brecht. However, they foregrounded the critical provocation of actor and audience confrontation by encouraging *audience* and audience confrontation: our viewing experience was influenced by how other spectators reacted to the play. Furthermore, a contemporary Hungarian audience was physically inserted into the narrative of *Cloud Nine*: not just as backdrop, but participants through intensified emotional involvement and being put on display in an evenly lit theatrical space.

The performance took place under white lights, one of Brecht's signature visual signs (Fuegi 1994, 168). In his theory, the function of the unchanging white lights was to illuminate truth: "[t]his [white light] gave his productions tremendous visual clarity, in which everything was held up for analysis, like a body on a dissecting table" (Unwin, 2005). In Ördög and K.V. Company's production, the internal truth of *Cloud Nine* was illuminated, pointing out how gender is performed, how oppression operates through the ages. An external truth also came into the spotlight, revealing the performance as theatrical. The refusal to use traditional mood lighting, a practice also supported by Grotowski (1999, 15), and to involve the audience in the spotlight, made shedding light on uncomfortable truths the central theme of the play. It highlighted the lack of distance between the revealed truth of the play and the audience's position: maybe we are not as far away from restricting gender roles and oppression as we would like to think.

The set had the function to further close this distance. In Act One, a potted plant, a plastic chair and a bamboo curtain hinted at the African scenery, but the design was deliberately minimalist and unpolished. Act Two repurposed props and set elements from Act One, or just left them lying around: Ellen's wedding veil covered a desk that was used as an altar for Vicky's troubled husband, Martin. Items were liberated from their previous roles the same way as the characters, but they, too, had the burden of heritage: the white plastic chair could not just be a *chair* anymore, since the audience remembered it to be Clive's "throne," and thus Betty sitting in it comfortably in Act Two and symbolically taking her husband's dominant position was a subtle, but significant visual reminder. The featureless set gave the impression that the play could

take place anywhere, any time: not only was the jump between the Victorian and contemporary setting less of a leap, but it made the entire set more timeless and less markedly British (the playtext and most English productions involve a prominent Union Jack).<sup>6</sup> Both Brecht's epic theatre (Kékesi Kun 2007, 170) and Grotowski's poor theatre (1999, 9–20) recognised the potential of a stage stripped of its usual overpowering visuals; however, their ideas differed about costumes.

Grotowski sought to eliminate costumes in the same fashion as he wanted to minimize the impact of setting (1999, 13), while Brecht believed that historically accurate costumes would serve the desired alienation effect: audiences would not identify with the characters, and gain a historical perspective on the events (Kékesi Kun 2007, 176–177). Most British productions of *Cloud Nine* used lavish costumes,<sup>7</sup> but Ördög and the K.V. Company's production had a new approach. The costume design was expressly ironic in Act One: Betty, the Victorian housewife, was wearing a shirt with a monkey print, fake earrings, red lipstick, and a cheap hat. There was a hint of elegance, but it was all glamour—just as her gender was all pretence, since she was played by a male actor.<sup>8</sup> Similarly, Clive, her husband, was dressed for a safari, but he was wearing a leather jacket, exaggerating his masculinity at the cost of historical accuracy.

Although the costumes did not follow Brecht's preferred method of historical accuracy, I believe they achieved a similar V-effect through the playfulness and humour of the costume design. The characters looked like broadly drawn caricatures; furthermore, their costumes were constant reminders that the play was merely a performance, making identification impossible. However, for Act Two, the actors changed their costumes in front of the spectators, undressing in plain sight and tossing each other items of clothing as they put on new roles. The new roles and costumes felt more authentic than the ironic costumes of Act One, even though the audience witnessed the changing process. Since they fitted the contemporary setting, and with the exception of Cathy, the characters' gender, they were neither playful nor ironic—which just served to highlight the playful irony of Act One. Act Two, through the costumes alone, made the audience reconsider their relationship to the characters and the play's reality. It felt closer to home.

Besides the ironic costumes, nakedness played a significant role in the production, as both acts featured explicit sex scenes. In Act One, Clive performed oral sex

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<sup>6</sup> The Union Jack is not only part of the set design in most productions, but it is referred to in the opening song and features in Harry's magic trick; these references were also dropped from the Ördög and K.V. Company production, implying a further deliberate distancing from the play's British context without changing the play's location or the characters' nationality.

<sup>7</sup> A famous and recent example would be Thea Sharrock's 2007 production at Almeida Theatre, London.

<sup>8</sup> The purpose of the cross-gender casting is to reveal the characters' inner truth (Churchill 1985, 241–50).

on his mistress in the cover of her long skirt. Although nudity was only implied by her underwear being tossed aside, the actors were embarrassingly close to the audience, and their naturalistically performed passion provoked laughter. When Clive emerged, bodily fluids were smeared over his chin, and a spot on his trousers marked his discharge. He spilled some champagne over the spot to hide it from the characters arriving at the scene. A bottle of champagne played a role in Act Two's orgy scene, where the grown-up Edward opened the bottle and sprayed it around, drank from it then spat it out in playful indulgence. He was fully naked, while the other participants of the orgy, his sister Vicky and her girlfriend Lin, were wearing underwear. The physical presence and pervading smell of the champagne connected this scene to Clive's comparatively modest sex scene. While adultery was done in secret, and the spectators were complicit witnesses, the orgy of Edward, Vicky and Lin was proudly performed in public, forcing the audience to confront several taboos (full frontal male nudity, lesbian sex, public sex, ménage-à-trois, and incest). Grotowski argues that "breaking taboos, transgression [...] is only made possible through shock [...] undressing completely, revealing everything" (Grotowski 1999, 17). Péter P. Müller, however, is of the opinion that the taboo-breaking shock value of theatrical nudity has worn off due to its frequent usage on contemporary European stages (2019, 217). He adds that although it might provoke embarrassment, it will never be amusing (2019, 215). *Cloud Nine* put this theory to test, since both sex acts had a comedic framing, and the orgy scene, embarrassing and arguably shocking as it was, was highly entertaining.

Comedy is an often overlooked element of Brechtian theatre: "his dramatic world would scarcely suggest a climate favourable for comedy [...]. The race of men that inhabits this world is at best, mean and exploited—at worst, viscous and predatory;" however, "laughter is one of the most frequent responses his [Brecht's] plays elicit" (Hoffmann 1963, 157). This apparent contradiction can be resolved if one considers the role laughter plays in breaking tension. It can be an effective tool to invite audiences for introspection and make them question why they are laughing. *Cloud Nine* utilized dark humour for a similar effect, and connected humour to provocation, making the audience laugh when they should not. The details of a paedophile's horrific acts had a comic beat, and when Ellen, the governess threatened to kill herself and cried with anguish, collapsed on the floor, the spectators laughed. The events themselves were anything but amusing; but the dialogue, the dramaturgy and the acting made it comic. Still, laughter had a bitter aftertaste: the spectators might take a moment to examine their empathy, thus uniting the role of critical witness (capable of introspection) and participants with strong emotional reactions (responses which they were invited to examine).



However farcical the characters were, however caricaturistic, there were significant moments when the spectators felt for them. As Betty relates in Act Two how she masturbated the first time after her abusive husband's death, realising with wonder that she was perfectly capable of giving herself pleasure, a sympathetic lull washed over the audience: this part was performed as a monologue directly addressed to the spectators—the actress met the eye of the onlookers, and connected with them through the character's story. Similarly, despite the ironic humour of cross-dressing, one could not help but be charmed by the Victorian housewife Betty played by a man desperately trying to be feminine, or feel a conflicted sympathy for the paedophile Harry who could not live with his guilt, his expression tormented as he fretted with his hands. The performance refused to give up on humanity. It did not settle merely for a critical overview of human behaviour, contrasting humour with sympathy and alienation with empathy. It left conclusions up to its audience instead of settling on an unambiguous message.

It appears as if the play's critics expected *Cloud Nine* to be closer to our idea of Brecht's plays which are expected to have a clear, almost didactic political message, and wanted it to take a definite position on current sexual politics. The criticism that the play fails to be adaptable to a non-British audience and is not contemporary enough, connects to this misguided expectation. As David Barnett points out, the Brechtian tradition is frequently misunderstood and misrepresented: Brecht's world is "unstable and consequently changeable," his theatre "encourages spectators to pick out contradictions in society and seek new ways of reconciling them" (2015, 4–5). He does not offer clear answers. Neither does *Cloud Nine*. The Ördög and K.V. Company production relied on a Brechtian tradition that understands Brecht's theatre as "a fundamentally political theatre, because it asks audiences not to accept the status quo, but to appreciate that oppressive structures can be changed if the will for that exists" (Barnett 2015, 3). *Cloud Nine*, both on stage and page, is cautious not to settle for the status quo following the sexual revolution of the 1960s–70s: if Act Two's political message seems outdated, one might be under the debatable belief that we now live in a fully emancipated society, where issues of gender roles and sexuality are fully settled. Churchill's political theatre, like Brecht's, is too subtle to rub its message in. Her work is not defined by party politics or reactionist retorts. As Pikli points out, "Churchill does not focus on propaganda theatre: she mixes viewpoints, registers and various artistic genres, which make her plays work well on stage." Churchill projects globally relevant political questions on personal relationships, seeking the key component of the human condition (2018, 83).

Churchill insisted that Act One should not merely be a farce, "so that we do care about them [the characters] as people" and while Act Two clearly gets more

realistic, it “mustn’t get naturalistic” (qtd. in Fitzsimmons, Trussler and Page 1989, 48). Ördög and K.V. Company’s production achieved this by using Brechtian and Grotowskian methods in an innovative way, so the play had an empathic approach to its characters and established a close connection with the spectators. I would argue that through the humanity of the characters, the play does become universally adaptable and contemporary, since it reflects on the human condition beyond Victorian or 1970s English society. The close connection established with the spectators made a contemporary Hungarian audience involved in the performance and relate to it intimately. Using traditional techniques by established European directors such as Brecht and Grotowski also helped to make *Cloud Nine* feel more familiar, embedding it into a tradition that is recognizable to Hungarian theatre-goers. This opened the possibility to reflect on the relevance of its political message while enjoying it as a universal work of art.

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# LANGUAGES AND THE U.S. FEDERAL CONGRESS: ATTITUDES, POLICIES AND PRACTICES BETWEEN 1789 AND 1815

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The present paper examines the link between language and cultural identity by exploring the language-related attitudes, policies and ideologies as reflected in the written records of the U.S. Federal Congress from 1789 until roughly the end of the “Second War of Independence” in 1815. The results are compared and contrasted with the findings of a previous study which examined the founding documents of the United States from a similar perspective. The most salient language policy development of the post-1789 period is the overall shift from the symbolic, general language-related remarks towards the formulation of more substantive and general policies.

*Keywords:* United States; Congress; language policy; language ideology; identity construction

## 1 Introduction

The analysis of language-related remarks and language policy (LP) initiatives in the key national-level legislative documents of the pre-1789 period in the United States reveals that the clash of values between “national unity” and “equality” was not yet present in the early legislative and nation-building discourse (Czeglédi 2018, 134). Despite the fact that, for example, the *Federalist Papers* favored the idea of national unity and the creation of a strong central government, these principles were not translated into actionable calls for assimilationist legislation trying to limit or eliminate multilingualism. Traces of possible attempts to officialize English (or any other language) cannot be found in the official documents of the era: all things considered, there appeared to be an aversion to the formulation of general and substantive, national-level language policies. It does not mean, however, that contemporary legislators were absolutely reluctant to express their opinion about linguistic diversity: symbolic statements emphasizing the mission of the English language as a common bond between Americans and prophecies highlighting its expected role in facilitating rapprochement with Britain were not uncommon among the unofficial remarks.

Overall, genuine language policies were mostly specific and substantive in the Confederation period, geared towards the facilitation of international communication, negotiations, and treaty-making. Therefore, the role of the French language turned out to be dominant, which was also reinforced by contemporary American propaganda campaigns towards Quebec. Foreign languages in general (and German in particular) also appeared to be crucial: the German language—somewhat similarly to French—proved to be indispensable for domestic “soft power” campaigns as well. These included the publicization of the causes and aims of the American Revolution intended to rally German-Americans behind the cause—and also to persuade German-speaking, British-hired mercenaries to switch sides (Czeglédi 2018, 133–135).

The present analysis continues the exploration of overt and covert language ideologies and documented policy proposals during the second major phase of American nation-building from 1789 to the end of the “Second War of Independence” with Britain in 1815, focusing on the activities of the federal legislature. The examined 26-year-long period spans thirteen Congresses (from 1789 to 1815) and coincides with the presidencies of George Washington (2 terms), John Adams, Thomas Jefferson (2 terms) and the first half of James Madison’s second term. These years witnessed the doubling of the territory and the population of the United States and the decline of the First Party System, which eventually ushered in the Era of Good Feelings as the Federalists were losing their power base, leadership and political influence.

While incumbent presidents rarely addressed language-related matters until the 1820s—the first genuine LP-proposal came from Millard Fillmore in 1851, who suggested using Plain English for the text of the laws (Czeglédi 2019, 191)—their private or (semi-)official correspondence before or after the presidential tenure may nevertheless provide clues about their language-related views.

By and large, Federalist politicians, who mostly favored the idea of a strong central government, had generally been more receptive to the thought of regarding English to be a (or “the”) unifying force, a social glue—as mentioned e.g. in *The Federalist Papers: No. 2*. Federalists occasionally even suggested implementing national-level language planning, including the ultimately unsuccessful proposal to set up an American Language Academy in 1780. Future president John Adams believed that “the form of government has an influence upon language, and language, in its turn, influences not only the form of government, but the temper, the sentiments, and manners of the people” (Adams 1780, 45).

Anti-Federalists (later: Democratic-Republicans or Jeffersonian Republicans) were not very far from the Federalist views in this regard. Although they criticized heavily the pro-British, pro-“big government,” and anti-immigrant policies of the Federalists

(especially while the Republicans were in opposition), Jefferson also believed in the unifying power of English. In a letter to James Monroe, while musing about the possibility (or rather: necessity) of territorial expansion due to “rapid multiplication,” he envisioned that the United States one day might “cover the whole Northern, if not the Southern continent with a people speaking the same language, governed in similar forms, & by similar laws” (Jefferson 1801). Almost a decade later, after leaving the White House, Jefferson—despite his pro-French sympathies—acknowledged that “Our laws, language, religion, politics, & manners are so deeply laid in English foundations, that we shall never cease to consider their history as a part of ours, and to study ours in that as its origin” (Jefferson 1810). Nevertheless, centralized language planning was an unacceptable proposition for the ex-president: in a letter to the linguist and grammar book writer John Waldo, Jefferson argued that one should “appeal to Usage, as the arbiter of language” since “Purists... would destroy all strength & beauty of style, by subjecting it to a rigorous compliance with their rules” (Jefferson 1813). As far as foreign and classical languages were concerned, Jefferson proved to be a great friend of language learning, yet he was at least ambivalent toward the intergenerational transmission of minority languages (see e.g. Schmid 2001, 16; Pavlenko 2002, 168).

## 2 Aims, Corpus, and Method

As opposed to the relatively little available documentary evidence concerning presidential attitudes towards languages during the examined period, the records of the Federal Congress offer a more comprehensive insight into contemporary language ideologies. The federal-level legislative activities of the examined period between March 4, 1789 to March 3, 1815 (from the first through the thirteenth US Congress) are covered by the *House Journal* (hereafter cited as HJ); the *Senate Journal* (SJ); the *Senate Executive Journal* (SEJ); *Maclay’s Journal* (MJ) (the journal of William Maclay, United States Senator from Pennsylvania, 1789–1791); and the *Annals of Congress* (AC).

The corpus of the analysis was built with the help of these five major documentary sources available online as part of the “American Memory Collection” of the Library of Congress at <https://memory.loc.gov/ammem/amlaw/lawhome.html>. The final corpus includes all the records containing the word “language” and/or “languages” in the five databases—with the exception of those instances that simply refer to a particular choice of words or language use by a person or a document.

The analysis remains largely at “macro” (i.e.: national) level in that it does not try to trace how policies were interpreted and appropriated in particular meso- or

micro-contexts, yet attempts are made to explore the “ideological and discursive context” for the policies (Johnson 2013, 124). In order to gauge the scope and potential impact of language-related references that may range from informal, individual remarks to enforceable national policies, I propose the application of a Language Policy Spectrum Framework (LPSF) with four quadrants:

	<i>Symbolic</i>	<i>Substantive</i>
<i>General</i>		
<i>Specific</i>		

Table 1. Language Policy Spectrum Framework (Source: author)

The two quadrants on the left side represent symbolic policies, defined in the public policy context by James E. Anderson as policies that “have little real material impact on people”; “they allocate no tangible advantages and disadvantages”; rather, “they appeal to people’s cherished values” (Anderson 2003, 11). For example, language-related remarks without the policy-setting dimension that belong to the area of “folk linguistics” are classified as “symbolic.” On the other hand, substantive policies (the right quadrants) “directly allocate advantages and disadvantages, benefits and costs” (Anderson 2003, 6).

The “general” vs. “specific” criteria hinge on the scope of the policy, statement, or opinion in question. National-level policies or sweeping, stereotypical statements about languages are definitely considered “general”; whereas policies affecting one single language in one particular situation (or one single individual, for example, a translator or an interpreter) are classified as “specific.” In this analysis, language policies applied to territories or newly-forming states are considered to be “general” and “specific” at the same time, recognizing the long-term national-level precedential potential of these decisions. Today’s most controversial LP-related laws, proposals, executive orders, and regulations (including, for instance, the provision of multilingual ballots, the federal-level



English language officialization attempts, and Executive Order 13166, designed to improve minority access to government services) belong to the top right quadrant; therefore, they are “substantive” and “general” in nature.

In order to fine-tune the results, the language-related references in the corpus are classified on the basis of additional criteria. First, they are grouped whether they affect the English language (“English”), foreign languages (“FL”), immigrant minority languages (“Min. L.”), Native American languages (“Nat. Am.”), or classical languages (“Clas. L.”), acknowledging the fact that the distinction between “foreign” and “immigrant minority” languages is extremely vague in certain cases.

Next, the elements of the corpus are also examined according to LP types, using Wiley’s analytical framework, which divides the spectrum of LPs into “Promotion”-, “Expediency”-, “Tolerance”-, “Restriction”-, and “Repression”-oriented policies (Wiley 1999, 21–22). The current analysis regards “translation” as an “Expediency”-oriented policy.

Finally, the language-related references and policy proposals are compared to Ruiz’s tripartite “orientations,” as to whether the language or languages in question are treated as a “Problem”—linked with “poverty, handicap, low educational achievement, little or no social mobility” (Ruiz 19); whether they appear in the “Language-as-Right” context—associated with the option of granting linguistic access to government services (in an “Expediency”-oriented way); or whether they are regarded as assets, emphasizing their national security, diplomatic, economic value. The latter attitude is identified by Ruiz as a “Language-as-Resource” orientation (Ruiz 1984, 28). Although Ruiz’s orientations scheme is more than three decades old now, Francis M. Hult and Nancy H. Hornberger convincingly argue for its continuing usefulness as an analytical heuristic (2016, 48).

### **3 Findings and Discussion**

#### ***3.1 General Overview***

After removing duplicates and irrelevant records according to the exclusion criteria identified above from the 72 document pages that contain the search term “language,” there remain 45 instances with either symbolic or substantive LP relevance in the corpus. As illustrated below, all of them were recorded between 1779 and 1813, the peak year being 1804 in terms of sheer frequencies.

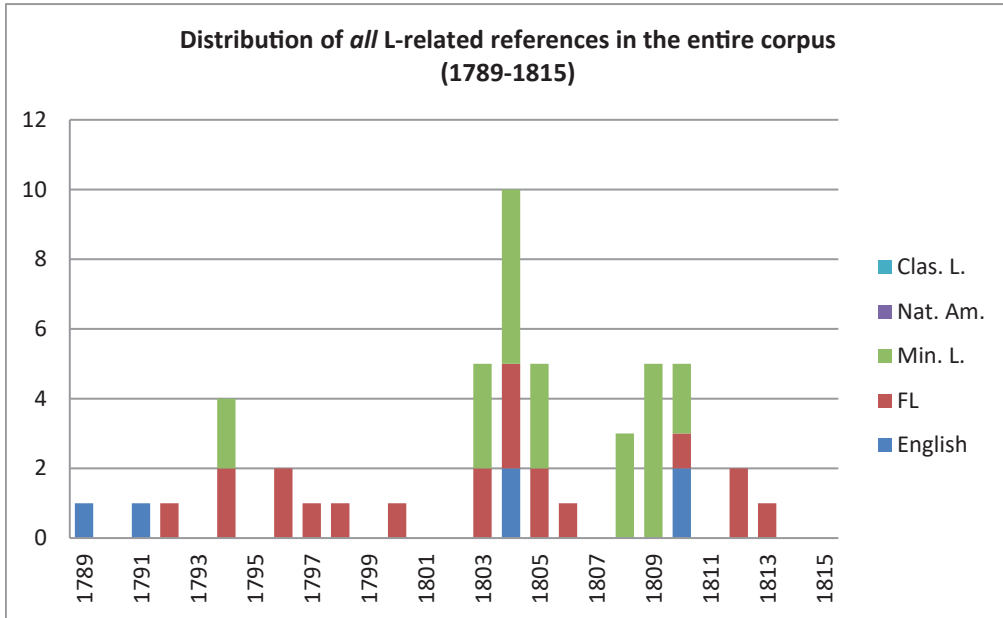


Figure 1. Chronological distribution of all relevant references in the entire corpus from 1789 to 1815  
(Source: author)

Language-related discourses were dominated by minority and foreign languages during the examined period. English was given relatively little attention, while references to classical languages and Native American languages did not appear at all, despite the federal government’s continued policy to buy Indian lands, to “civilize” the inhabitants—and to wage wars that culminated in Tecumseh’s Rebellion in the 1810s. Apparently, no LP-ramifications of these conflicts can be identified today, relying on the records of the Federal Congress alone.

References to the English language were relatively rare: 6 records altogether. There were two symbolic remarks by William Maclay, one stating that, with the exception of the English, “foreigners do not understand our language” (MJ, Ch. I, 1789, 28). The other, more ominous prediction from 1791 foresaw rapprochement with Britain—and also envisioned the concomitant deterioration of the relations with France: “ours was a civil war with Britain, and that the similarity of language, manners, and customs will, in all probability, restore our old habits and intercourse, and that this intercourse will revive... our ancient prejudices against France” (MJ, Ch. XVI, 1791, 407).

Almost two decades later, an individual petition by a French artillery officer who had aided American naval operations in Tripoli reached the House floor. The veteran soldier—having relocated to the United States—requested financial aid

from Congress that “will enable him to subsist until he can acquire a knowledge of the American language” (HJ 1810, March 8, 271).

Clearly, these symbolic remarks and the specific request by an individual cannot be considered as binding, general policies. On the other hand, from 1804 onward, due to the territorial expansion of the United States, the language issue assumed center stage, this time in the context of Louisiana.

### *3.2 Language Policies for Louisiana*

At the time of the Louisiana Purchase, the Francophone population of the area consisted primarily of the Creoles (descendants of the French settlers) and the Acadians, whose ancestors were expelled from Nova Scotia and New Brunswick during the Seven Years War. As Sexton notes, Creoles often were members of the landed elite and they were literate—as opposed to the majority of the predominantly rural Acadians/Cajuns (2000, 26). The original French immigrants to Louisiana mostly “belonged to a good class of society, and the language spoken by them was pure and elegant” (Fortier 1884, 96). After the Seven Years War, Louisiana was transferred to Spanish authority in 1763, yet loyalty to the French language remained strong: Spanish officials routinely married ladies of French descent, and the children naturally acquired the “mother tongue” (Fortier 1884, 97). Heinz Kloss also notes that although German-Americans were “above average” in terms of language retention in the US, “the French were the most persistent” (1977/1998, 17).

After a brief reestablishment of French rule in 1800, Napoleon was forced by his military setbacks in the Caribbean to sell the territory to the US in 1803. Territorial purchase—the first of this kind in the history of the young republic—immediately presented Jefferson with serious constitutional and ethical dilemmas. Although the Senate eventually ratified the purchase with an overwhelming majority, the opinion of the Cajun and Creole settlers about joining the US was never asked. Nevertheless, the Louisiana Purchase Treaty of 1803 guaranteed that the inhabitants of the ceded territory

...shall be incorporated in the Union of the United States and admitted as soon as possible according to the principles of the federal Constitution to the enjoyment of all these rights, advantages and immunities of citizens of the United States, and in the mean time they shall be maintained and protected in the free enjoyment of their liberty, property and the Religion which they profess (“Louisiana Purchase Treaty,” 1803, Art. III)

Language rights, however, were not mentioned explicitly, and as it turned out, they were practically denied for years to come. Louisiana was divided along the 33<sup>rd</sup> parallel into the (strategically more important) “Orleans Territory” (corresponding

roughly to the present-day state in terms of geographical location) and the rest of the area became the “District of Louisiana” (later “Louisiana Territory,” then “Missouri Territory” after 1812).

In response to the heavy-handed policies of the federal government (which also included the appointment of an English-speaking governor with dictatorial powers), and limitations on the importation of slaves, the inhabitants of Orleans Territory sent to Congress the list of their grievances in the form of the “Louisiana Memorial” of December 1804 (also known as Louisiana Remonstrance). The drafters of the document also protested the “introduction of a new language into the administration of justice, the perplexing necessity of using an interpreter for every communication” (aggravated by the contemporary coexistence of French, Spanish and American legal practices), and “the sudden change of language in all the public offices” (“Louisiana Memorial” 1804). Apparently, as the very same document notes, the Spanish had been more considerate in this regard, as they were “always careful in their selection of officers, to find men who possessed our language and with whom we could personally communicate.” These protests fell on deaf ears in Congress, yet as the population grew, a more representative government system was set up according to the principles laid down by the Northwest Ordinance of 1787. Nevertheless, when Louisiana was admitted as a regular state in 1812 on the basis of the Enabling Act of 1811, its first constitution was written in the spirit of English-only, specifying that “All laws... and the public records of this State, and the judicial and legislative written proceedings of the same, shall be promulgated, preserved and conducted in the language in which the constitution of the United States is written” despite the fact that “a strong French majority still existed” in the state at the time (Kloss 1977/1998, 112). To the contrary, the 1845 state constitution was to recognize the French language as quasi-co-official, but this magnanimity disappeared after the Civil War, only to return briefly after 1879. (For a more in-depth analysis, see e.g. Kloss 1977/1998, 107–115).

The records of the federal legislature in the examined period reflected these LP struggles to a certain degree. On March 17, 1804, a language restrictionist, general and substantive resolution appeared in the House Journal, which required that “all evidences of title and claims for land within the territories ceded by the French Republic to the United States” should be registered “in the language used in the United States” (HJ 1804, March 17, 661). This motion, however, was ordered to lie on the table. When a modified version appeared in the House Journal in November of the same year, the relevant linguistic requirement allowed the registration of the claims “in the original language, and in the language used in the United States” (HJ 1804, Nov. 23, 22–23). This version was referred to a committee, but it is not known whether it was ever reported out. Simultaneously, however, the Louisiana

Memorial was already on its way to Congress, which might have influenced the more minority language-friendly amendment of the resolution.

Nonetheless, the last English language-related record in the corpus defined general, substantive policies regarding the future state of Louisiana (i.e. “Territory of Orleans”). Following Henry Clay’s motion in the Senate, the eventual Louisiana Enabling Act of 1811 specified that after admission into the Union “the laws which such state may pass shall be promulgated, and its records of every description shall be preserved, and its written, judicial, and legislative proceedings conducted, in the language in which the laws... of the United States are now published” (SJ 1810, April 20, 497). This decision was later incorporated into the new state’s constitution, putting a temporary end to the language-related battles in the territory, which had started with the Louisiana Purchase and were to continue for more than a century after achieving statehood in 1812.

### 3.3 Symbolic References and Substantive Policies

Altogether, there were only two symbolic references in the examined corpus (both referring to the English language by William Maclay, as discussed in 3.1), which signals an even more practical-minded turn in legislative attitudes than the one observed with respect to the 1774–1789 corpus, especially after 1787 (Czeglédi 2018, 134).

The 1789–1815 corpus is dominated by substantive references and proposed policies (although the majority were rejected or postponed indefinitely):

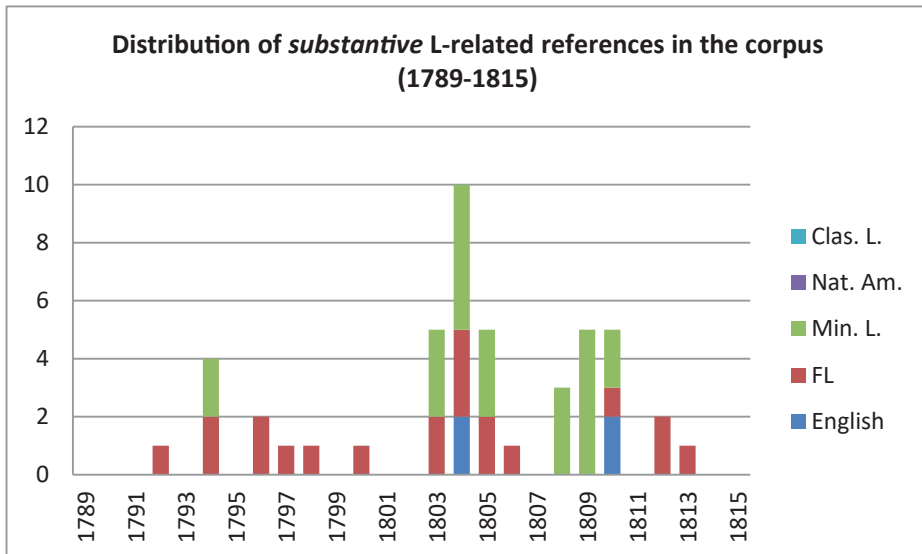


Figure 2. Chronological distribution of substantive references in the entire corpus from 1789 to 1815

(Source: author)

Following a 5-year period of virtual *laissez faire*-orientation, substantive proposals returned after 1792, then culminated in 1803–05 and 1809–10, focusing on minority and foreign languages. The English language appeared three times in substantive, general proposals, the last of which was passed by Congress and became the Louisiana Enabling Act of 1811 (see 3.2).

Out of the 43 substantive proposals, 13 were general as well, i.e. they could be classified as either state- (territory-) or federal-level decisions with potentially great impact as far as the number of people concerned and/or the precedential value entailed. These LP-proposals affected the status of the German and French languages—and mostly curtailed the linguistic rights of their speakers.

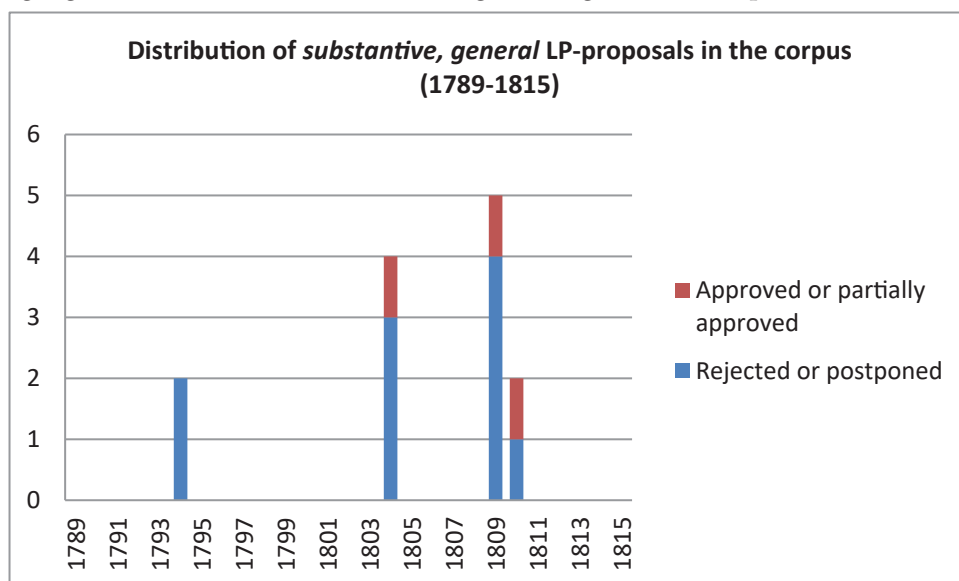


Figure 3. Chronological distribution of all *substantive, general* references in the entire corpus from 1789 to 1815 (Source: author)

The three (partially) approved proposals date back to 1804, 1809 and 1810. They include the apparent permission to register previous land claims on the territory of the Louisiana Purchase “in the original language, and in the language used in the United States” (HJ 1804, Nov. 23, 22–23), although the final decision (and the committee’s opinion) in that question was not recorded.

The second substantive, general proposal from 1809, which was passed at least by one chamber (this time by the Senate) focused on a petition “in the French language” by the French-speaking inhabitants of the Territory of Michigan requesting “a number of copies of the laws of the United States, particularly such of the said laws as relate to the Michigan Territory, to be printed in the French

language” (HJ 1809, Jan. 23, 484). Three weeks later, the same petition appeared on the Senate agenda as well (SJ 1809, Feb. 18, 384), and according to the Annals of Congress, it “was read a third time, and passed” (AC, 10<sup>th</sup> Cong., 2<sup>nd</sup> Sess., Senate, x). (The exact scanned page is not available in the online database, but it is page 455 in the original, printed document). The fate of the petition was less fortunate in the House: it was “postponed indefinitely” (AC, 10<sup>th</sup> Cong., 2<sup>nd</sup> Sess., House, xxxv), then the committee which it had been referred to issued a report “adverse to the petition” (AC, 11<sup>th</sup> Cong., 1<sup>st</sup> Sess., House, lxxiii).

The third approved substantive, general proposal was indeed passed by Congress and became known as part of the Louisiana Enabling Act of 1811, which (together with the first constitution of the state), made the state of Louisiana a *de jure* English-only state despite its Francophone majority. Consequently, the net effect of the three substantive, general proposals was to set the country on a path toward assimilationist LP-legislation, which tendency was later reinforced by the Reconstruction; the resurgence of nativism from the 1880s as a reaction to “new immigration”; and ultimately by the Great War, which discredited “hyphenated Americanism” in every form.

The rejected or (indefinitely) postponed substantive, general proposals mostly included the previous versions or the sister bills of the three approved proposals discussed above. An additional, unrelated petition came from the inhabitants of the Territory of “New [sic] Orleans” asking for allowing the “use of their native language in the legislative and judicial authorities” after acceding to statehood (HJ 1804, Nov. 29, 26–27). The petition arrived a few days before the Congressional reception of the Louisiana Memorial, which is dated to December 3 according to Lambert (2002, 201). No further information on the fate of this particular petition is available, but the request was certainly not granted either by the Enabling Act of 1811 or by the state constitution of 1812.

Similarly, the 1794 petition by “a number of Germans, residing in the State of Virginia... praying that a certain proportion of the laws of the United States may be printed in the German language” (HJ 1794, Jan. 9, 31) appeared in the House Journal twice (the second time on Nov. 28) but was rejected after a tie vote, which may have been broken by the Speaker, Frederick Augustus Conrad Muhlenberg (Kloss 1977/1998, 28). This attempt was not unique: a similar French petition was rejected in 1809 (see above), and a few likeminded, unsuccessful German attempts were to be made e.g. in 1835 (also resulting in an initial tie vote), then in 1843 and in 1862 (Kloss 1977/1998, 29–33). Perhaps partly due to the persistence of German minorities and to the propaganda machinery of the Fatherland, the Muhlenberg-incident was later blown out of proportion, giving rise to fanciful tales about German almost disestablishing English as the official language of the United States.

### 3.4 The Language Policy Spectrum Framework

The relevant corpus of language-related remarks and policy proposals can be classified according to the LP spectrum framework discussed in Section 2 into the following quadrants:

#### LP spectrum diagram 1789–1815

		Symbolic	Substantive
<b>General</b>	Eng. will facilitate reconciliation with GB		(Denying) the translation of laws into min. Ls; declaring Louisiana an English-only state
		2 Eng. 2	15 Min. Fr. 8 Eng. 3 Min. Fr.+Sp. 2 Min. Ger. 2
<b>Specific</b>			Petitions, translation (mostly in and from French)
		0	38 Min. Fr. 16 FL Fr. 4 FLs (unspec.) 7

Table 2. Distribution of LP-references in the corpus according to the LP spectrum framework (the numbers indicate the actual number of references in the given quadrant; Fr.=French; Sp.=Spanish; FLs=foreign languages) (Source: author)

The symbolic, general statements only included William Maclay's personal remarks about the English language (see 3.1), while the symbolic, specific quadrant remained empty. The 1774–89 corpus, on the other hand, contained 15 symbolic, general remarks (mostly about the nation-building and unifying role of the English language). The symbolic, specific quadrant had almost totally been empty a few decades before as well (Czeglédi 2018, 121).

Genuinely macro-level and binding policy proposals are associated with the top right, i.e. with the substantive, general quadrant. Here the major LP



approach to linguistic diversity turned out to be the discontinuation and denial of the previous policy of translating the laws of the United States into several minority languages. This new, assimilationist and problem-oriented attitude limited the rights of the French (Spanish) and German language-speaking populations, whose petitions to that effect were routinely rejected. The most sweeping (and hotly contested) decision in this quadrant was the total denial of minority language rights in Louisiana in official domains even after granting statehood to the Territory of Orleans (see 3.3). (No other state was to be declared *de jure* Official English on admission—but no other territory was allowed to become a state without a more or less clear English-speaking majority afterwards, either.) The greatest difference between the LP-profiles of the 1774–1789 and the 1789–1815 corpus can be found here: before 1789 (strictly speaking: before 1810) there had been no substantive, general LP-bills (or joint resolutions with the force of law) passed by the national legislature.

Substantive, specific policies included state- or territory-level initiatives (which were classified as belonging to both the general and specific categories—as stated in section 2) and the smaller-scale decisions that affected e.g. one single individual or a language in one particular or local situation. Typical examples of the latter included the appropriation of money to pay the “Clerk for Foreign Languages” in the Department of State (HJ 1792, Dec. 3, 640); negotiations conducted and documented in foreign languages (e.g. in French and Spanish as in the case of Pinckney’s Treaty (SEJ 1796, Feb. 26); grievances in French by French-speaking citizens of Indiana Territory complaining about “intrusion by citizens of the United States, on lands which the petitioners claim, under a title from certain Indian tribes” (HJ 1803, Feb. 11, 336–337); compensation for (French and Spanish) translators; and the appointment of a French language teacher to the Corps of Engineers (HJ 1803, Jan. 24, 299).

### ***3.5 From Promotion to Repression: Types and Orientations***

The application of Wiley’s analytical framework (21–22), which classifies LPs according to their effects on linguistic diversity, reveals that among the substantive, general proposals the promotion of English and the restriction of minority languages were the major themes of the proposals with the greatest real or potential impact. These included the declaration of Louisiana to function as an English-only state immediately after joining the U.S. and the eventual rejection of the request by the French-speaking inhabitants asking Congress to print the relevant laws of the U.S. in the French language. The similar, German request had also been rejected 15 years before. Limited tolerance was present in the 1804 decision allowing the

registration of previous land claims in the territory of the Louisiana Purchase in the original language as well, although the final decision on the issue was not recorded.

The substantive, specific practices and policies were predominantly expediency-oriented, focusing on the financing of translation and interpretation services, mostly affecting the French language. However, expediency did not extend to the provision of short-term, transitional minority-language accommodations (represented by e.g. today's multilingual ballots and transitional bilingual education models), as they did not exist at all 200 years ago. Consequently, expediency in the minority-language context could only be understood in a limited sense: it mostly meant the willingness of Congress to receive, translate and consider petitions in minority languages. The two symbolic, general statements about the English language had no policy implications at all.

According to Ruiz's orientations scheme, the treatment of minority languages in the examined period reflected an overall "problem"-orientation with a few ephemeral "language-as-right" gestures that were never codified nor always consistently practiced. One unquestionably present linguistic right was the possibility of petitioning Congress for the redress of grievances in non-English languages. Foreign languages (especially French), however, were recognized as diplomatic assets, but this appreciation was never applied to French (whether Creole or Cajun) in the minority-language context.

#### **4 Summary and Conclusion**

The fundamental question is whether the United States had had a language policy or at least language policies before 1815 on the basis of the available federal-level legislative documents. Incumbent presidents had not expressed their language-related opinions before the 1820s and neither had they proposed genuine policies before the 1850s (Czeglédi 2019, 191–192). This, however, did not mean that they always avoided addressing the topic as legislators, diplomats or private citizens. Both John Adams and Thomas Jefferson shared the belief in the unifying power of English—Adams was even convinced that language can be planned from above. Yet, no attempts were made and no proposals were recorded which would have tried to reintroduce the Language Academy idea after 1780 (Czeglédi 2018, 135). Similarly, the myths about officializing English (or another language) had no factual basis at all in the legislative documents before 1815.

Between 1774 and 1789, the dominant quadrant in the Language Policy Spectrum Framework (LPSF) was the one containing substantive, specific policies and practices, which mostly meant translation and interpretation into and from

French, German, Dutch and Spanish. Up to 1780, Congress had also translated laws and propaganda materials into German and French, then the practice was discontinued. Symbolic, general statements about the nation-building role of English were not uncommon, either.

After 1789, two major shifts can be detected on the basis of the LPSF data: the virtual disappearance of symbolic, general statements and the emergence of genuine policy proposals in the substantive, general quadrant. The first real instance of general language policymaking happened in the context of the Louisiana statehood debate: eventually, however, the “English-only” forces (practically: the federal legislature) won against the Creole and Cajun inhabitants of the territory, who demanded the enshrinement of French language rights.

Unless we count the numerous earlier, reactive instances when language rights were denied especially to the German and French minorities as a response to grassroots petitions, the first proactive, general and substantive LP decision by the U.S. Congress was the one that set the state of Louisiana on an officially assimilationist path for more than three decades.

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## HISTORY AND THE BODY GOTHIC

**Dangerous Bodies:** Historicising the Gothic Corporeal. By Marie Mulvey-Roberts. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2016. Pp. 258. ISBN 978-0-7190-8541-3.

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An engaging monograph, *Dangerous Bodies* aims to give new insights into Gothic literature's obsession with corporeality. Marie Mulvey-Roberts presents a fascinating and thought-provoking study about the real-life horrors which reside in the fictional terror and horror in Gothic literature and film. She applies concise language and her arguments are clear and coherent. Each chapter abounds in detailed historical facts which are the results of thorough investigation. Mulvey-Roberts cleverly draws upon connections between the authors of famous Gothic texts and their own historical period and cultural milieu.

The book chapters explore the representation and pathologisation of the 'monstrous' body from the inception of the Gothic genre in the 18<sup>th</sup> century until the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The author highlights in her introduction that Gothic, as a body of writing, not only transgresses boundaries and ventures into taboo lands, but also generates negative stereotypes by branding 'the Other' as a dangerous body. As she argues, the existence of otherness is most palpable or evident through its corporeality (3). The Gothic monster has always been a rallying point for cultural, nationalist or religious hegemonies, since its difference destabilises the existing heteronormative ideologies normally related to race, class, religion, gender or sexuality (3). The author claims that each body is, whether real or fictional, a bearer of a politicised message. She calls the stigmatisation of the 'the Other' the process of "monsterising," which is born out of an abuse of power. Throughout Western cultural history, the body has always been controlled and exploited by the institutions of the church, medicine and state, the three most important powers. The body, therefore, has been subjected throughout history to torture and destruction. In this book, a collection of dangerous bodies are traced to the effects and terrors exercised by the institutional forces of the English Reformation, Spanish Inquisition, French Revolution, slavery, 19<sup>th</sup>-century Victorian medical malpractice, anti-Semitism, Crimean War and the Vietnam War. The book is divided into five larger chapters. Its opening chapter explores the Catholic body

as subject to torture in the famous Gothic literary texts of Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* (1764) and Matthew Lewis' *The Monk* (1796). The following two chapters move into the nineteenth century, focusing on Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818) and Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897). These novels discuss the contemporary anxieties and paranoia surrounding the idea of the monstrous body.

The first chapter explores how Gothic literature in the 18<sup>th</sup> century was influenced by the terrors of the English Reformation, anti-Catholic movements and the French Revolution, with particular reference to Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto*, which is considered to be the first Gothic novel, and Matthew Lewis' *The Monk*. The wounded body was a central motif of the Gothic novel in the 18<sup>th</sup> century and a central icon of the Roman Catholic Church with its images of bleeding statues, crucifixion, martyred saints and mysterious stigmatics. The Church inspired Gothic novelists with monks, lustful priests, and immured nuns, while Gothic settings like cathedrals, convents and crypts evoke a sense of medievalism replete with superstition. This chapter also revisits the conventional position that Gothic literature in the 18<sup>th</sup> century was anti-Catholic. Mulvey-Roberts argues, however, that while anti-Catholicism remains a central element of Gothic novels, by the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century a greater threat emerged, which was the repressive secular state. Horace Walpole was a critic of Henry VIII and saw him as a bloody persecutor because of his turbulent break with Rome. In this context, the author draws attention to a neglected interpretation of *Otranto*, which—in her view—can be read as neither a defence of, nor an attack on Catholicism, but rather as a satire on Reformation. The overtly anti-Catholic *Monk* by Lewis represents the real-life threats of The Reign of Terror during the French Revolution through the image of the Bleeding Nun.

The second chapter investigates the corrupting effects of slavery. The 19<sup>th</sup> century was an unsettling historical period for Great Britain. The country gained vast lands through territorial expansion and became the largest colonizer. In the view of many British people, slaves and colonials symbolised the exotic, racial and ethnic “Other.” This chapter thoroughly investigates that some Gothic authors, like Horace Walpole, William Beckford and Matthew Lewis, had West Indian connections—especially in the Caribbean—and some of their wealth came from sugar plantations mostly worked by slaves. Many abolitionists regarded slavery as a form of civil death, which deprives a person of their humanity. In this fascinating chapter, Mulvey-Roberts draws a parallel between Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* and the issue of slavery. She provides details from the life of Mary Shelley, including her support of abolitionism. According to the author, *Frankenstein* can be read as an allegory of slavery. She argues that Mary Shelley's monster, made out of corpses, is like the slave in being living dead. Accordingly, Shelley's monster parallels 19<sup>th</sup>-



century racial stereotypes in skin colour and size. Both Shelley's male and female monsters are a patchwork of various body parts and invite readers to see them as metaphors for mixed race. *Frankenstein*, therefore, is a "parable of the life cycle of a slave and, as such, a narrative embodiment of real-life terror and horror" (53).

The third chapter provides a historical and medical overview of 19<sup>th</sup>-century sexual surgeries on men and women aimed at controlling their sexuality. 19<sup>th</sup>-century sexual surgery were used to 'cure' a wide variety of ailments, including allegedly immoral forms of behaviour, like hysteria and masturbation. Hysterectomy was a kind of "castration of women" which was believed to cure a wide variety of female maladies such as menstrual disturbances, insanity, hysteria, nymphomania (95). Masturbation was considered to be the main cause of insanity, hypersexuality and hereditary disease. Therefore, sexual surgeries and other treatments were used to 'correct' women and men who were deemed hysteric and sexually perverse. This formed a subtext to Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, which reflects the social and political instabilities of gender during the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Some of Stoker's relatives were doctors and surgeons, from whom he acquired clinical and surgical details for the writing of *Dracula*. Therefore, Mulvey-Roberts argues that *Dracula* can be read as a medical novel which mixed medicine with the supernatural. Stoker's vampire figure was not just a blood-sucking supernatural being and an embodiment of otherness in terms of ethnicity, morality, religion, but in terms of gender as well. Mulvey-Roberts highlights that the female vampire in *Dracula* is associated with the social anxieties and paranoia felt about liberated female sexuality in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Vampirism was not just interpreted as an image of sexually transmitted disease, but as a "trope for an invented female pathology, believed to require a surgical solution" (93).

The fourth chapter continues to discuss the vampire theme in connection with Jewishness by drawing a parallel between them. The Jewish body has always been represented as that of a bloodsucker and a carrier of various diseases. Even the body parts of Jewish people, such as the nose and eyes, were pathologised. The first vampire film was based on *Dracula*—the German Expressionist movie, *Nosferatu* (1922)—which used the dangerous vampire body as a metaphor for the crypto-Jew. Mulvey-Roberts investigates whether the representation of the vampire in *Nosferatu* influenced the well-established Nazi anti-Semitic propaganda within Weimar culture or not. The chapter later draws upon how Nazi propaganda films might have applied the vampire trope to Jews in movies such as Paul Wegener's Golem films, *The Eternal Jew* and *Jew Süß*.

Chapter five applies the imagery, discourse and rhetoric of vampirism to the context of warfare. Mulvey-Roberts argues that war is the ultimate horror and bloodsucker and highlights that it has been rarely analysed from this aspect. This

chapter examines the connection between vampires and war in novels, films and short stories from the Crimean War, through the Russo-Turkish conflict and the First World War, up until the Vietnam War. Mulvey-Roberts writes about the horrifying effect of war on bodies of soldiers and body politics in general. The figure of the vampire often symbolised the enemy in wartimes. As the author explains, “like the vampire, war replicates itself through blood” (180). She also argues that traces of the Crimean War can be detected in Stoker’s *Dracula*. The novel can be read as a war novel, and as a military campaign against the enemy, who is none other than the figure of the vampire.

In conclusion, this page-turner will be of interest to academics and students of Gothic studies, gender, film studies and history. I would especially recommend it to those who are interested in the relationship between history, literature and film. In this comprehensive monograph, Mulvey-Roberts sums up her argument about corporeality in the following manner: “Corporeality has been used by the Gothic to express horror of the Other, whether it be through the body of the Catholic, Caribbean slave, femme fatale, Jew or enemy soldier. The construct of the monster is a declaration of war on individuals, who are demonised for their marginality and whose bodies are overlaid with fear and danger” (221).

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## CHILDREN'S LITERATURE BEYOND PLACE AND SPACE

**Translating and Transmediating Children's Literature.** Edited by Anna Kérchy and Björn Sundmark. London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2020. Pp. xv + 337. ISBN 978-3-030-52526-2. €114.39.

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Translation and transmediation, i.e. storytelling through media, are culturally significant, interrelated practices that make room for their audiences from different cultures, social backgrounds, and generations to gain access to one another. According to the editors, one could not be without the other: as forms of storytelling, both translation and transmediation involve the adaptation of a source material to different linguistic and sociocultural environments through different literary and multimedia platforms. Children's literature as a means of connecting the young to the old and *vice versa*, of making cross-cultural commentaries on contemporary social and political issues—Jan Svankmajer's filmic adaptation of Lewis Carroll's *Alice* is a fine example for it—and of creating hyperreal spaces where imagination can freely move, is open to reinterpretation, and thereby is a great source for translation and transmediation.

*Translating and Transmediating Children's Literature*, edited by Anna Kérchy and Björn Sundmark, provides some thought-provoking insights into how these two concepts are applied in children's and young adults' books, to the constant transformations we need to face the growing digitalization of classical works and the changing readerly needs and expectations of the coming generations. Emphasis should be placed here on concepts like transfer and adaptability, i.e. the (im)possibilities of mediating children's stories between cultural and linguistic borders, an issue that each of the studies of this volume explores.

Structurally, the book consists of five parts, each of which provides colourful perspectives on the issues of translation and transmediation in children's literature. The first part examines the ways mediation through translation can open cultural borders and allows the perceptions of different worlds. Clémentine Beauvais draws an incredibly important picture of the role of children's literature during the cultural and political crisis that Brexit has brought forth. Employing Francois Jullien's concept of the *écart*, i.e. the "sidestep," a *vis-à-vis* between cultures that is needed for a reflection of other cultures, Beauvais discusses how the translation of children's literature can guide the reader out of the pitfalls of his/her ideologically justified prejudices, opening

his/her eyes to other worlds. Hannah Felce discusses the intracultural alterations of Selina Chönz's *Uorsin*, a children's book celebrated as a Swiss national classic, and its sequels. An interesting fact is that while the original tale was written in Ladin, one of the dialects of Romansh, Switzerland's fourth national language, its follow-ups were printed in German, which might inevitably call to mind the issues of cultural, linguistic and aesthetic prioritising both in relation to the source material over its secondary translations and also of the text over its illustrations. In the next chapter, Joanna Dybiec-Gajer examines how the subsequent Polish translations of Hoffmann's tale have altered the context, the style and even the narratorial voice of the original, as well as the way these alterations have influenced the relation of a presumed child-reader to the narrator of the source text. According to the author, the question that each mediator had to face was how to make the apparently detached narrative voice and the basically absurd source material accessible for readers. Dafna Zur scrutinises the aftermath of the Korean war that implied the reassertion of North Korean nationalism and the inclusion of socialist moral vision to North Korean children's literature in science fiction and travel writing. Zur argues that while North Korean writers were struggling to reconstruct their national identity upon the ruins of the war, they had to negotiate it in the shadow of the changing political atmosphere and particularly under the Soviet influence.

The second part analyses the formulas for the complex and varied relations of the visual representation and the translated text. Anees Barai discusses Joyce's only known children's story, *The Cat and the Devil*, originally conceived as a trilingual letter written for his grandson in 1936. Barai maps out the ways Joyce uses the French folklore and language and incorporates it into the linguistic and cultural attributes of Irish identity, and explains how the French translations sought to domesticize Joyce's text, and how the various illustrations of the translated versions adapted the verbal to the visual. Björn Sundmark's essay explores the Swedish translation and visual representation of J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Hobbit*. Discussing the illustrations accompanying the 1962 Swedish edition of *The Hobbit* by Tove Jansson, Sundmark calls for a reassessment of the visual standards and potentialities of Tolkien's work. Anna Kérchy examines the iconotextual both in the text and the reader's consciousness, i.e. the way our consciousness strives for gaining meaning out of nonsense. As the author claims, this process of our meaning-making highly depends on the relation of text to the image, in this case the poem and its illustration, and the way the original text arrives to us in its domesticated forms through the different translations.

The third part sheds light upon the translatability of images to other images while considering the limits of visual representation. It altogether challenges the hierarchical order between the verbal and visual while discussing the various

forms of visual narratives and the intersections between image and language. In a case study based on research on sixty-eight children's and young adults' books published by Greek publishers, Petros Panaou and Tasoula Tsilimeni compare book covers with those of their translated versions. Their work is essential since it informs us not just about what a significant influence foreign literature had upon Greek writers, but also it gives us a picture of how meaning transformed and was changed through the various additions, omissions and replacements of cover designs, illustrations and peritexts. Karolina Rybicka focuses on Olga Siemaszko's domestication of John Tenniel's illustrations to the original *Alice in Wonderland* to the Polish translation of the book. Rybicka argues that Siemaszko's work is unique in the sense that she highly relied on Tenniel's design, translating it into her four versions of *Alice*, manifesting how adaptable the Tennielian visual world is to the artistic vision of a different culture.

The fourth part explains how the digitalization of classical children's literature and young adults' novels moulds and influences the young audience's readerly expectations and experiences. Cheryl Crowdy first takes note of the growing concerns about how new digital media platforms paralyse Generation Z and Alpha's ability for attention and empathy and how they might replace serious and empathic reading with lightweight and morally indifferent entertainment. With her reader-response methodology, the author engages in a dialogue with these assumptions while mapping out the therapeutic mechanisms of "resisting reading", i.e. the way their different interpretations can help child readers express their emotions, thereby coming to terms with their potential traumas. Furthermore, Crowdy suggests that works like *Chopsticks* prove the fears of the older generation about younger ones as irrelevant and encourage a dialogical intergenerational reading. In the next chapter, Dana Cocargeanu analyses the emerging popularity of Beatrix Potter's tales in post-Communist Romania and the resulting online translations of them carried out by enthusiastic fans based on the growing number of internet users and the unprecedented popularity of Potter's books among Romanian readers. Cybelle Saffa Soares and Domingos Soares address ethical issues regarding the contemporary translations of the Star Wars franchise, mainly concentrating upon the different translations of *light* and *dark* on several transmedia platforms, which ultimately calls to mind the collective expectation of cultural products to serve as a moral fable for children.

The volume's fourth part investigates cross-cultural reading, visualising and transmediating practices by different generations. Annalisa Sezzi investigates the complex multifocal relation between the translator and the adult reading aloud, discussing the Italian translations of Maurice Sendak's *Where the Wild Things Are*. Agnes Blümer discusses the loss of ambiguity through translation, using the concepts

of “visual context adaptation”, i.e. visual shifts that make originally ambiguous texts more conventional, and “generic affiliation”, i.e. verbal shifts, whereby the fantasy texts were adapted to the generic models founded in post-war West Germany. Carl F. Miller examines contemporary Latin translations of children’s literature, which might be at first surprising, but his claim that conversation between a living and a dead language can transform established narratives in education and thereby inspire young readers to initiate social transformation without the trappings of formal schooling is highly impressive. In the book’s last chapter, Caisey Gailey focuses on three board books that translate and transfer scientific knowledge for toddlers. In this study, Gailey debates whether scientific knowledge can be cognitively acquired at an early age, while paying tribute to these books for their aim to draw children’s attention to science through transmediation.

As we might see, the volume’s spectrum is wide and colourful, drawing the attention to its subject from as many angles as possible. The different chapters suggest that translation and transmediation provide an opportunity to examine cross-cultural and intergenerational aspects, which may help to reveal sociocultural issues present in literature in general and more specifically children’s literature in this case. In this respect, this volume is a brilliant contribution to several further research areas, such as intercultural studies, gender studies, or media studies.

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## INNOVATIONS AND CHALLENGES IN LANGUAGE LEARNING MOTIVATION

**Innovations and Challenges in Language Learning Motivation.** By Zoltán Dörnyei. *Innovations and Challenges in Applied Linguistics*. Abingdon; New York: Routledge, 2020. Pp. 178. ISBN 978-0-429-48589-3. Kindle Edition. \$44.44

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In the new book entitled *Innovations and Challenges in Language Learning Motivation*, Zoltán Dörnyei tries to rethink language learning motivation by bringing together the existing research challenges and offering some innovations and FUTURE trajectories in this field of research. Aside from the introduction and conclusion, the book is comprised of six chapters. Topically speaking, the first three chapters of the volume reflect on the theoretical challenges and innovation regarding motivation. In contrast, the second part, the last three chapters, addresses specific motivation theory approaches, such as unconscious motivation, vision, and long-term motivation.

The first chapter, “Fundamental Challenges I,” tries to pinpoint the definition of motivation. Dörnyei starts the discussion by acknowledging the multitude of potential descriptions or conceptualizations of the term within the academic areas. Firstly, he raises a set of thought-provoking questions of how motivation is to be perceived as a ‘trait’ or a ‘state,’ which is followed by an innovation encapsulated in the “New Big Five” model that sheds some light on the distinction between the ‘trait’ and the ‘state’ (7). By delving into the plethora of theories addressing the concept of motivation vis-à-vis the temporality aspect, the chapter further discusses the theoretical challenges and innovations regarding the possibility to “capture time” (10). Lastly, the chapter leads to a discussion of the academic challenges in the distinction between conscious and unconscious motivation and mentions a potential agreement between, or the ‘blend’ of, the two to grasp the role both play in “guiding human behaviour” (17).

Starting from the perception of motivation as dynamic, the second chapter of the volume continues the problematization of its ‘fluidity’ by discussing the temporal dimension and eventually framing it within the Complex Dynamic Systems Theory (CDST). The first section of the chapter discusses

the “theoretical dilemmas” (21) that arise around the impact of context on understanding motivation. Dörnyei reviews an array of theoretical psychological research problems that tackle the dichotomous relationship between personal and social implications on human behavior by reflecting on the emergence of social motivation and eventually highlighting the dynamic interconnectedness between a “person’s agency and his/her background, history, identity, goals and motives” (32). In like manner, the second section advances the innovations regarding temporality by illustrating differential timescales in L2 learning. Additionally, it brings forward the element of ‘proximal goals,’ through which the strength of motivation can be exemplified. Thus, with all the implications regarding the trait/state dichotomy, temporality, or the motivational context, the chapter concludes by stating that the study of L2 learning motivation should be framed within the complex dynamic systems theory.

The third chapter addresses the ‘applied’ dimension in motivation research. It discusses the challenges and innovations reflecting on the relevance of motivation vis-à-vis processes in second language acquisition (SLA), its impact on language learning, and overall motivation assessment. In the first section of the chapter, Dörnyei criticizes the existing psychology that frames and conceptualizes motivation as essentially generic or too generalized. He asserts that a more nuanced method is needed and that motivation needs to be addressed from a more specific perspective, particularly within SLA discourse. The innovations he addresses stand for “fruitful research areas” in SLA, such as the “small lens” approach and the discussion of “undertheorized” “task-based” motivation (51). In a similar vein, the second section of the chapter forwards the discussion on enhancing motivation in a meaningful manner. Dörnyei proposes doing away with a ‘carrot and stick’ model by analyzing several ways that contribute to more “meaningful” approaches in motivating learners (54), such as motivational strategies, student engagement, remotivation, role models, and the role of technology. The chapter concludes by listing adjustments and innovations in the existing L2 learning motivation research methodologies and promises alternative directions concerning the dynamic nature of motivation per se.

The fourth chapter of the volume, “Research Frontiers I: Unconscious motivation,” outlines the practical implications of the dual processes that affect human motivation, the unconscious and conscious, to open up the space for further research on ‘unconscious motivation’ vis-à-vis the framework of SLA (76). Dörnyei asserts that whether one of these processes has a more significant impact on human behavior is still somewhat debatable among scholars. However, some scholars in psychology have been advancing specific methodological approaches and instruments for researching the unconscious and its impact on motivation theory, which proved essential for the SLA framework (96).



“Research Frontiers II: Vision” zooms in on the ‘future aspiration’ as the most crucial aspect of vision. Dörnyei identifies vision as “sensory in nature” (103) and affirms its role in the construction of possible (future) selves that represent the foundation of his research on L2 motivation self-system. Applying vision in the social sciences, he posits that its possession is an outstanding feature that is different from the concept of goal and has a significant impact on people’s inspiration, motivation, and engagement (114). Since vision undeniably arouses motivation in people, Dörnyei summarizes the chapter by stating that it can be perceived as a trigger or an instrumental element in fulfilling the desired outcomes.

As the title suggests, the sixth chapter, “Research Frontiers III: Long-term motivation and persistence,” overviews the reasons behind the insufficient theorization of long-term motivation and outlines a framework for its construction out of the multitude of converging elements. Drawing a parallel between a “long car journey” (161) and long-term motivation, Dörnyei lists the set of factors necessary for the completion of goals, likening them to the efficient car, high-octane fuel, economic use of fuel, effective breakdown cover, and so on. These factors correspond to specific motivational terms that indicate that the entire process of long-term motivation reflects the strong vision essential in the ignition and reignition of motivation, leading to controlled and resilient behavior.

In conclusion, there are two fundamental contributions the book makes. Firstly, not only does it highlight the challenges and difficulties within the field of L2 motivation, but it also offers a set of practical solutions and innovations necessary for tackling these challenging situations. Also, it outlines three scholarly areas, or “unticked boxes,” as Dörnyei puts it (167), that have not been dealt with extensively because of the complexity of the research work needed to be invested. Even so, Dörnyei emphasizes each of the three themes because he believes they can lead to a greater understanding of L2 motivation and serve as a foundation for or inspiration in the diversity of further research in motivation studies.

As mentioned above, since this book summarizes previous research on L2 motivation, offers research innovations, and overviews the future research trajectories, it can be said it is quite beneficial for anyone interested in, planning to do research, or having difficulties researching L2 motivation. It is also of great assistance for anyone researching within the fields of Language Learning Psychology and SLA, as well as those having an interest in interdisciplinary studies because Dörnyei, himself, sometimes tends to go back to specific philosophical questions to broaden the scope of motivation theory and take the discussion into a somewhat different direction than the one already present within the field of psychology and discourse of SLA.

**Works Cited**

Dörnyei, Zoltán. 2020. *Innovations and Challenges in Language Learning Motivation*. Innovations and Challenges in Applied Linguistics. Abingdon; New York: Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429485893>

**Contemporary Perspectives on Language, Culture and Identity in Anglo-American Contexts.** Edited by Éva Antal, Csaba Czeglédi and Eszter Krakkó. Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2019. Pp. xii + 387. ISBN 978-1-5275-3812-2.

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The editors of the present collection have borrowed Hans-Georg Gadamer's idea of "the 'fusion of horizons' [that] marks the in-between space where the new possibilities of meaning and our understanding of alterity lie" (viii). Consequently, this collection undertakes two things, first, it foregrounds individual and unique perspectives, and second, it also attempts to generate a dialogue between the texts. The critical papers included present the great variety one finds in contemporary scholarly discourse in the fields of English and American Studies and English linguistics. While the inclusion of a wide range of papers could have imperilled the coherence and the dialogue of the articles, the editors overcome this challenge by a thematic arrangement. It is due to this careful organization of the articles from different fields of study that the reader is enabled to find the "fusion of horizons" and expand his/her own limits of understanding. Thus, the collection is divided into six parts that observe the field and the main theme of the respective subsections.

The majority of the papers are dedicated to British and American literature of not only the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century, but truly contemporary fiction as well. The theoretical approach applied in the essays include memory, cultural, ethnic and gender studies, as well as criticism of narratology and fiction after postmodernism. The second half of the collection is divided between history and linguistics. The section focussing on history includes engaging articles that address various historical epochs and themes explored through authentic documents, Hollywood productions, history films or multimedia representations. The true strength of the final two sections on linguistics is the fresh insight it offers into the connection of theory and practice that target phonological variations in Hollywood productions, the literal and figurative expressions of sadness and happiness, and teaching academic English to foreign students of English at the university.

The first part is dedicated to images of recollection, cultural and collective memory. This section opens with Adrian Radu's investigation of D. H. Lawrence's short stories of the 1920s. Radu claims that Lawrence's works display a mythopoeic capacity, which implies that "the author entirely adopts mythemes as a mode of discourse with cognitive functions, offering explanation for fundamental feelings as

well as phenomena like astronomy and meteorology, or human conditions” (2). The theoretical framework applies Richard Chase’s theory of myth as art to foreground a significant feature in Lawrence’s fiction which is to suggest that the myth in the author’s hands is a story, “in other words it is art” (ibid.). Noémi Albert’s study of Evie Wyld’s novel, *After the Fire, A Still Small Voice* (2009), is a representative example of the recent upsurge in memory studies. Her article exhibits the connection between remembrance, bodily sensibilities and space by analysing the male characters and their traumatic past triggered by war memories. András Tarnóc’s thorough analysis sheds light on the similarities and differences of the American slave narratives and those written in the Caribbean. A peculiarity regarding slave narratives of the West Indies, Tarnóc claims, is that the subject re-captures authority and control through speaking as opposed to the act of writing in the American equivalent. Korinna Csetényi’s paper joins the academic discussion of popular literature in exploring friendship in Stephen King’s fiction. Csetényi shows that popular fiction is worthy of critical analysis by shedding light on King’s well-known works in which she observes how a strong bond among young boys substitute for dysfunctional families and how it serves against worldly or otherworldly horrors.

Part Two, titled as *Quest and the Journey*, comprises three chapters that exhibit the encounters of intercultural in-betweenness in literary works. Ágnes Zsófia Kovács’s essay familiarizes the reader with Edith Wharton’s lesser-known travel books about Europe, mainly Italy and France. Kovács’s interest primarily lies in Wharton’s travel-related writings on France before and after World War I in order to explore the change in the author’s attitude to US-French relations. Her meticulous discussion of Wharton’s nonfiction pieces on France exhibits how war interferes with the architectural legacy and explores how tradition is able to defy war destruction by shedding light on the question of historical continuity and the author’s contemporary political context. Fanni Feldmann’s paper approaches cultural in-betweenness from a fairly different angle, as her focus is the protagonist-narrator’s cultural and liminal position in Nirpal Singh Dhaliwal’s *Tourism* (2006). Feldmann claims that the protagonist’s ethnic identity—Sikh-British—allows for a multitude of identities, a “tourist-ethnographer-flaneur-voyeur-immigrant” (73), which is also a source for the connectivities and alienations within his own identity in “the multicultural whirlpool of London and British society” (ibid.). Renáta Marosi takes a fairly novel perspective of P. L. Travers’s Mary Poppins novels. She contends that “Mary Poppins has a distinct Zen layer” (86), which leads her to analyse the world of Mary Poppins along Buddha’s Four Noble Truths. While critics point out that the novels are more related to Zen Buddhism, Marosi attempts to locate and explore the texts in a wider context that touch upon other branches of Buddhism, such as Theravada and Tibetan Buddhism as well as Japanese cosmology.

The first article in the third section, *Voices of Authority and Power*, negotiates the phenomenon that Robert Rebein's critical account of contemporary American fiction after postmodernism calls "an aesthetic diversity" (102). László B. Sári's analysis of Jonathan Franzen's novels sheds light on the aftermath of the postmodern fiction by calling attention to a shift towards a new realism. The author claims that *Purity* (2015), genuinely explores Franzen's novelistic discourse targeted at how the novel oscillates between his realist mode of representation and the allegory of the postmodern. The second article by Anna Biró-Pentaller problematizes the concept of authority and the omniscient narrator in Martin Amis's 1995 novel, *The Information*. Given that Amis's novel is dedicated to the postmodern mode, it critically observes "hierarchical thinking and the presence of universal truth" (116). This, as the author claims, is subtly intertwined in the narrative structure where the narrator's omniscient authority is interpreted as a rhetorical performance rather than a degree of narratorial knowledge. Furthermore, this status, or search for truth calls for examining "the tie between the author and the narrator" (ibid.). Zoltán Cora's investigation of Joseph Addison's concept of the sublime takes us back to the early 18<sup>th</sup> century. Cora points out that Addison's reinterpretation of the sublime is an abrupt breakaway from the Greek rhetorical theory as well as a significant contribution to its reformulation as a more "imaginative and empiricist psychological aesthetic category" (129). He argues that Addison was the first to apply the notion of the sublime to nature where one can perceive the divine and share the joys of creation. Gergő Dávid relies on Ludwig Wittgenstein's theory about knowledge, certainty and language to bring Christopher Marlowe's Doctor Faustus's struggle with language and its creative power, or rather its limits to the fore. Reading Faustus's figure from the Wittgensteinian sceptic perspective, the main character is confronted with two things: the futility of incessant doubt and the limits of the world accessible through human language. This recognition, however, does not only disempower Faustus as a powerful agent but results in a loss of meaning.

The four articles included in *Representations of Femininity and Otherness* discuss fiction and poetry from both the 19<sup>th</sup> and the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Edit Gálla's analysis of Sylvia Plath's poems recaptures the female experience of domestic oppression and the banality of everyday life that deprive women of individualistic ambitions and creativity. Krisztina Kitti Tóth's discussion of Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse* revises the relation of female characters towards art and creation. She claims that while art and creative expressivity are central to Woolf's novels, the literary women in this particular novel find pleasure in the process of creation itself which overrides the concept of persistence and timelessness and associates art with the ephemeral. Zsuzsanna Lénárt-Muszka familiarizes the reader with *Push* (1996), a novel by an African-American author, Sapphire. Her paper is preoccupied with how the

young black heroine's body becomes symptomatic of her own social and physical conditions including abuse, motherhood, rape, violence, and obesity. Lénárt-Muszka demonstrates how the female protagonist negotiates her own subjectivity and struggles to deconstruct what is considered to be an abnormal, "aminalised, and (hyper)-sexualized" (189) body. Judit Kónyi inspects a widely known but rarely scrutinized topic that relates to Emily Dickinson's preference for isolation and her reluctance to be published in print. Through the reading of some of Dickinson's poems, the author reveals that the poet's disgust with print originated from both her wish to choose her own audience and the fear of losing her autonomy over her own art once it is commercialised and reproduced.

While section five counts only four articles related to history, they contrast and complement each other in their approach to negotiating the past. The authors' interest is divided between historical events, historic figures, or the influence of artistic conventions in contemporary historical films. Zoltán Peterecz sheds light on a less known historical detail and enquires into the activities of the British secret services in Hungary between 1941-1945 that partly aimed to hinder Hungary's participation in the Second World War and most of all weaken the regime to give help to Germany. Lívía Szedmina's witty article, "Mission Impossible", recounts John Devoy's struggles to organize the so-called Catalpa rescue mission in 1876, for a Fenian friend, James Wilson, incarcerated in Western Australia. Szedmina enumerates and interprets the diversity of multimedia representations of this iconic event in Irish-American history, which, as she claims, has shaped our understanding of the complexity of John Devoy's personality and his memorable contribution to Irish independence. József Pap's paper continues with the Irish past and analyses the genre representatives of the *aisling*, one of the traditional allegories of Irish literature in Neil Jordan's well-known movie, *Michael Collins* (1996). He claims that the *aisling* has moved into cinematic productions and resurfaces in the figure of the female figure, Kitty Kiernan, Michael Collins's fiancée. The last article examines how historical films negotiate the past and iconic historical figures. Erzsébet Stróbl's engaging discussion of filmic representations of Queen Elizabeth I's Tilbury Speech demonstrates that collective memory of the past can be shaped and enriched with a higher level of historic authenticity via these productions.

Although the final two sections are dedicated to linguistics and language teaching, the articles escape isolation and maintain a dialogue with the other parts of the collection. The first article by Péter Pelyvás compares *can*, a preterite-present verb in Old English, with other modals and scrutinizes the reasons why it has resisted the tendency to develop epistemic senses (267) while other English modals have easily undergone this change. Andrea Csillag applies Louis Goossens concept of metaphonymy to explain the phenomenon of how metaphor and metonymy may

be intertwined. This conceptual framework enables her to show this interaction in “English linguistic expressions of sadness and happiness containing body part terms” (291). “British English as an Icon” by Szilárd Szentgyörgyi is an engaging article that takes us to the field of phonology and presents the cultural aspects of British accents in Hollywood blockbusters, such as *Star Wars*. The author’s aim is to showcase “the different attitudes towards (standard) British accent” (305) by revising the pronunciation features of Received Pronunciation, stereotypical movie characters with RP-like accent, the sources of these attitudes and examples from Hollywood movies. In the final article, Katalin Balogné Bérces and Ágnes Piukovics apply Ingo Plag’s interlanguage hypotheses and semi rhoticity in interlanguages and creoles. First, they elaborate on rhotic, non-rhotic and semi-rhotic varieties of English with a special interest in the last one. In the second part of the article, the two authors display the findings of empirical data collected during an experiment with Hungarian speakers of English “whose English pronunciation displays semi-rhotic features” (327).

The last two articles in the section *Language and Its Teachers (and Their Teachers)* address some methodological challenges in language teaching and teacher training programs at universities. Francis J. Prescott highlights the difficulty that Hungarian students of English face during the acquisition of skills in Anglo-American academic writing. Nevertheless, the author emphasizes the fact that an academic skills course does not only improve students’ skills to become better writers in the target language, it also promotes “autonomy in the students” (345). Csaba Czeglédi’s paper raises some serious questions with regards to the idea of an anti-theoretical attitude in foreign language teacher education. The author contends that spreading the theory of non-theory in language teacher education is self-contradictory in itself “which underrates the significance of knowledge and understanding...in the education of educators” (383).

Considering the diversity of disciplines, genres, themes, or theoretical approaches, this collection might seem challenging to keep under control. Nevertheless, it is not a limitation as the editors suggest, but “rather as evidence of its potential” (xii). Anyone setting out to read the collection will recognize its merits and most of all its engagement in the latest academic discussion of the respective fields.





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