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The Representation of the Double in Arthur Conan Doyle's Three Sherlock Holmes Narratives

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The present paper examines the duality of human nature in late-nineteenth century Victorian society by exploring Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's famous character, Sherlock Holmes. The literary doubles of Sherlock and Watson, just as Sherlock and Moriarty, provide us with further insights into the unresolved tensions of Victorian society. These doubles also shed light on the troubles of human nature, the ongoing battle of right and wrong, light and dark, which does not pertain to just one era but remains relevant throughout the centuries.

Keywords: double; bi-part soul; Sherlock Holmes; degeneration; Victorian, detective, criminal

1 Introduction

In Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's "The Red-Headed League" (1891), Dr Watson, Sherlock Holmes's sidekick, claims that in Sherlock's "singular character the dual nature alternately asserted itself, and his extreme exactness and astuteness represented, as [he] ha[s] often thought, the reaction against the poetic and contemplative mood which occasionally predominated in him" (1994, 45). Dr John Watson's description of Sherlock Holmes' bi-part soul highlights the complexity of the detective's personality. Beyond representing order and rationality, the dual nature of the detective is an essential characteristic of detective fiction and Sherlock Holmes is not an exception. The genius figure of Holmes became one of the most famous and influential fictional detectives in the Victorian era. Christopher Pittard argues that the Victorian desire for reason and order, which glorified Holmes as a hero of both intelligence and meticulous investigation, was the key to Doyle's success. (2010, 110). As Catherine Wynne points out, the duality in the writings of Doyle comes both from the troubled society and Doyle's personal struggles. Wynne notes that "duality converges biographically in Doyle and replicates in his writing and in his public career" (2002, 3). She recalls that Doyle was born in Edinburgh into a Catholic family, but later, he abandoned Catholicism and converted to Spiritualism (2002, 3–4). According to Ian Ousby, the character of Sherlock Holmes changes

as time passes on, and reflects "the different tastes of the various eras in which the stories first appeared" (1976, 151). *A Study in Scarlet* (1887) was the first story out of the four novels and fifty-six short stories that features the well-known detective, Sherlock Holmes, and Dr. John Watson. However, as Wynne remarks, "A Scandal in Bohemia" (1891) was the first Holmes story that appeared in a serialized form in *The Strand Magazine*, and the publication together with the eye-catching illustrations of Sidney Paget brought huge success for Doyle (2002, 7).

Moreover, people were curious about the monstrosity of human nature, and with the help of detective fiction, they could observe life without moral rules from a safe distance. Sherlock was a great candidate for that because he embodied the moral and the immoral sides of human nature. Sherlock Holmes represents order and rationality as a scientist and a detective with his loyal sidekick, Dr John Watson, who happens to be a doctor, and they contribute to the welfare of people. The two of them make a successful complementary duo; they find the missing halves of themselves with the help of their Platonic friendship so they can function effectively together as a whole. References to the origin of such relationships trace back to Greek mythology. According to Plato, love evolves from a desire for the individual to an appreciation of the universal and ideal. This type of relationship can also refer to a tight bond between two people where sexual desire is absent, restrained, or sublimated ("Platonic love" n.d.). In *Symposium* (385–370 BC), Plato writes that "the primeval man was round, his back and sides forming a circle; and he had four hands and four feet, one head with two faces, looking opposite ways, set on a round neck and precisely alike…" (Plato 2019, 43). Plato notes that the gods feared the power of humans, and Zeus decided to cut them into two halves, condemning them to walk the Earth in search of each other (2019, 43–5). As Jonas Holst points out, through the medium of another soul one can develop the kind of friendship that enables the friends in question to genuinely understand themselves and each other (2021, 332). Describing the philosophical soul, who has gone on a passionate journey for wisdom, as being in love with someone else, Plato shows in *Symposium* how self-knowledge cannot be achieved alone (2019, 332). In this sense, Watson is the Platonic double of Sherlock; together they make a whole, and Watson is not just the narrator of Sherlock's stories or just a sidekick in the investigations, but also the moral compass of the detective. However, there is someone else in Sherlock's life, as well; his infamous *doppelgänger*, the notorious Professor Moriarty, who represents the threatening forces of Victorian society. As John Herdman points out, Jean-Paul Richter coined the word *doppelgänger* (1990, 13). Herdman says that "the *doppelgänger* is a second self, or alter ego, which appears as a distinct and separate being apprehensible by the physical senses (or at least, by some of them), but exists in a dependent relation to the original" (1990, 14). According to Ilana

Shiloh, "the notion of the double, or *doppelgänger*, refers to the existence of two individuals of such striking physical resemblance as to be each other's mirror images" (2011, 5). As Shiloh writes, literary doubles "are conspicuously symbolic, pointing to something beyond themselves, and what they point to are systems of ideas, of models of external or internal reality, constructed along a dualistic principle" (2011, 33). However, as Herdman points out, doubles can be complementary "as in the Platonic conception of twin souls which seek each other to make a whole out of their sundered halves" (1990, 1).

Literary doubles like Sherlock and Watson or Sherlock and Moriarty represent something else beyond themselves in a particular society in their respective era. The flexibility of detective fiction which adapts to the changes of society and time throughout the centuries is clearly explained by Stephen Arata who says that detective fiction can "effectively manage unruly anxieties by rearticulating them within the conventions of the genre, thereby draining or at least redirecting much of their troubling energy" (1996, 132). Since its first appearance in the middle of the nineteenth century, detective fiction has always fascinated readers. In England, the establishment of the New Metropolitan Police, and The Bow Street Runners (1749) brought the change in public policing. Martin A. Kayman writes that in 1750 London suffered from high rates of criminality. By establishing The Bow Street Runners, Henry and Jonathan Fielding regulated and reformed the legislation. In addition, they "made an important contribution to the creation and acceptance of an institution and a mythology of a professional and specialized anti-crime force" (1992, 66–67). Until 1829, there was no professional police force which could improve the image of the police or the detectives, so the next important element in forming the opinion about the detectives was the establishment of such professional policing forces. However, the first government founded, professional police force was established in Paris. As Ousby claims, Eugéne-Francois Vidocq, the leader of the *Sûreté*, had the most crucial role in forming the image of the character of detectives. Ousby says that the "set a thief to catch a thief" phrase was more widespread in France than in England (1976, 13), and this phenomenon was linked to Vidocq himself (1976, 45). Heather Worthington writes that even Vidocq started as a delinquent, but while he served his sentence, he offered his services and information to the police, and he worked for several years as a double agent. Also, he and his colleagues enjoyed the advantage of using their knowledge of their previous criminal lives to catch the evildoers. Nevertheless, Vidocq became well-known due to his *Memoirs*, and inspired great writers including Edgar Allan Poe and Sir Arthur Conan Doyle (2010, 18). The inauguration of a state-funded professional police force in England – which was highly influenced by the *Sûreté* – played an exceedingly decisive role in the subsequent detective figures' dual nature.

Furthermore, the rise of the Newgate novel was also crucial in the development of the genre. This title was given to some novels which were published in the 1830s and 1840s and the name indicates that there is a connection between the *Newgate Calendar* and the Newgate novels. These works were accused of creating celebrities of criminals and portraying their lives as attractive, adventurous, and entertaining. Also, the Newgate novel shows "an increasing interest in the construction and motivation of the criminal; they have an element of detection or feature a detective figure" (Worthington 2010, 19). The genre of the Newgate novel indirectly played an important role in establishing the New Metropolitan Police in 1829, because it enhanced 19th-century society's fears about real criminality. Moreover, in 1842 the existence of a public police force was accepted in London, and it led to "the creation of a small, plain-clothes detective police force and it is the activities of the detective police that finally bring crime and detection together in popular literature" (2010, 20). Charles Dickens was also criticized for glorifying criminality in some of his works, but his fascination with the detectives led to some of his fictions, like *Bleak House* (1853).

Detective fiction and the great detectives, like Sherlock Holmes, have always enjoyed great popularity and their legacy can still be traced in today's society. Even though the genre considerably transformed during the twentieth century and saw the emergence of many subgenres, there is something common in almost all of these diverse categories: the constant battle of the dark and the bright side of human nature. In detective fiction, this battle is explicitly delineated in the characterization of the criminal and the detective, who are considered doubles. This paper intends to explore how the Platonic double of Sherlock and Watson embodies the different characteristics of their age, and how the unresolved tension between Sherlock Holmes and Professor Moriarty is also the symptom of a troubled society given the fact that detective fiction as a genre is truly contemporary, one that addresses the malaise of its own era.

2 Duality between Holmes and Watson

Sherlock and Watson as Platonic doubles are significant in the Sherlock Holmes canon because they represent different sides of Victorian society. This section will explore the doubling of the detective and his sidekick considering the Victorians' fear of degeneration.

Firstly, Sherlock Holmes is often considered to be the embodiment of order and reason in contrast with the always-changing Victorian society. Enes Kavak points out that Sherlock Holmes represents the "ideal gentility" (2017, 58). Furthermore,

Joseph A. Kestner says that Sherlock possesses every quality which was considered to be masculine in Victorian culture: "observation, rationalism, faculty, logic, comradeship, daring and puck" (qtd.in Kavak 2017, 58). The masculine qualities are further affirmed, as Ousby points out, when Sherlock is first depicted in the laboratory, he is "identified as a scientist" (1976, 151). The changing world and gender roles, the uncertainty, the crisis of masculine identity all contributed to the masculine traits of Sherlock's character. Moreover, Worthington notes that Doyle based Sherlock's methods on his own professor, Joseph Bell, whom he met during his medical studies (2010, 26). Sherlock's obsession with science is highlighted throughout the canon, which makes him a rationalist hero. Secondly, as Ousby notes, his obsession makes him a suspicious figure, because his approach to various crimes, especially in the earlier stories, is almost inhuman, since "to him, criminals and human problems are simply scientific puzzles" (1976, 156). Stamford's description of Sherlock in *A Study in Scarlet* is not the description of a typical hero: "Holmes is a little too scientific for my tastes—it approaches to cold-bloodedness" (2018b, 5). Also, Elizabeth Fisher claims that by establishing himself as the world's only consulting detective, Sherlock gives himself unparalleled freedom in Victorian society, because in this way he is able to work "outside the strict confines of the law", which is "an excellent example of both his dualistic nature as detective and criminal" (2018, 55). Moreover, Y.A. Bruinsma argues that Sherlock reinforces his misfit status by creating his own profession and becoming a consulting detective (2017, 21). In this way, Sherlock frees himself from the bonding moral rules of Victorians, and he can engage in different kinds of scientific methods, which would have been highly controversial in his era. One of the best examples in *A Study in Scarlet* for Sherlock's cold-bloodedness or controversial methods is the fact that he is "beating the subjects in the dissecting-rooms with a stick" in order "to verify how far bruises may be produced after death" (2018b, 4). Also, as Watson and Stamford are heading to meet with Sherlock, the description of the setting, their way to Holmes in the hospital, enhances the scientific character of Holmes. When they find him, Sherlock is astonished and thrilled by his own scientific discovery. As Watson puts it: "His eyes fairly glittered as he spoke, and he put his hand over his heart and bowed as if to some applauding crowd conjured up by his imagination" (2018b, 5).

On the one hand, Sherlock stands for reason and rationality, and his scientific discoveries foster the well-being of society. On the other hand, Holmes lives on the borderline of criminal life and ordinary life which is bounded by strict Victorian morals. At the beginning of the Sherlock Holmes canon, the amateur sleuth is an alienated outsider, more of a suspicious figure than a rational detective who could bring stability and order into a troubled society. Also, his sexuality is rather ambiguous, as he is not really involved with women and remains a bachelor.

In addition, in Doyle's work Watson's description of Sherlock with such remarks as "hawk-like nose" or "sharp and piercing" eyes also evokes suspicion (2018b, 7). As Bruinsma puts it, Holmes, based on his facial characteristics, could be easily classified – in Cesare Lombroso's terms[1] – as a murderer, even though the readership knows that Holmes is the detective (2017, 23). Kavak argues that Sherlock represents two kinds of characters: "the masculine hero and the Decadent of Fin-de-Siècle" due to the fact that he is a rational man, but he is also a depressed figure in the always-changing Victorian era, which was characterized by crucial changes in society (2017, 59). In other words, Sherlock is like Victorian society, but he is also the scapegoat of this period; he frankly reflects the malaise of his era, the duality, which spread like wildfire. Consequently, Sherlock needs something or, more exactly, someone who will strengthen his rational, reasonable, and moral side to play the role of the saviour of society.

However, Watson, the narrator of Sherlock's stories and the moral compass of the detective, is also different at the very beginning of *A Study in Scarlet*. He is disillusioned and depressed after the horrors of the second Afghan War and does not stand for the typical Victorian man. Kavak says that Watson struggles with a masculinity crisis, which stands for a very general phenomenon; at the end of the nineteenth century male members of the middle-class faced an identity crisis because of the changing roles in both "domestic and social spheres" (2017, 60). Besides, while Watson is staying at a hotel at the beginning of *A Study in Scarlet* and suffering from alienation and loneliness due to the lack of human relationships, he does not contribute to the welfare of humanity, he is not an active member of society. Eventually, when Sherlock and Watson meet and move in together, they find their missing half, so they complement each other. After establishing a life together, Sherlock becomes a stable and more humane man who can always be the dispenser of law, and Watson regains vitality through promoting the welfare of society by assisting in Sherlock's cases. Watson's experience as an army doctor as well as his medical knowledge are both very useful in solving cases. Also, he helps Sherlock, among others, with the pills in the case of Jefferson Hope in *A Study in Scarlet*: "'Now, Doctor , […] 'are those ordinary pills?' 'They certainly were not. They were of a pearly grey colour, small, round, and almost transparent against the light. 'From their lightness and transparency, I should imagine that they are soluble

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[1]   In *Criminal Man*, Cesare Lombroso claimed that "habitual murderers have a cold, glassy stare and eyes that are sometimes bloodshot and filmy; the nose is often hawk-like and always large; the jaw is strong, the cheekbones broad; and their hair is dark, abundant, and crisply textured. Their beards are scanty, their canine teeth very developed, and their lips thine and, above all, prehistoric man much more than the white races" (2006, 51).

in water,' I remarked" (2018b, 60). By finding each other, they fulfil their Platonic relationship, and they are no longer condemned to be lonely or in search of their missing halves.

As can be seen, Doyle drew inspiration from the scientific and medical world of the nineteenth century. He based the characters of Sherlock Holmes and Dr John Watson on his real-life professor, Dr Joseph Bell. As Helen Lavën writes, beyond the fact that many of Sherlock's enemies are physicians, as in "The Adventure of the Speckled Band" (1892), "the archetype of the depraved doctor" is significant in the Sherlock Holmes canon because "the image can, to some extent, offer an interpretative framework for Holmes himself" (Lavën 2013, 2). *A Study in Scarlet* was published in 1887, a year before the brutish Whitechapel murders, which were committed by the infamous Jack the Ripper. As Lavën points it out, the investigation focused on the medical world, after the coroner testified that specific organs from the body of Annie Chapman "had been surgically removed". Jack the Ripper was said to have a certain amount of medical knowledge and, eventually, the idea that the infamous serial killer was a doctor and a member of either the middle or the upper class became highly popular (Läven 2013, 6). Basically, instead of healing the body, the degenerate doctor represents a threat to society by harming the body and causing injuries (2013, 7). What could be the remedy for society in such a threatening atmosphere? Precisely the almost superhuman detective, whose deduction method was inspired by a real doctor: "Holmes prides himself, as did his real-life model Bell, on his ability to read symptoms as keys to an underlying truth, only in Holmes's case this truth is a secret of a criminal rather than a medical puzzle" (2013, 9). However, Sherlock Holmes lives on the borderline of rationality and irrationality, he has the mind of both a detective and a criminal, and this could suggest "the darker potentialities of his role as a doctor of crime" (2013, 10). By catching all the criminals, Holmes heals the city of London and the nation's wounds which were caused by degeneration. He is involved in the whole process; he must think like a criminal to be such a successful detective, consequently, he cannot remain immune, he is a homoeopathic character who suffers from the same symptoms as other Late-Victorians. He leads a quiet decadent lifestyle, by using questionable methods in his work, and by being sexually ambiguous. Furthermore, he uses cocaine to soothe his nerves in the shortage of thrill which is caused by the absence of criminal activity. Sherlock feels a constant urge to keep his mind busy either by solving cases or by abusing different kinds of substances. The first mention of such drug abuse can be found in *A Study in Scarlet* when Watson observes that "on these occasions I have noticed such a dreamy, vacant expression in his eyes, that I might have suspected him of being addicted to the use of some narcotic" (2018b, 7). As he creates his own occupation, he can use his own methods, but having

the ability to identify himself as the criminal, as Lavën argues, he "obliges him to contaminate himself morally by identifying with the criminals he pursues" (2013, 14). If Sherlock represents the idea of the evil Victorian doctor, then Watson stands for the good one (2013, 11).

The doubling between Sherlock and Watson shows the different characteristics and struggles of Victorian society. Moreover, it also shows how the dynamic duo complement each other in many ways; Watson is Holmes's moral compass and becomes a useful member of society by helping the investigations with his medical background. Doyle's Sherlock stories tend to portray the unresolved tension between the dark and bright side of human nature, which is a recurring theme in the Gothic fiction of the fin-de-siècle. It can be traced in the duality between Sherlock and Watson, as well as between Holmes and his archenemy, Professor Moriarty.

3 Holmes and Moriarty

In Conan Doyle's Sherlock canon, the fears of the divided Victorian society are well-represented by Sherlock Holmes and his archenemy, Professor Moriarty. Fisher says that Sherlock Holmes "vividly reflects the spreading degeneracy of the society during the late Victorian era in which Sir Arthur Conan Doyle lived" (2018, 62). Furthermore, as Stephanie Craighill points out, the claim that Moriarty is the *doppelgänger* of Sherlock is supported by the dual nature of the detective, and his predecessors' dual personality as well, for instance, the protagonists of the *Newgate Calendar* or the duality represented by a real detective (2017, 93).

First, Doyle clearly acknowledges Émile Gaboriau's influence with the fictional detective Monsieur Lecoq and Poe's Dupin in his *A Study in Scarlet*. By establishing a connection between Lecoq, Dupin, and Sherlock, Watson makes a direct reference to the duality of Sherlock's nature. This is justified by the following line from *A Study in Scarlet*, when Watson exclaims: "you remind me of Edgar Allan Poe's Dupin. I had no idea that such individuals did exist outside of stories" (2018b, 18). This is Watson's remark after Sherlock proves that his science of deduction is real; he explains how he arrives at the conclusion that Watson was an army doctor in Afghanistan. By comparing Sherlock's extraordinary ability of observation and deduction to Dupin's science of ratiocination, Watson establishes a connection between the two detectives.

Beyond their extraordinary characteristics, Dupin and Sherlock resemble each other in their ability to stand for the societal problems of their era by possessing the mind of both a criminal and a detective. Both Sherlock and Dupin give a kind of order and reason to the always changing and transforming society of the nineteenth

century. On the one hand, as Fisher notes, detective fiction and Doyle's work acquired national success since it offered a release for individuals experiencing an emotional upheaval due to the changing societal structures (2018, 5). On the other hand, it seems that Sherlock Holmes, as Edgar Allan Poe's Dupin, has two sides, the creative and the logical (2016, 177). Furthermore, Ousby points out that both the unnamed narrator in "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" (1841) and Watson in "The Red-Headed League" describe the detectives in a very similar way (1976, 143). Poe's narrator mentions in "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" "the old philosophy of the Bi-Part soul" and amuses himself with the idea of a "double Dupin" (2016, 177). Furthermore, Sherlock, like Dupin, is a mathematician and a poet. He has a creative side: he plays the violin and, according to Ousby, Sherlock improvises on his violin in a melancholy and unmelodious way (1976, 143). Moreover, as Dupin has his archenemy, Minister D___ in "The Purloined Letter" (1844), who is his *doppelgänger*, Sherlock finds his double in the figure of Professor Moriarty. Craighill says that Dupin and Minister D___ are akin to Robert Louis Stevenson's split self of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, and just as Minister D___ represents the evil side of Dupin, Moriarty personifies Sherlock's (2010, 93).

Professor Moriarty appears only in "The Final Problem" (1893). At first, Moriarty was just a narrative device, he was created by Doyle in an attempt to kill Sherlock Holmes. He wanted many times to kill off his famous detective, but as Fisher writes, he was convinced otherwise either by his own mother, or his wives, or the editors at *The Strand Magazine* (2018, 9). As Thomas Goetz writes, in 1891 Doyle complained to his mother that he was unable to concentrate on other things because of Sherlock Holmes and he referred to his fictional character as if he was alive: "I think of slaying Holmes […] and winding him up for good and all. He takes my mind from better things" (2014, 149). However, Professor Moriarty, as the arch-nemesis of Sherlock Holmes, is more than a simple narrative device. He is the *doppelgänger* of the famous detective, the harbinger of illness and death. In Doyle's "The Final Problem", Sherlock describes Moriarty as an "extremely tall and thin" figure, also Sherlock claims that "his appearance was quite familiar" to him (2018a, 224). As Watson notes, in *A Study in Scarlet*: "in height he was rather over six feet, and so excessively lean that he seemed to be considerably taller" (2018b, 11). Beyond the external similarities, their thought processes are also analogous: they know precisely what the next step of the other will be, they seem to be able to read the other's thoughts. There is a striking example of the almost thought-reading process in "The Final Problem": "All that I have to say has already crossed your mind,' said he.[Professor Moriarty] 'Then possibly my answer has crossed yours,' I replied" (2018a, 225). Besides, Holmes says, "there is no one who knows the higher criminal world of London so well as I do", except the "Napoleon of crime" himself (2018a, 223). Furthermore, Watson writes that the Platonic duo

at the time of "The Final Problem" is separated because Watson lives with his wife, and their relationship goes through some changes: "after my marriage […] the very intimate relations which had existed between Holmes and myself became to some extent modified" (2018a, 220). After Watson's marriage, Holmes, in a way, loses his bright side, and becomes more involved with his *doppelgänger*, the evil Moriarty. The change is recognizable even in Sherlock's appearance: as Watson notes, "he was looking even paler and thinner than usual (2018a, 221). Being a homeopathic detective, Holmes starts to resemble Moriarty as he is about to release his oppressed and dark side. Sherlock is a divided man in the Victorian era. Furthermore, Sherlock as a public man is characterized as a respectable member of society who helps to solve crimes and contributes to the social welfare by providing the illusion of safety. However, as a private person, he leads a decadent lifestyle: he solves cases to entertain himself, and when there is nothing to do, he injects cocaine to ease his boredom. Lavën points out that Sherlock embodies a soothing image for Late-Victorian fears of crime, as well as certain fears about the professional classes and the possibly corrupt character of the genius (2013, 1). Throughout the canon, Sherlock shows the tendencies of degeneracy, and the symptoms of this disease become fatal in "The Final Problem", since Sherlock slowly becomes Moriarty, who represents one of the most dreadful things in Victorian society, degeneracy. Lavën says that "Professor Moriarty in Conan Doyle's stories became part of a Late-Victorian Gothic code that explored the monstrous potential of the post-Darwinian human being" (2013, 3). Even Sherlock says in "The Final Problem" that Moriarty "had hereditary tendencies of the most diabolical kind. A criminal strain ran in his blood, which, instead of being modified, was increased, and rendered infinitely more dangerous by his extraordinary mental powers" (2018a, 222–23). Moriarty, as an aristocrat, represents the phenomenon that degeneracy could threaten the upper-class as well as the lower classes. As Wynne writes, Sherlock endures his struggles caused by the duality inside him and the constant battle between the detective and the criminal makes Sherlock and Moriarty's doubling relevant to the Late Victorian unease raised by degeneration (2002, 8). Sherlock knows it and he is aware that he is the one who can "free society of him" (Doyle 2018a, 222). However, Sherlock realizes after his conversation with Moriarty that he is unable to triumph over his *doppelgänger* without ending his own life, but he eventually jumps into his death in a very heroic and selfless way to save society. Sherlock explains it to Watson at the end of "The Final Problem" in a letter: "I am pleased to think that I shall be able to free society from any further effects of his presence, though I fear that it is at a cost which will give pain to my friends, and especially, my dear Watson, to you" (2018a, 237). Wynne points out that the end of "The Final Problem" provides the readership with a Gothic closure (2002, 55). Indeed, the landscape at the Reichenbach Falls has Gothic tendencies, as it is a "fearful place" with "the long sweep of green water roaring

forever down" and with the "half-human shout which came booming up with the spray out of the abyss" (Doyle 2018a, 234).

Although Sherlock protects society by jumping to his death, its reception was not joyful. By killing his famous detective, Doyle caused national hysteria, as Fisher writes, he killed the scapegoat of society. Literature, especially crime literature, enabled society to project their fears and emotions onto fictional characters and see the consequences without any responsibility for what happens when people are not bound by morals. Fisher points out that in the Victorian era "the degenerate, criminal tendencies that seemed to be infiltrating the upper classes needed an outlet, and detective fiction provided that outlet, particularly through the dualistic nature of the stories' protagonist" (2018, 9). Consequently, people longed for someone to experience the horrors of the world from the comfort of their home, and the dual-natured consulting detective proved to be perfect for the role.

4 Conclusion

In the always-changing Late Victorian society, there was a great need for a hero who could restore rationality. The chaotic atmosphere of the era, which was a consequence of several factors, like urbanisation, industrialisation, poverty, and scientific discoveries, provided an ideal environment for the birth of the classical detective figure. The alterations of gender roles, the crisis of masculine identity, and the rise of the middle-class all contributed to the development of the genre. Victorians needed someone onto whom they could project their worst selves and fears or even desires while this person was able to cope with the immense immorality of that particular era.

Eventually, the earliest writers of detective fiction such as Edgar Allan Poe and Sir Arthur Conan Doyle were influenced by these changes and gave society what they desired through their famous and rational detective figures. Also, the analyses of the texts has shown that the literary doubles can be interpreted as the symptoms of a troubled society. At first, Watson embodied the masculinity crisis by being unable to function in a utilitarian society. With his dominating darker side, Sherlock was an almost inhuman outsider, resembling a degenerate doctor. However, by accompanying each other, they became a Platonic duo capable of saving Victorian society from itself. Being the scapegoat of his own time, Sherlock could not escape from the horrors of the era or his dark side, all embodied in Professor Moriarty, Sherlock's *doppelgänger*. The fears of Victorian society were projected onto the scapegoat who was strong enough to recognize the evil parts in himself (Moriarty) and to kill himself to save Victorian society.

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Rewriting Victorian Stereotypes: Questions of Female Identity in Sarah Perry's *The Essex Serpent*

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Contemporary British novelist Sarah Perry's pastiche, *The Essex Serpent* (2016), goes beyond the way women were portrayed in 19th-century fiction in several ways, including their relationships with men. Therefore, it is worth having a closer look at the complexity of female-male relationships represented in the novel. After a brief outline of the social construct known as Victorian marriage, I will examine the three main female characters' relationships with men, let them be husbands, suitors or, for that matter, comrades. In this way, I intend to prove that these women understand female-male relationships on a spectrum transcending the stereotypical roles offered to them by Victorian society.

Keywords: Gender Studies, 21st-century novel, British novel, Sarah Perry, Neo-Victorian fiction

1 Introduction

In my interpretation, Sarah Perry's novel breaks down the idealised image of the Victorian marriage by providing a deeper insight into the complexity of gender relations in the second half of the 19th century. In the centre of the Neo-Victorian narrative,[1] one finds three women, Cora Seaborne, Stella Ransome and Martha (without a family name), in whose lives marriage (or the lack of it) plays radically different roles.

In general, the idealised image of the Victorian married couple is based on the union of an obedient wife and mother, who also runs the household, and an assertive husband and father, who is responsible for the financial well-being and the public image of the family. This ideal is obviously rooted in the exemplary marriage of the royal couple: Queen Victoria both established and represented the moral standards of the period, as her harmonious relationship with Prince Albert and the way they

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[1] The whole narrative takes place within one year, starting with the New Year's Eve and ending with the November of 1893.

brought up their nine children laid the foundation of the ideal Victorian family. "By 1857, the Queen had borne nine children, and her devotion to her consort and to her home life had established her as a model bourgeois housewife – if one uniquely rich, famous, and active in national affairs" (Nelson 2007, 5).

In fact, this ideal secured the common social expectation that women should be married in order to lead an acceptable life. As Joan Perkin writes in her book on women and marriage in 19th-century Britain, "marriage was the life plan of most women, and the single state a fate to be avoided like the plague" (Perkin 1989, 3). As Perkin highlights, for many women, marriage was not a question of emotional determination, but rather a duty they had to fulfil in order to survive. Remaining single was a disgrace, which Perkin adequately expresses by likening this state to the plague. This commonly held opinion, however, in itself refutes the ideal represented by the royal couple, in whose case marriage was founded not on duty but on an emotional bond. In addition to this, one should also mention that marriage was not the only possible form of connection between men and women at the time, but extramarital affairs and comradeship-like friendships (as the one between Martha and Edward Burton) were clearly not among the socially accepted female-male relationships.

Perkin mentions yet another important aspect of the Victorian marriage, as she points out that one finds a great diversity of female-male relationships across the spectrum of the different social classes. Obviously, the members of the royal family were subject to the strictest marriage rules, such as limited partner choice, as they had to provide a model for society (1989, 4–5). The essence of this model was that women were by definition subordinated to men. Strangely, however, the power relations in the case of the royal couple went against this rule, since "Victoria as Queen Regnant had the same rights, duties and prerogatives as a King. She was the only woman in England not legally subordinate to her husband" (Perkin 1989, 35). Evidently, the dominant role Queen Victoria played both in terms of politics and in the privacy of her marriage with Prince Albert cannot be projected to other female members of the society, since everywhere else female subordination was the norm. As far as middle-class marriages are concerned, women and men had different roles: pursuing a career and maintaining social connections were among the "duties" of men, while women were confined to the home. As Perkin says, the "husband was likely to know and exert his legal rightsover [sic!] custody of children and control of his wife's property and income" (1989, 8). As for working-class wives, their situation was even worse: although by the end of the 19th century, "women achieved an equality of legal rights within marriage" (Perkin 1989, 8), they not only had to run the household and obey their husbands like their middle-class peers, but they also needed to seek employment, which meant yet another obligation for them.

Naturally, this is only a superficial overview of marital relationships in the Victorian era, as in the case of each social class, one can find radically different experiences due to the variations in the social background and the personality of the partners involved, as well as in the challenges they faced during their marriage. Similarly, the novel represents female-male relationships on a wide social scale from the upper-middle class (Cora) through the lower-middle class (Stella) and the working class (Martha), but, as a piece of historiographic metafiction, it also aims to break down the idealised image of the Victorian marriage that still prevails in the common imagination. Moreover, the text displays a great variety of complex emotional relationships, some of which transgress Victorian social expectations, such as Platonic love, abusive marriage, female-male comradeship and adultery. These are paired with models of feminine identity that similarly transgress the social norms and customs of the era, for instance the New Woman, the proto-feminist, the socialist, the merry widow and the Angel in the House. In what follows, I will provide a thorough examination of female-male relationships present in the novel to reveal their complexity.

2 Cora – The New Woman

Cora Seaborne, the protagonist of the novel, has a complicated relationship with men in general. This becomes evident right from the beginning of the text, which narrates her marriage with the somewhat older Michael Seaborne, who is a senior civil servant by profession. In fact, his domination is present already during their first encounter, when Michael, on seeing the seventeen-year-old Cora, "scolded her for a broken nail" (Perry 2016). At the beginning of their relationship, the acts of Michael do not seem to be particularly violent, but they mark only the beginning of the process during which he wears down the spirit of Cora. In the soul of Cora, an innocent and naïve young girl, such seemingly harmless insults inflict enormous wounds, primarily, because she has not had a chance to experience what it means to be an unattached lady, as she becomes a married woman straight from the paternal embrace.

Later on, the text uses suggestive symbols to represent the growing scale of male oppression. "He gave her a gold ring which was too small – a year later another, and it was smaller still" (Perry 2016). Although the ring is commonly interpreted as a token of attachment, in this case, the tightness of the ring symbolises that her husband keeps a tight rein on Cora, while I interpret its shape, an endless circle, as a reference to the perpetually increasing oppression Cora needs to endure as long as they are together. The other gifts Cora receives from him are similarly symbolic: the "slim books, and small hard objects of no use" (Perry 2016) can be

interpreted as the expression of how small and insignificant Cora is in the eyes of Michael, while the emphasis on the uselessness of the objects establishes a parallel between her and the worthless and superfluous things she is given. The hardness of the objects, however, also refers to Michael, whose rigid and emotionless nature gradually includes more and more aggressive and violent undertones. In this sense, both the rings and the "small hard objects" (Perry 2016) become possible physical weapons against Cora, while his utterances and general behaviour form part of the mental abuse he conducts in relation to her.

As a consequence of his dominant behaviour, Cora gradually changes both externally and internally by the age of nineteen: "[s]he grew ashamed of them – of her loose untidy clothes, her unbraided hair" (Perry 2016). Parallel with her transformation from a wild, young girl into a decent lady, Cora also loses her direct contact with the liveliness of nature. Instead, she becomes associated with a "dead version" of nature: "she exchanged birdsong for feathered fans, crickets in the long grass for a jacket dotted with beetles' wings; she was bound by whalebone, pierced with ivory, pinned by the hair with tortoiseshell" (Perry 2016). The fact that she starts dressing like a lady, however, also affects her behaviour, which gradually loses its individual charm: "[h]er speech grew languid to conceal its stumble; she walked nowhere" (Perry 2016). Thus, she partially loses her own self and becomes a schematised version of herself in an attempt to match the idealised image of the lady and to please Michael. Gradually, Michael becomes the ruler and Cora his faithful subject.

Despite the negative treatment she receives, however, Cora seems to be happy and enamoured of Michael in the first few months. "She had loved him – no-one could ever have loved more: she'd been too young to withstand it, a child intoxicated by an inch of drink" (Perry 2016). This blinded and seemingly limitless love Cora feels for Michael might be due to her innocence and her naivety. Since Michael is the first man who regards her as a woman, she does not even notice her increasing subordination in their relationship: like a child made dizzy by one sip of alcohol, she does not notice how intoxicating and painful this experience and this relationship would become for her. Because of the generation gap between them, she never dares to confront him, not even during his fatal disease.

When already married, Cora suffers increasing subordination, which might be due to her lack of privacy. Unlike Cora, Michael has a private life, which coincides with his public life, in which his wife can neither intervene nor participate. Interestingly, Cora infers, he seems to share this part of his life with anyone except for his family, including Cora: "[i]t struck her that really she'd known nothing of him in his public life, which was carried out in (she imagined) identical rooms in the Commons, and in his Whitehall set, and in the club which she could not attend, having the misfortune to be female" (Perry 2016).

In the Victorian period, "clubs were male-only institutions", therefore, women often knew nothing about how men spent their time in those places (Milne-Smith 2011, 10). Although towards the end of the Victorian era, "the subject of women's inclusion into club life came up," still, the clubs "maintained a predominantly homosocial ethos" (Milne-Smith 2011, 11). At the same time, women did not have the privilege to break away from home and spend time alone or enjoy a social event without a guardian or chaperone – more evidence of their social inequality. This, naturally, led to a lack of social connections, which were provided for men primarily through the club life they shared with their middle-class peers.

Over the years of marriage, Michael becomes more and more violent, tormenting Cora both mentally and physically. The conscious and continuous mistreatment of Cora begins with the pondering of Michael, which foreshadows future abuses: "[w]hat a thing it would be: to have me break you, and mend your wounds with gold" (Perry 2016). Through this, Michael likens the way he wants to deal with Cora to a 15th-century Japanese tradition, Kintsugi, which means that broken pottery is repaired with gold or other valuable materials. As Kintsugi "treats breakage as part of the object's history rather than as an error or a failure to be covered up or discarded," Michael also treats the breaking of Cora as a natural part of their relationship and does not try to hide the intentionality of his abuse ("Kintsugi++" 2018, 55). Similarly to Kintsugi, in which "[a] broken ceramic piece becomes an opportunity for innovation" ("Kintsugi++" 2018, 55), Michael intends to develop the personality of Cora by breaking and then shaping her to meet his expectations. In Kintsugi, after the pottery is repaired, it becomes more valuable, as is the case, ironically, with Cora in the sense that she becomes enriched with each experience, which will later add to her character as a widow and a single mother.

In addition to this, Michael handles Cora not only as his own property, but also as a work of art which he creates and shapes. A permanent scar on the body of Cora is perhaps the most obvious sign of his abusive treatment: "[i]t was the perfect replica of the silver leaves on the silver candlesticks that flanked the silver mirror, and which her husband had pressed into her flesh as though he were sinking his signet ring into a pool of wax" (Perry 2016). This mark is like a signature of Michael to label his property; however, it is also a tell-tale sign of the fact that he treats Cora as if she were an artifact. In this sense, her scar resembles the signature the artist puts on the artwork after its completion.

Later, the mother-son relationship between Cora and her son, Francis, gives Michael the opportunity to abuse Cora not only physically but also mentally. At the age of twenty, Cora gives birth to their son, who seems to be the only refuge for her, "an ally" in her marriage with Michael (Perry 2016). Motherhood is a blessing for Cora, but at the same time, she also has the fear of becoming increasingly

vulnerable both physically and spiritually: because of her tender emotions towards Francis, "her heart would always be exposed to wind and weather" (Perry 2016). Her son, however, becomes her weak spot not only because her husband can use him against her, but also because she gets the "second rejection of her love" from Francis himself: "[i]f she nursed him, it appeared to cause him pain, or at least a rage he could not contain; if she held him he struggled, flailed, cut her eyelid with the sharp little nail on his thumb" (Perry 2016). Naturally, her failure in motherhood is a new "source of amusement to Michael," who often makes Cora feel that she would not be suitable for this task either (Perry 2016). Although later the text makes it evident that Francis suffers from autism, at this point in the narrative, the reason why he is dismissive towards Cora is not obvious: either these are the early symptoms of his mental condition, or he might simply be following the example set by his father. Whatever the reason, this is just another opportunity for Michael to mentally abuse Cora, which is similar to how, even if unintentionally, Francis treats her. The complexity of the relationship between the three of them, however, becomes even more problematic if one considers that because of the large generation gap and the gendered binary opposition present in the Victorian era, the relationship of Michael and Cora resembles more a parent-child relationship than a husband-wife bond, in which Cora, the child, is punished without reason. Furthermore, by rejecting her, Francis also punishes his mother, and in this sense, the Francis – Cora relationship comes to mirror the one between Michael and Cora.

During the last months of Michael, his communication with Cora changes, as due to his serious illness, he gradually becomes unable to rule over his wife to the same extent as he did beforehand. While nursing him, Cora becomes so prepared as if "she might have memorised a manual on a woman's duties down to its last syllable" (Perry 2016). One should note that in the 19th century, "almost all deaths (except for sudden accidents) took place at home" and "during the final stages of an illness a family member would remain in the room, day and night" (Mitchell 2009, 164). Cora remains true to this tradition in the sense that she stays with her husband until the very end, but even then, she behaves more like a professional nurse than a caring and devoted wife, as these hours go by without her expressing any emotions, be it anxiety or love. In this sense, she performs the role that American historian M. Jeanne Peterson associates with Victorian women: "she obeyed her husband, adored him, and promoted his spiritual and physical well-being" (1984, 678). Accordingly, she takes on personality traits which are connected to the idea of the Angel in the House. On the basis of this, one might conclude that Michael's desire is fulfilled, as Cora, the work of art he has shaped over the years, is finally complete. However, Cora never transforms fully into the obedient Victorian wife, as during his last hours, there is nothing that would indicate her subordination; the

husband bears his fate, and the wife performs her duties. Therefore, in this scene, when for the first and the last time in the novel Cora could be represented as an Angel in the House, all that she becomes is an almost-angel.

After the death of Michael, Cora finally feels liberated. Ironically, her conception of widowhood is in stark contrast with the expectation that Queen Victoria generated with the way she mourned her husband: "[a]fter Albert's sudden death in December 1861, Victoria embarked upon an ecstasy of mourning, secluding herself as much as possible from the public gaze for the next fifteen years and making it obvious that like the ideal woman of her age, her chief priorities were domestic" (Nelson 2007, 5-6). Cora, however, does not go into mourning and instead of withdrawing from the public eye, she begins to socialise almost immediately after her husband's death. All the more so, since as a widow belonging to the upper-middle class, she does not have to face one of the greatest problems of Victorian middle-class widows: poverty.

In most cases, as Cynthia Curran says, becoming a widow in the Victorian era entailed the threat of financial insecurity and emotional estrangement from the world, as "a middle-class widow likely found herself not only bereft of her husband's companionship and support, but without the means to maintain herself and her family" (1993, 225). Ironically, none of these threats are relevant in the case of Cora, as Michael never provided emotional support for her, and she has no financial problems, either. Consequently, Cora has the chance to pursue a life that was considered to be largely "unwomanly" in the period. Instead of following the example set by her contemporaries, as "many widows surely would have attempted to turn to the traditional refuge of the helpless female – remarriage" (Curran 1993, 225), Cora decides to use her newly-gained independence to change her surroundings, pursue her long-standing passion for geology and get rid of her painfully acquired feminine looks – all this within a month after the death of her husband. Parallel with this, she regains her individuality and her quite unconventional attitude to femininity: "the wonderful thing about being a widow is that, really, you're not obliged to be much of a woman anymore" (Perry 2016).

This is the point when she, accompanied by Francis and his nanny, Martha, leaves her house in London and moves temporarily to Essex. The change of surroundings and leaving the modern, thriving city of London (the place of her marriage) behind can be understood as the realisation of her aim to reinterpret herself – to get away from social expectations and requirements, that is, to dress and behave like a lady and to perform the role of the Angel in the House. At the same time, although she has "freed [her]self from the obligation to try and be beautiful" (Perry 2016) and has left the world of superfluous formalities behind, she still retains ambivalent feelings in connection with her life shared with Michael: "[t]here was grief, too, that was certain, and she was grateful for it, since however

loathed he'd been by the end, he'd formed her, at least in part – and what good ever came of self-loathing?" (Perry 2016). At this time, she gets closer to Michael's former doctor, Luke Garrett, who is eager to provide consolation for Cora during her time of mourning.

Cora meets Luke for the first time in her Foulis Street house when he is called to Michael during his illness. Already during his first visit, Luke witnesses that no tenderness exists between Cora and Michael and that their marriage is characterised more by duty than by desire, which later gives him the hope that perhaps after the passing of Michael he could replace him in Cora's life. At the same time, although his affection for Cora is present already during their first encounter, Luke dares to express his tender emotions towards her only after Michael's death: "I loved you when you asked if I could save him and I knew then you hoped I would not and I knew that I would not try" (Perry 2016). However, although Luke sacrifices his vocational principles solely to please the woman he loves, his devotion remains unrequited, as Cora regards him only as a friend and not as someone whom she would seriously consider as a potential partner. Therefore, Luke's passionate love remains only Platonic, which is not unrelated to Cora's desire to retain her independence and the freedom to act as she wants: "it seemed an attempt to force her hand – all the years of what ought to have been her youth she'd been in someone's possession, and now, with hardly a few months' freedom to her name, someone wanted to put their mark on her again" (Perry 2016). Thus, he becomes the first man, soon joined by William Ransome, who sees Cora as a femme fatale.

3 Stella – The Angel in the House

Stella Ransome, the next central female figure of *The Essex Serpent*, represents the opposite of Cora Seaborne: while Cora is fighting against the expectations of Victorian society (represented also by Michael) to transform her into an Angel in the House, Stella, at least when she first appears, seems to be the manifestation of the same Victorian ideal. Therefore, I examine her position in her family in general and her role as a wife in particular as standing in sharp contrast with Cora's attempts to regain and then retain her freedom from marital constraints, which she finds suffocating. As for the narrative, Stella is introduced as the devoted wife of the clergyman of Aldwinter, William Ransome, and an enthusiastic mother of three. She unquestionably meets social expectations regarding middle-class women, as she dedicates her life to her family and household. However, her idyllic life is soon shattered by the appearance of Cora when she arrives in Essex.

As for Stella and William, they represent a perfect example of "[t]he middle-class marital ideal [that] involved love, companionship, and mutual respect based upon the complementary strengths that the partners were expected to bring to the union" (Nelson 2007, 15). One can feel this respect both in their actions and during their conversations. Stella admires her husband for his pastoral work and the financial stability he provides, while William acknowledges the energy Stella invests into running their household and raising their children; furthermore, he is grateful for the spiritual peace she creates in the family. Unlike Cora and Michael, they also share the mandatory tasks of both their private and their public lives, through which they contribute to the well-being of their family. Another difference between the two couples is that Stella and William are not afraid to show their love for each other every day through performing small gestures, for instance saying goodbye when the husband goes to work and greeting each other with a kiss when he arrives home. In addition to this, Stella cherishes a childlike passion for her husband: for her, "the mere existence of William Ransome, with his grave eyes and his sincerity and his deeply buried humour, was a miracle on a par with the wedding at Cana" (Perry 2016).

In this sense, the relationship of Stella and William, based on mutual love, goes against the nature of the 19th-century wedlock, as in the Victorian era, "couples frequently married without being passionately in love on their wedding day" and instead, were simply motivated by "a desire for children (or for a stepparent for existing children), for sexual release, for financial support, for higher social status, or for companionship, or simply by a feeling that the surrounding culture expected adults to pair off" (Nelson 2007, 27–28). The relationship of Cora and Michael, however, is in stark contrast to what Stella experiences, and, consequently, I argue that it is much closer to a possible form of the reality of the Victorian marriage than the idealised love of Stella and William. The ideal aspect of their relationship is present primarily in how Stella sees it: "[h]er love for Will – which had arrived as suddenly as a fever when she was seventeen and had been just as dizzying – had not abated or diminished, even briefly, in their fifteen years of marriage" (Perry 2016). Therefore, Stella and William share a union that is much closer to an ideal than to Victorian reality.

Part of this ideal is that Stella "had taken to every aspect of marriage with indecent delight," which is less present in William's more thoughtful and balanced feelings for her. For instance, she enjoys serving her husband, doing housework, and, most of all, giving birth to their children whom she sees as divine blessings. The relationship of Stella and William proves to be so strong, at least until the arrival of Cora, that "even the loss of two children had not struck a blow to their love, only settled it more deeply on its foundation" (Perry 2016). In this relationship based on support, trust and fidelity, Stella successfully accomplishes her "mission" to be an ideal Victorian

woman and, consequently, she is the only female character in the novel who has found her berth by the beginning of the narrative. However, her seemingly ideal marriage, based on a union of body and mind, soon dissolves when its foundation is shattered – or rather transferred to William and Cora's relationship. As a response to their budding love, Stella increasingly becomes like the Virgin Mary both in her attitude to her marriage (she becomes an asexual being who is prone to self-sacrifice) and in terms of her clothes (the colour mostly associated with her is blue, the symbolic colour of the Virgin Mary).[2]

As William's attention turns from Stella to Cora, he gradually lets her closer to himself. A significant act demonstrating this shift takes place when he lets her into his study, the place he uses to hide from the world (and occasionally from his family). Since I interpret his study as a possible projection of his soul, I find it of symbolic importance who he lets into this intimate space. Everything in the room, including his books and notes, belongs to that part of his life that he intends to conceal from the public. Before Cora's arrival, the only person he admits into his study is his wife, Stella, which is a further reference to the intimate relationship they share: "it would seem to him less exposing to relieve himself against Traitor's Oak at noon than to allow anyone across the threshold" (Perry 2016). This threshold symbolises the boundary between his public and his private self, which only those are allowed to pass who share a special intimacy with him. Even their children are not entitled to enter: for them, the room is a forbidden place where they can set foot only at the direct request of their father.

Therefore, allowing Cora into this room is a significant turning point in their relationship, which, eventually, destroys the unconditional trust and sincerity on which his relationship with Stella is based. At the same time, primarily due to Stella's inherently self-sacrificing attitude, their love triangle is far less dramatic than one would expect. When the tender emotions between William, her husband, and Cora, her friend, become obvious for Stella, instead of trying to stifle them, she rather encourages their development. For instance, when Cora throws a summer party and Joanna, Stella's daughter, starts playing the piano, Stella symbolically offers her place to Cora, saying "I'm too tired to dance with my husband, will my friend take my place?" (Perry 2016). Despite her self-sacrificing behaviour, however, T. J. Edelstein's claim that adultery brings about "the destruction of the Victorian home" (1983, 209) is relevant to *The Essex Serpent*, even though the devotion Stella feels for her husband does not let her conclude their marriage with a divorce, that is, in a conventional way. Rather, the innocence that characterises

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[2]   As Vivian and Wilhelmina Jacobs say, "[i]n the Church blue has become the traditional color of the Virgin Mary and is used on days commemorating events in her life" (1958, 29).

Stella both in terms of her demeanour and physical appearance makes her choose death instead of being involved in a love triangle.

After Stella symbolically sets her husband free, the physical relationship between William and Cora becomes more intimate, and he regards her as his new heroine. At this point, William does not allow Stella an insight into the privacy of his life anymore, even though she is aware of the affection present between William and Cora. This awareness is what eventually causes the decline of Stella's health, which one notices also in William's changed perception of her. While previously he felt a "[l]onging for her, and for the sound of children at his study door," now "he knew he'd touch her and find her for the first time slight and insubstantial" (Perry 2016). Stella's response to this situation is psychosomatic: she starts fading and when she gets sick, the process during which her condition deteriorates goes parallel with the strengthening of William and Cora's attachment. The nature of her illness is both symptomatic and symbolic: "Stella Ransome was no fool, and knew consumption when she saw it speckle the white folds of a handkerchief" (Perry 2016). Since consumption is an illness that literally consumes the body, I interpret its effect on Stella's health as being similar to the effect the attachment between William and Cora has on her spirit: it consumes Stella's soul and takes away her energy and her will to live.

Even though William's adultery seemingly does not bring about fundamental changes in their marriage, Stella understands it as her failure to fulfil the requirements attached to the role of the ideal Victorian wife, which leads to her gradual decline. Stella considers herself useless, as if she were the one who hinders William in his attempt at leading a happy life. Her viewpoint is assumed also by William, who uses the transformation of her behaviour as a pretext to criticise her: "sometimes I think she wants to leave us – that she wants to go away from me" (Perry 2016). Paradoxically, William accuses Stella of leaving him, while he is the one who is cheating on her. Even though his feelings for her have not diminished, it is symptomatic of the growing distance between them that he becomes conscious of the love he still feels for Stella only when Cora asks: "[d]id you really think because you loved *here* you couldn't love *there*?" (Perry 2016).

However, even without leaving his family, William stops being fully present in Stella's life, as he nurtures tender feelings for another woman. In response to his neglect, Stella consciously sacrifices her life for the sake of William's happiness, while at the same time becomes the victim of the love shared by William and Cora. The most obvious sign of Stella's transformation is that she gradually appears to lose her corporeal reality and become a quasi-translucent and ethereal creature. Therefore, it is not by chance that towards the end of the narrative (and of her life) she establishes a strong emotional relationship with Cora's son, Francis; a bond that is based not on the attachment of the bodies but on the connection of two fellow spirits.

There is no man in the life of Stella who would perform the role William does, yet, her relationship with Francis, Cora's psychologically troubled son, generates a feeling of appreciation in her that she lacks in other fields of her life (for instance as a wife and as a mother). Both Francis and Stella have unsolved emotional problems: Francis lacks the love he cannot get from Cora because of their uneasy relationship (Cora has problems with handling his strange behaviour), while Stella also lacks the motherly love she cannot give to her children because of their absence (the Ransome children are taken away lest they should get infected by Stella). Therefore, it is not by chance that Stella and Francis become fellow spirits helping each other: Stella cares for Francis like a solicitous surrogate mother, while Francis feels an admiration for her that is totally missing from his relationship with his own mother. Both of them become enriched by this quasi-mother-son relationship, since Francis realises that he has a lot to lose by not letting his mother love him, while Stella finds consolation in her attachment to Francis after being ousted from her role of the perfect mother and wife. Through this relationship, they become allies as it helps them achieve their goals: Francis finds his way back to his mother, while Stella sacrifices her life on Earth for the sake of her soul's immortality.

4 Martha – The Socialist

Cora and Stella handle their relationships with men in different but comparable ways: Cora gradually distances herself from the Victorian ideal of femininity with which Stella willingly identifies. In contrast, the approach Martha, Francis's nanny, shows to men seems to be radically different from both Cora's and Stella's, as her actions are guided by principles that fully ignore the expectations of the era. Furthermore, Martha is ready to come to radical decisions regarding both her public and her private life, which, evidently, has an effect on the way she handles the men (and the women) present in her life. As for her social status, Martha comes from the working class, so she stands below both the lower-middle class Stella and the upper-middle class Cora. She is introduced as the nanny of Cora's son, which means that she ought to play a mother-like figure in Francis's life, even if, just like Cora, she is unable to perform this role.[3] Being a single woman, Martha lives in

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[3]   I find it important to note that, according to Peterson, "[t]he governess should not be confused with the nurse, also called nursemaid or 'nanny.' The nursemaid, also responsible for child care, was clearly of the servant class. As much overlapping as there might have been in child care duties, the distinction between the two occupations was always clear" (1970, 23, n. 8).

the household at Foulis Street and later she follows Cora and Francis to Essex and back – in fact, she lives wherever Cora does throughout the novel.

Naturally, the symbiosis of Martha and Cora results in an intimate relationship between them, which is present already while Michael, Cora's husband, is alive. In fact, Michael's presence in the household does not prevent the close relationship that develops between the two women, rather, his oppressive behaviour contributes to it, as he does not give Cora the emotional support she needs; therefore, Cora tries to find it elsewhere. Furthermore, Cora cannot escape from her abusive husband, not even temporarily: as a Victorian wife, she is "a 'feme covert' or 'hidden woman' – absorbed into her husband, and regarded as one person with him by Common Law" (Simonsen 1997, 510). Therefore, as an upper-middle class wife, she is not allowed to leave her home without a guardian, which means that she cannot establish friendships in public, only within the confines of her home. In addition to her troubled relationship with her husband, Cora cannot seek solace in her son, Francis, either, as the child rejects her attempts to approach him. Thus, the only person who can offer consolation for her is Martha, who lives in the same house, and consequently, is always available, and who, as a woman and as a witness to Cora's sufferings, has direct experience of what Cora has to go through. Although Martha is unable to revolt against Michael due to her subordinate status as a servant, she is still ready to support Cora emotionally, which, eventually, leads to the formation of a lesbian-like bond between the two of them.

This lesbian-like relationship becomes obvious when one night Cora, after having a heated argument with Michael, enters Martha's room and seeks consolation from her, against which Martha has no objection: she "had raised the cloths that covered her, and taken Cora into her arms; she drew up her knees to enclose her entirely, and held her very tight, so that the other woman's trembling entered her" (Perry 2016). Through this embrace, during which all the differences regarding their status and their social position seem to vanish, Cora and Martha get as close to each other as possible, and an intimate alliance is formed between the two of them. When Martha takes Cora "into her arms" (Perry 2016), she behaves as a mother does when cuddling her baby; however, the atmosphere the scene suggests is rather homosexual than filial in nature. In addition to this, Martha "was given to standing with her arm about Cora Seaborne's waist with a possessive gesture" (Perry 2016), through which she boldly and openly shows her tender emotions towards Cora. Martha's behaviour might also suggest that Cora is her own property even though she is a married woman at the beginning of the novel. Symbolically, this intimate embrace reveals Martha's intention to chain Cora to herself.

However, latent homosexuality is more obviously present in Martha; as for Cora, her intimate connection with the nanny is only a deeply felt friendship, which

serves as a shelter providing her safety whenever she needs it. At the same time, the term "friend" is somewhat ambiguous, "as for Victorians, a friend was first and foremost an emotional intimate who was not a relative or a sexual partner, but the term could also be a euphemism for a lover" (Marcus 2007, 26). The diversity of this interpretation appears also in Martha and Cora's relationship, as for Cora, this attachment means only a spiritual intimacy, while for Martha, it is rather a combination of an emotional bond and physical love. Nevertheless, the relationship between them remains only latently lesbian, as it is far less explicit than what Sharon Marcus defines as a relationship between "female lovers." As Marcus explains, "friends differed significantly from female lovers who threw themselves into obsessive passions or lived together, functioned socially as a couple, merged finances, and bequeathed property to each other" (Marcus 2007, 29). Seen from this perspective, Cora and Martha do not become a lesbian couple in the novel, because their general behaviour, attitudes, social position and lifestyle do not match. Furthermore, although their intimate affection for each other is present all through the narrative, they are not financially and socially co-dependent (even though after Michael's demise, Martha is obviously employed by Cora).

At the same time, their relationship is still on the verge of homosexuality, at least seen from the perspective of Lesbian Studies. As Marcus points out, "[l]esbian studies place women's friendships on a continuum with lesbian relationships and equate both with resistance to the family and marriage" (Marcus 2007, 29). This attitude, obviously, positioned itself in opposition to the social norms of the marriage-centred Victorian society, in which "[m]arriage [represented] heterosexuality more forcibly than any other public institution" (Vicinus 1997, 72). As for the novel, Cora escapes into the arms of Martha because of her abusive marriage and the emotionally unsatisfactory atmosphere in which she lives, while as for Martha, homosexuality can be understood as a revolt against the expectations of the Victorian society, according to which marriage is "the approved female destiny for all classes" (Walkowitz 1992, 64). Therefore, Martha, a radical and a proto-feminist, may demonstrate more noble purposes through her lesbian-like relationship with Cora, such as equality between women and men. Thus, she stands for those aims that became widespread already among the proto-feminists of the Victorian era: "[w]omen in female marriages were thus in the vanguard of the movement to modernize marriage, for their relationships anticipated the increasing equality of husbands and wives gradually written into law over the course of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries" (Marcus 2007, 194).

Cora's acquaintance with William leads to a turning point in the life of Martha, as her only rival so far has been Luke Garrett. However, with the appearance of William, Cora does not seem to need the emotional support of Martha anymore. At this point, the two rivals, Martha and Luke, realise that neither of them has a chance

to win over Cora's heart, and therefore, they choose to become allies. During their sexual intercourse, they console each other while imagining that Cora is there with them: "it was Cora's mouth he kissed, and Cora's hand she placed where she wanted it most. Each was only second best: they wore each other like hand-me-down coats" (Perry 2016). Losing Cora, the object of their desire, might be all the more traumatic for Martha, since, meeting the expectations of the era regarding single women, she is a virgin. However, she casts her purity aside with the intercourse; and, therefore, becomes both physically and spiritually the victim of her unrequited love for Cora.

As time goes by, Martha resigns herself to the inevitable fact that she cannot deepen her relationship with Cora and she begins to open up towards others. The first man in Martha's life to whom she can get close emotionally is Edward Burton, a young clerk, whose life is saved by Luke after getting stabbed by a stranger. The nature of their relationship is completely different from the one she has with Cora: "[t]o Martha – used to Cora's endless conversation and her sudden fits of joy or gloom – his company was peaceful" (Perry 2016). This serenity and his wounded condition bring about a change in Martha: she becomes Edward's caring nurse and it seems that she starts living the life of an average Victorian woman. She is always there for Edward, looking after him and worrying about his well-being, as a dedicated housewife would: "Martha had found herself fretting, in the following days, that Burton would not eat enough, or test the strength of his legs by walking the length of the road, and so she had returned a week later with packets of fish and chips, a net of oranges, and several of Francis's abandoned copies of *The Strand*" (Perry 2016). Her affection brings them closer to each other, and Edward contemplates Martha with admiration, which he does not fail to express: "she looked, he thought, breaking batter from his bit of fish, like an angel, if an angel could be hungry, and didn't mind grease on her chin and a smear of green peas on her sleeve" (Perry 2016). This comparison of Martha to an angel reminds one of the idea of the Angel in the House, which further highlights the fact that for Edward, Martha becomes a potential housewife.

At the beginning of her relationship with Edward, Martha behaves as if she has forgotten the principles that she previously represented. However, this phase ends when Martha rejects Edward's marriage proposal, as she considers it an offer that would threaten her independence. With this decision, Martha not only rejects the idea of marriage, but also rebels against the expectations of the late 19th-century society. In this sense, she becomes a fictional representative of a growing number of women, since "the percentage of women who never married increased slightly in the late-Victorian period" (Walkowitz 1992, 64).

At the same time, one should also consider that, as Martha Vicinus points out, although "[i]n the nineteenth century the dominant ideology of separate spheres

gave both women and men opportunities for a wide range of emotional and erotic relationships among themselves, […] heterosexual marriage remained the presumed emotional, religious, and social center of society" (1997, 72). Martha also seems to be aware of the alleged superiority of the heterosexual marriage when she tries to resolve the problematic situation caused by her rejection with an offer: "[i]f you cannot have a wife, will you take a companion – will you have a comrade?" (Perry 2016). Although her aim might be to prevent Edward from taking this refusal as a personal insult, her suggestion of a female-male comradeship is also problematic: similarly to homosexuality, it goes against the Victorian ideal of heterosexual relationships, which prefers marriage as the only suitable connection between men and women. As a proto-feminist and socialist, Martha rejects the idea of marriage, which often results in the oppression of women. This late-Victorian tendency is also mentioned by Ann Heilmann and Margaret Beetham, who claim that at the *fin-de-siècle*, "the principle of comradeship and equality replaced the traditional view of the wife as subordinate to and dependent on her husband" (2004, 123). Through her denial, Martha openly rejects the opportunity to become a Victorian wife and to live according to the expectations regarding contemporary women – she follows a different ideology.

The last relationship of Martha to be analysed essentially differs from the previously mentioned ones, as the connection between Martha and George Spencer, Luke's wealthy friend who is also a surgeon, exemplifies a situation in which the woman is in a superior position and she is the one who takes advantage of the emotions of the man. Spencer[4] is hopelessly in love with Martha, however, she does not return his emotions. At the same time, Martha, being a socialist who aims to improve the housing conditions of the poor, realises that she could achieve her noble goals, or at least make progress in this respect if she had Spencer's money at her disposal. Therefore, she decides to deceive Spencer in order to achieve her goals, which leads to a relationship based on the Platonic love of Spencer and on the ulterior motives of Martha: "[i]f I let him love me, and pretend I might return it, and it makes him do something good – is it really so bad? Is a broken heart too high a price to pay for a better city?" (Perry 2016). Eventually, Martha convinces Spencer to take steps in improving the housing conditions and in replacing the London slums with newly built houses. The uniqueness of this relationship lies in the fact that here the traditional roles between men and women are reversed, as Martha controls Spencer according to her own financial interests, while Spencer is put into a position that is inferior to hers. Although this relationship is only of minor importance in the narrative, in a way it can be understood as the climax of the novel, which, as a pastiche, both celebrates and rewrites the female-male relationships present in the Victorian period.

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4   George Spencer is practically the only character who is most often referred to by his family name.

5 Conclusion

When encountering the term "the Victorian woman," one tends to imagine a woman living in a happy marriage, raising several children and in general, embodying the Angel in the House both in terms of her behaviour and her attitude to life. However, as this novel also suggests, it would be precipitous to assume that every woman living in the Victorian period was expected or had the chance to conform to the same ideal. In fact, their diversity was present both in terms of their social class and their family status and also in their attitude towards the expectations of the society around them. Moreover, the novel raises not only the possibility that the concept of "the Victorian Woman" was more heterogeneous than homogeneous, but also that perhaps it did not even exist, as none of the female characters embody this ideal. Cora exchanges the obligations of married life for the liberty of a single existence, Stella leaves behind her exemplary role as a wife and a mother and chooses sublimation from the terrestrial world, while Martha, although having been offered the prospects of a presumably happy marriage, decides to follow her socialist ideas about female equality. Therefore, one might conclude with saying that it is this contradiction between how the Victorian era exists in our collective imagination and how this Neo-Victorian novel portrays it that accounts for its innovative character, as *The Essex Serpent* reinterprets the idealised image of "the Victorian Woman" to show its complexity – in full accordance with the subversive ambiguities that characterise the genre.

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Non-Linear Temporal Experience in Edgar Allan Poe's Short Fiction

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The goal of my article is to familiarise the reader with the notions of 'non-linear temporality' and 'non-linear temporal experience.' Based on studies of memory and neurobiology, I would like to highlight that episodic memory is a narrative process, and the past-present-future trichotomy is a bias, which can be overruled in so-called 'non-neurotypical' states of mind, such as trauma-induced shock and psychological illness. Edgar Allan Poe's characters often present symptoms of psychological illnesses undefined in the early/mid-19th century with surprising accuracy, among them displaying common symptoms of NLTE (Non-Linear Temporal Experience). I aim to outline how these experiences are manifest in the particular context of his short fiction.

Keywords: time, non-linear time, temporal experience, Edgar Allan Poe, non-neuro-typicality

1 Introduction

I have been researching the philosophical ramifications of non-linear temporal experiences (NLTE) for years, with the main emphasis on understanding how fictive NLTEs relate to real-life NLTEs, and what they can tell us about the nature of time and temporality. The outcome of this research, as I will argue in this article, is that modern, historical, neurotypical people are linearly biased due to the workings of their brain, societal conventions, and the fundamental physical build-up and rules of the universe. Since NLTEs override this bias, they can communicate intriguing potentials about time and temporality. Approaching the subject from an integrationist point of view, as opposed to focusing on what separates reality from fiction, I found intriguing clues in fictive works which inherently communicate something about a pronounced NLTE that has extratextual relevance as well. In general, I found that non-neurotypical authors (especially those with pronounced psychological illnesses) communicate NLTEs through their characters in a manner that definitely calls for a careful interpretation, investigating real temporal reference. I try to abstain from drawing only autobiographical parallels, and also observe the literary context in which these fictive works are created. In this article, I will outline the following ideas:

1. What non-linear temporal experience means, derived from both the philosophy of time and the neurobiological experience of time. I will focus on the so-called neurological "linear bias" to explain why and how non-neurotypical authors are prone to communicate extratextually relevant NLTEs through their characters.
2. Edgar Allan Poe's life, non-neurotypicality and literary significance, and what constitutes the temporal horror in his particular version of Gothic fiction. I will try to synthesise how his psychological predisposal, combined with his literary approach, result in very peculiar NLTE-ridden characters.
3. I will investigate three short stories, and their main characters in detail: "The Pit and the Pendulum," where NLTE is a vessel to a transcendental epiphany, "The Tell-Tale Heart," where it drives the narrator insane, and "The Premature Burial," where the focus is on how the story portrays with poetic detail the encounter with a real-life, completely non-fictive NLTE, catalepsy. This horrifying medical enigma began living its own life outside of literary texts, haunting the 19th-century society's collective unconscious, through, at least in part, Poe's imaginative virtue.

2 Linear and Non-Linear Temporal Experience

In *The Myth of the Eternal Return*, Mircea Eliade argues that the conception of the Bible was of decisive influence in the formation of the European concept of time. As opposed to previous narratives by 'primitive'[1] societies about gods and mankind, this Judeo-Christian text presented a catalogue of events ordered on a straight temporal line, carving out individual and unrepeatable moments, or what may be called *moments of history* (whether fictitious or real, in this particular case). It also proposed a set of individual characters who bear their own personal narrative and become recognizable through their tales of faith and suffering (1954, 104). From Eliade, we can conclude that the 'birth' of this Judeo-Christian historical narrative was pivotal in the 'birth' of the individuum. Primitive cyclical time had little respect or care about humans as individuals. It divided moments into the sacred (rituals through which human beings unite with the eternal, non-temporal, sublime dimension of gods) and the profane (parts of individual life without a sacred function, hence forgettable, unimportant, and unrecorded; 1954,

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[1] Predominantly cyclically temporal, with little to no intention of recording history and individual human narratives.

35). Circularity is an idea based on observing grander, external units, existing independently from us, such as nature itself. Linear time, in contrast, is the time of the individual.

Though Eliade makes fairly reasonable points when he claims that a prominent linear temporal disposal originates with the Bible, this article is inclined to argue with him to a certain extent. According to Ronald C. Hoy, even as far back in time as 500 BC, Greek society as a whole (and not only the educated philosophers) had "common temporal beliefs" similar to modern societies (2013, 10-11). These entailed a belief in "a determined (fixed) Past, and some indeterminate and open Future" (2013, 10), a belief that objects can be past, present or future, that evolution prompts us to be concerned about the future, not the past, or that future things are moving towards us" (2013, 10). If we carefully study pre-Christian scholars, we can find a myriad of examples of linear inclinations, embedded even within the ideas of e.g. Aristotle[2] or Heracleitus.[3] It has to be noted that Eliade bases his comparisons on juxtaposing 'natural' societies with limited capacities or will to record history with more 'modern' societies that did so, but I still find it interesting that whilst making his argument about the transition from cyclical to linear schemes, he predominantly disregards Greek antiquity as a whole.

Linear temporality has been explained by many pertinent and often similar notions throughout history, such as the acknowledgement of a certain irreversibility of moments. As per Stephen Hawking (as far as his proposals on the Big Bang and the Big Crunch are concerned, which are ideas he started second guessing at some point), linear temporality includes the notion that time has a beginning and an end point. Saint Thomas Aquinas argued that time is a string of events which infinitely stretches backwards (McGinnis 2013, 74), and John Philoponus claimed that it infinitely stretches both backwards ("ante parte") and then forward ("post parte") (McGinnis 2013, 79). Up until Albert Einstein, linear temporality also entailed the idea of uniformly flowing time.

No matter which school of thought we follow, it can be argued that linear temporality entails that time *flows from past to present to future*, or that time is *divided between moments of earlier and later*. Such classification is by no means an original conclusion of the author of this article. It is actually paraphrasing the arguments of British Idealist philosopher J.M.E. McTaggart. His seminal essay, "The Unreality

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2   Andrea Falcon, upon discussing Aristotle's puzzles about time, cites a variety of examples that outline how Aristotle questioned the nature of time, based on what I believe to be linearly biased paradigms. These include that time can be described with words such as "now," "recently," "long ago," "suddenly" etc. (cited in Falcon 2013, 48) or using the past-present-future trichotomy in his arguments (qtd. in Falcon 2013, 50).

3   Hoy quotes Heracleitus's famous claim: "You cannot step twice into the same river" (2013, 15).

of Time," first published in 1908, ordered linear time (or what he called, back in that particular moment of history, time in its entirety) into the so-called A, B, and C Series. In this particular article, I am introducing his A and his B Series. The A Series, or what McTaggart calls a dynamic notion, is the idea that time flows from moments of the past through moments of the present to moments of the future. The B Series is a fixed notion because it entails that moments have a position on a straight temporal line as being earlier or later, and these positions will never change (the birth of my mother is always earlier then the moment of my birth) (1908, 459).[4]

The intriguing part about McTaggart's essay is when he starts pondering on the fact that however well these notions describe time as per our human experience, they are either contradictory (A Series) or insufficient (B Series). Hence in the end, he renders time unreal (1908, 464). Regardless of the discrepancy between what McTaggart claims to describe (time itself) and what he actually describes (linear temporal experience), he undoubtedly unravels the internal paradox that lies within a temporal scheme projected onto reality due to the workings of none other than our own brains with a staggering, almost poetic sensitivity.

Human perception made linear temporality a reigning paradigm that we project onto the world, even if on the grander schemes, it is not necessarily a viable idea. This self-projection involves coming up with a system of conventions (such as measuring time with months, days, etc.), which, at some levels, is based on educated guesses or careful measures that take into account certain celestial physical schemes (the orbiting of the Earth around the Sun, etc.). Though it even echoes a cyclical origin, it is ultimately a linear, biased doctrine. This self-projection only kept getting stronger and stronger in time, as society progressed to living in modern, urbanised settings, as clock time, chronological time rose to more and more prominence, and as the human sense of individuality grew increasingly stronger. Regarding Poe's "The Tell-Tale Heart," my interpretation will focus on how the narrator is quite literally driven into insanity by his own brain, unable to consolidate between the discrepancy of a strong urge to perceive time as linear, and a fundamental, underlying circularity, which awakens harrowing anxieties of cessation for someone like him: a modern individual with a linear narrative of the self.

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4   The C Series is a particularly intriguing idea: McTaggart claims that events may actually only have a fixed, atemporal sequential order of e.g. M, N, O, P, and then some mysterious element (such as e.g. change, an idea embedded in the A Series) adds the illusion of temporal progress to this static, non-temporal, quasi-numeric order. In a previous article, "Madmen In and Out of Time: A McTaggartian Reading of Madness in Fiction" (*Pro&Contra*, 2019, 5–30) I decoded this series in regards to its potentiality to suggest that the underlying reality around us is not spatiotemporal but numeric (such as a computer program, as proposed even by pop cultural references, such as *Matrix*).

The peculiar ways in which our brain reinforces (or most likely creates) the linear projective urge is rather complex and fascinating. What I fundamentally rely on here is a certain philosophical discussion of time, which, however, utilises insight from natural sciences such as neurology and modern physics, as I strongly contend that the interdisciplinary angle helps to occasionally 'validate' certain philosophical proposals, such as McTaggart's perplexity of (linear) time. Hence, this approach contributes to establishing a particular interdisciplinary analytical framework concerned with temporal experience, in the context of which we can unpick certain (and perhaps) less orthodox interpretations of Edgar Allan Poe's works. It has been long known and understood by those extensively studying memory that the past-present-future trichotomy is *indeed* created internally, as sensitively presupposed by amongst others, McTaggart, due to the human brain being hardwired on a cause-and-effect order. In other words, our brains are linearly biased. Paula Droege, in *The Routledge Handbook of Philosophy of Memory,* outlines that once someone loses the ability to remember to some extent, that person will also lose their ability to anticipate. Cerebrally, intellectually they may still comprehend the idea of 'past' or 'future,' but their ability to act upon it is impaired. Droege also quotes Pascal Boyer's theories about the potential repercussions amnesiacs' behaviour pose on social cohesion and ponders on whether they are more prone to partake in perilous activities due to not being able to viscerally comprehend that *if* they do something hazardous in the *present*, it will have an influence on their *future* (Droege 2017, 107). Amnesiacs' deficient *feeling of pastness* influences their ability to anticipate because our brains do not technically differentiate between 'past' and 'future.' The same parts of the brain are responsible for creating the sensations of memory and anticipation (De Brigard 2017, 137). The past-present-future trichotomy is an epistemological bias force-fed to us by a brain hooked on ordering everything into cause first, and then effect. However, it is not only our brains that do not technically differentiate between past and future – the laws of science seem to follow the same pattern.[5]

Hawking pondered on the direction of time quite extensively in *A Brief History of Time*, and whilst he could not pinpoint *why* the direction of time is past to present to future (a.k.a. cause to effect, a.k.a. order to chaos), he underlined that in our universe, for whatever reason, the law is that in any given closed system, entropy always grows

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[5]   According to Hawking, "The laws of science do not distinguish between the past and the future. More precisely, as explained earlier, the laws of science are unchanged under the combination of operations (or symmetries) known as C, P and T. (C means changing particles for antiparticles. P means taking the mirror image, so left and right are interchanged. And T means reversing the motion of all particles: in effect, running the motion backward.) [...] In other words, life would be just the same for the inhabitants of another planet who were both mirror images of us and who were made from anti-matter, not matter" (2016, 163).

(2016, 164), which entails that we go from order to chaos, from cause to effect. We will knock over a teapot and see it falling on the ground and breaking into pieces. We do not go around seeing cracked pieces of teapot on the floor magically lift themselves up to gracefully land on a table and recompose into an unbroken teapot. This, in the understanding of this article, could well explain the brain's predisposal to the cause-and-effect order: we physically manifest and accustom and habituate ourselves to exist in a material dimension mainly independent from us which ordains any given system to function by following a certain physical and neuro-temporal order. Divergence from this system is semi-impossible and semi-terrifying. In a coming subchapter, I will discuss a physiological condition pertinent both in the society and the fictive works of Poe which somehow makes the whole body and mind unanimously riot against the thermodynamical arrow of time, "the direction of time in which disorder or entropy increases" (Hawking 2016, 164). However, it does so with the terrifying consequence of making the victim of this curious condition, catalepsy, appearing to be dead whilst still staying alive.

In fact, in recent years, a number of studies surfaced which underline that the brain's learning is quite potentially controlled by the rule of entropy (see e.g. Goldt and Seifert, 2017, 1–7). What is even more awe-striking, is that "consciousness could simply be a side-effect of entropy" (MacDonald based on Guevara Erra et al 2017, 1–18). Guevara Erra et al discuss the idea that the brain mirrors entropy because it has an innate need to mirror its environment: "Because the brain functions to maintain a predictive model of the environment (the reason the brain evolved is to model the environment, after all), then perhaps the brain's global configuration has to 'copy' what is out there: and out there energy distributes in all possible microstates (second principle of thermodynamics)" (2017, 9). If we accept that entropy imposes a certain linearity on the universe, in theory it can be responsible for imposing linearity, including a certain temporal directional thinking on our brains as well. My arguments regarding entropy modifying temporal awareness will be vital whilst talking about catalepsy, and its effects on both the narrator of Poe's "The Premature Burial," and a general societal anxiety present in the 19th century in connection with this condition. Discussing entropy with regards to temporal awareness allows for a vastly different reading of the *dead alive* body and the anxieties of being buried alive, as well.

But whether our brains are hardwired on the cause-and-effect order due to the thermodynamical arrow of time or not, the proof still stands that the brain surrenders many pivotal elements of mental human experience to creating functioning, linear narratives. One such experience is the experience of memory, or more precisely, as Daniel D. Hutto argues, "one special sort of memory – autobiographical reverie – has a strong claim for being indelibly narrative in nature." He goes on to point out that

"autobiographical memory and narrativity may be inescapably bound together" (2017, 192). To specify what autobiographic memories are, we resort to José Luis Bermúdez, who claims that they are explicit, declarative and episodic in nature (2017, 181). Droege outlines that as per recent scientific findings, episodic memory (the part of memory which "keeps track of the self in time") is much more of an act of recreation than remembrance (2017, 105). We do not retrieve episodic memories by 'picking' them out of some sort of storage – every time we remember something episodic, we essentially recreate the scenario. And the more gaps there are in our understanding or remembrance, the more our brains are inclined to fill in the gaps with functioning, linear story-pieces which contribute to a consequential narrative where everything retains a certain relation of elements (cause-and-effect order). To put it simply: our brain adores creating stories, or making connections where there are none.

These ideas, on the one hand, can underline the relevance of interdisciplinary research and an integrationist approach whilst studying fictive temporal experiences, especially ones related to trauma as well. Fiction, narration, time and remembrance are interlinked with a myriad of little threads. On the other hand, it also suggests the *objective*, external non-existence, or at least, somewhat diminished relevance of linear time. There are internal contradictions between certain canonised and still valid linear doctrines, and the often very visceral, chaotic, traumatic emotional, mental or fictive moments of awakening or terror when a character begins to consciously or unconsciously question the relevance or the ultimate truth value of this paradigm. Linear time is by no means an obsolete concept with no real use for society – however, whilst investigating non-neurotypical characters' temporal experiences, I propose the application of a rather lenient lens which allows their experiences to be judged based on the merit of their *potential* for truth value.

In terms of Poe's short fiction, the potential fictionality of linear time, and our inability to fully understand or even get to know what time truly entails is of pivotal importance. Robert Tally argues that the basis of Poe's horror is not simply the fear of the unknown, but the fear of unknowability, meaning that the subject dreads what they cannot ever really get to know (2010, 3–4). He claims that there is a strong subversive urge in Poe's fiction regarding the "truth telling" ability of narratives and narrators: Poe's narrators know *not* that they do not know, but that they cannot know. Hence, according to Tally, Poe's works often defy any attempt to decode a unanimous 'meaning,' as the horror itself lies in the fact that some comforting meaning cannot and will not reveal itself. "A foundational project in many tales seems to be the critique of knowledge itself" (Tally 2010, 4). I contend that for the most part, philosophical (and even scientific) discussions of time are often faced with the same dilemma. As if time was forever paradoxical to human minds, something that we cannot ever really get to know, or decipher – an irresolvable

enigma. I contend that engaging with NLTE is a prominent attempt at trying to tackle the dread of this unknowability – through (at least, partially) liberating our brain from the linear bias, we can engage with different temporal schemes, perhaps more true, more relevant to the reality of time then our linear projection. This urge is prominently observable in Poe's short stories.

My main thesis is that time is fundamentally unknowable. Temporal unknowability is present due to the biased human brain being unable to fully grasp what temporality could mean. During NLTEs, the brain is liberated enough from the linear bias to understand that its own experience is potentially flawed, but still incapable of fully surrendering to the experience, hence, in most cases, a sort of mental overload or 'malfunction' (mainly madness and mania) ensues. Observing these reactions related to unknowability is my main focus.

3 NLTE as a Source of Pure Horror – "The Tell-Tale Heart"

The plot of the short story can be summarised by saying that the narrator of "The Tell-Tale Heart" turns mad and paranoid due to a certain temporal threat, so much so that he actually murders the personification of that fear. But this dreadful deed does not give him solace: he does not succeed in lulling his fears, or triumphing over time. This description may interpret the 'journey' of the (anti) hero, but it does not offer a comforting resolution to the anxieties the story communicates: nothing known to us at this point can give us solace from the horror of cessation, our own passing, or so to say, time murdering us. There is an unresolved, irresolvable paradox embedded within the text. The narrator is captured by the police, but his anxieties will continue to wreak havoc in his heart – and ours. His anxiety is twofold: on the one hand, as already noted above, it presents itself through the narrator engaging with a repressed non-linear temporal pattern (primitive cyclicality), which terrifies him so much that it even turns the so-far thought-to-have-known, safe linear time into a source of horror. On the other hand, it manifests as a terrible anxiety of the unknowable: what he *begins to feel* through cyclicality and what *he thinks he knows* of linearity are so contradictory that this realisation pushes him into a deep state of madness, since he is unable to reconcile the paradoxes. In his madness, he leans back on a certain oversimplification of the horror that haunts him and tries to manifest the entity (time) which haunts him in a tangible, human container (the old man), which he can end before it ends him.

Arguably, when the story begins, the narrator is just a highly sensitive person who is somehow prone to viscerally *live through* and 'humanise' the doom of

nothingness, the threat of annihilation, the horror that happens every day at a particular point in time – midnight: "I knew the sound well. Many a night, just at midnight, when all the world slept, it has welled up from my own bosom, deepening, with its dreadful echo, the terrors that distracted me" (2005, 243). According to Eliade's analysis of cyclical time, the period between the holiday we call 'Christmas' today and Epiphany is a pivotal period when time renews and annihilates itself at the same time. It is both birth and death, the time when all logic and causality disappears, when ghosts can come back to life, when everything is permitted and all traces of linear orderliness vanish (1954, 59, 62, 65). I am inclined to argue that midnight does the same on a small scale. Every day, there comes the zero hour, when time annihilates and renews itself. In that sense, our linearly predisposed society in some ways have never actually broken with the tradition of circularity. The idea of constant renewal still echoes in our collective unconscious.

Poe's narrator, however, is so terrified by *experiencing* this non-linear (or circulo-linear) 'birthdeath' that it sends him into a sensory overdrive – he begins to hear everything so loudly that it drives him insane. The threat makes him not just overloaded in sensory capacities, but also extremely paranoid and hostile. I agree with Dan Shen that the narrator's acute hearing is not a sign of madness, but I would challenge his idea of calling it a "fantastic fictional fact" (Shen 2008, 331) and attribute it to engaging with NLTE. Clearly, as the narrator physically, and in most instances, mentally resides in a dimension that is predominantly linearly temporal, simultaneously engaging with a cyclical pattern that viscerally entails death and birth at the same time; along with the total erasure of individuality, it is something fundamentally incomprehensible for him. Hence his unconscious translates it as a direct death threat: annihilation, the end of it all. He cannot progress towards trying to attain any sort of knowledge or comprehend the 'reality' of time, because the first instance of engaging with NLTE (viscerally reconnecting with the individuum-erasing capabilities of cyclical time) fills his heart with horror, and profoundly affects him both mentally and physically. Instead of trying to reach a sort of transcendental insight through NLTE (as it will be the case with the narrator of "The Pit and the Pendulum"), he channels his efforts into annihilating the source of his temporal fears.

NLTE does not only remind the narrator that there is potentially a terrifying, epistemologically relevant temporal paradigm (primitive cyclicality) which can threaten his own existence: it also turns linearity, something so far known and familiar to him, into a source of horror. The old man's heart embodies clock time, which is now something conflicting, terrifying and unfamiliar – the strikes of the clock are mere, soulless beats marching towards cessation, the end of his finite

narrative. Clocktime in itself incorporates both a sense of linearity (a mechanic progression from past to present to future) and a sense of cyclicality (the repetition of the hours on a daily basis). Hence, it is the perfect symbol to illustrate the discrepancy which is driving the narrator insane: time, simultaneously being both linear and cyclical, and perhaps neither of them, is a strong death threat.

The narrator needs to funnel his fears of an abstract concept into something tangible, something he can control, something he can murder, before it murders him. Soon enough, he begins feeling that the old man he lives with somehow has an 'all seeing eye' and is out to murder him. The old man's heart, lo and behold, beats loud as a clock, driving the narrator even further into insanity: "now, I say, there came to my ears a low, dull, quick sound, such as a watch makes when enveloped in cotton. I knew that sound well, too. It was the beating of the old man's heart" (2005, 244). Arguably, the old man is just an unfortunate personification of an abstract evil, as opposed to some actual supernatural entity. Through the narrator's paranoia, he becomes a powerful and menacing entity though (just like time).

The dramatic irony is that no one can murder time. Time, if we take the cyclical pattern into consideration, does that to itself on a regular basis, yet it keeps rising like a phoenix from the ashes – something the narrator is not capable of. Even though he murders the old man and buries him, the narrator still keeps hearing the beating of his terrible heart, loud as a clock. There is no escape from the horror, and as far as the narrative is concerned, no escape from his arrest either.

Portraying time as a terrifying murderer is no foreign concept to Poe's works in general. Slawomir Studniarz analyses Poe's poems "The City in the Sea" and "The Bells" in relation to how they portray time as a dreadful source, bringing death, decay and annihilation. In "The City of the Sea", he highlights how a certain "reanimated time" brings movement to the static, undefined space, and causes the sea to move (2016, 164). However, this movement only brings about the final destruction of the city: as if time was a tool of the city's annihilation (2016, 164–65). This poem is a particularly fascinating example of McTaggart's paradoxes of linear time in action, and the question whether motion is inherently embedded in temporality (A Series), or motion is added onto a static scheme (B Series). However, both propositions are paradoxical and, as we see in Poe's poem, serve as a weapon of destruction, since linear time inherently entails ends and beginnings – ultimately, annihilation and death. Primitive cylical time embraces this eternal circle of death and birth in a way modern, individual human consciousness cannot, for the most part. However, in the next short story, we can witness a very different attitude to this paradox, even though time literally manifests as death itself. The narrator's approach ultimately results in an unlikely ending, without any remaining, lingering sense of unresolved implanted anxiety.

4 NLTE as a Metaphysical Epiphany – "The Pit and the Pendulum"

In this particular short story, the narrator is actually able to overcome the horror of being *literally murdered by time*. He does so by realising that there is potential in retaining some sort of consciousness after death, and that there is a possibility to think of life as a dream, and whatever awaits after death as a chance to achieve transcendence. Being able to 'hack' Poe's vicious circle of horrors, the narrator turns the horror into the sublime, and fear into transcendental realisation, hence he is rewarded with an unlikely *deus ex machina*. In this short story we can witness what Julia Kristeva describes as the sublimation of the abject. She argues that sublimation is "nothing else than the possibility of naming the prenominal, the pre-objectal, which are in fact only a trans-nominal, a trans-objectal." She emphasises the importance of the idea of control, something that arises through virtue of sublimation: "In the symptom, the abject permeates me, I become abject. Through sublimation, I keep it under control" (1982, 11).

But through what process does this narrator gain back control over the horror which overtakes him? How does he arrive at the conclusion that not all is lost after death, whilst he lies tied up, rendered motionless, unable to escape the sabres descending from the ceiling, directly from a painting of Death with not a scythe but a clock in his hand? He cannot physically move; however, he finds a way to escape – through his mind. Linear time is a paradox embedded within the human mind – it entails our lives having finite narratives. Death is able to acquire different meanings once we free our mind from this paradox. We can argue that Poe's narrator, given the fact that this thought is very thoroughly and sensitively present in the story, understands that the key to tackling the decay and annihilation brought forth by 'time' is by liberating the mind from certain biases that generate this paradox of finitude. No physical force can combat the horrible scythe of Death: only swooning, dreaming, only liberating the mind, by overriding conscious awareness. The shock of cessation, in this narrator's case, is actually a miraculous aid, as it starts the narrator's fluctuation between conscious and unconscious awareness, generating an all-encompassing NLTE, which is actually liberating, as opposed to the experience of the narrator of "The Tell-Tale Heart." The moment the judges sentence him to death, the narrator shifts to the event horizon of a metaphorical black hole:

> "the figures of the judges vanished, as if magically, from before me; the tall candles sank into nothingness; their flames went out utterly; the blackness of darkness supervened; all sensations appeared swallowed up in a mad rushing descent as of the soul into Hades. Then silence, and stillness, night were the universe." (2005, 161)

This passage serves as a foreshadowing premonition of the experience that is about to commence: nothingness, the greatest threat of linear time – a source of horror. However, soon after he sinks into darkness, we find out that the narrator just passed out. Whilst tied down in his execution chamber, immobile, he starts fluctuating between conscious and unconscious awareness, turning his perception into a flux between the two, the one ordained by linear cause-and-effect order, and the other independent from it. This transition opens his mind to the possibility of survival in some shape or form:

> "I had swooned; but still will not say that all of consciousness was lost. What of it there remained I will not attempt to define, or even to describe; yet all was not lost. In the deepest slumber --no! In delirium --no! In a swoon --no! In death --no! even in the grave all is not lost. Else there is no immortality for man." (2005, 161)

If we assume McTaggart's proposals to be valid, then this kind of immortality is something that can be directly derived from the unreality of time. If our existence is non-temporal, there is a possibility that it has no end. Hence, when the narrator experiences a momentary shift from the linear temporal paradox, he arrives at this conclusion as well.[6]

Poe's narrator comes up with elaborate thoughts on the nature of dreams and how they differ from death. He claims that we wake from a swoon or a dream first mentally, then physically, noting that if we were able to recollect what we mentally experienced during a swoon/a dream, we would be able to peek through the cracks of human existence. He is musing on whether these cracks, and as he calls them, "gulfs", are the same cracks like those one encounters whilst being dead. He makes a direct link between death, dreaming, and being unconscious, and brings it to a new level, claiming that anyone that has ever swooned, will carry strange remnants of that mental experience, and will encounter strange experiences whilst awake, as well. The narrator's fluctuation between order and chaos, the conscious and the unconscious, linearly ordained versus non-linear time (or even to some extent, complete non-temporality) reaches its climax when he mixes his perceptive experiences in a poetic, highly sensitive fashion, not unlike much later authors, such as Virginia Woolf. As much as language permits it, the passage below communicates a deep sense of transcendental unity, perhaps normally hidden as long as we cannot perceive a synthesis in the place of standalone states of mind or planes of reality:

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6   It is interesting to note that McTaggart often entertained himself with musing on the "immortality of the soul" in a similar fashion (Dickinson 1933, 96). Consciousness as we know it necessarily fades if put in a non-temporal universe. But perhaps not all is lost.

"He who has never swooned, is not he who finds strange palaces and wildly familiar faces in coals that glow; is not he who beholds floating in mid-air the sad visions that the many may not view; is not he who ponders over the perfume of some novel flower—is not he whose brain grows bewildered with the meaning of some musical cadence which has never before arrested his attention." (2005, 162)

Kristeva describes this transcendental awe in language akin to the above quote in its poetic quality: "As soon as I perceive it, as soon as I name it, the sublime triggers – it has always already triggered – a spree of perceptions and words that expands memory boundlessly. I then forget the point of departure and find myself removed to a secondary universe, set off from the one where "I" am – delight and loss" (1982, 12). She makes a pivotal point here, regarding the expansion of memory. As already argued, memory is one of those paradoxical devices of the brain which keeps reinforcing a linear paradigm, albeit through temporal concepts highly contradictory (such as feelings of pastness, presentness and futureness). The 'boundless expansion of memory' is a powerful tool to combat this paradoxical sense of neurological finitude and linearity.

In this short story, there is a dire time lock: as soon as the sabres reach the victim, he dies. Yet, the story keeps breaking the time-pressed plot with philosophical musings, creating a particular tension between immediacy and urgency, and the almost 'timeless,' serene ideas related to awareness, the mind, death and time. I contend this story to be a wonderful illustration of the sublimation of temporal horror. As Kristeva argues, "The abject is edged with the sublime. It is not the same moment on the journey, but the same subject and speech bring them into being" (1982, 11). Time is the same, the threat is the same, but the narrator's approach is different, and it changes everything. There is a dire contrast in the story between external and internal, as the plot is a deeply symbolic externalisation of an internal anxiety perhaps we have all experienced in some shape or form. Once in a while, we can find solace from these fears: "always with and through perception and words, the sublime is a something added that expands us, overstrains us, and causes us to be both here, as dejects, and there, as others and sparkling. A divergence, an impossible bounding. Everything missed, joy-fascination" (Kristeva 1982, 12).

5 Catalepsy in "The Premature Burial" – Blurring the Line between Real-Life and Fictive NLTE

In "The Premature Burial," there are multiple efforts that underline the traditional Gothic intent to shock the readers. Poe employs an impeccable dramaturgy by starting the story as an informal set of musings and recollections by an anonymous

narrator: he recalls 'real' instances of catalepsy and premature burials by giving spatial markers (such as Baltimore, or France), along with specifying the people involved in the incidents, which make these stories sound tangible, and blur the line between reality, fiction and speculation. By providing gruesome details about how the corpses were recovered in their graves,[7] Poe further escalates the effects of visceral horror for the reader. This alone would not call for a pronounced interest, as there is nothing particularly standalone about a Poe-story, or any other Gothic story, for that matter, aiming to shock its readers. However, in this case, the 'blur' between fiction and reality serves to exaggerate fears over a real-life NLTE.[8]

According to *Merriam-Webster*, catalepsy is defined as "a trancelike state marked by loss of voluntary motion in which the limbs remain in whatever position they are placed." However, the deathlike physical state is not the only thing perplexing about this illness. Encyclopedia.com expounds on the cataleptic mindset by mentioning that it is a "pathological condition of the nervous system" and that the victim of such attacks "remains unconscious throughout the attack."[9] It is precisely from the vantage point of this non-neurotypical mindset that I intend to conduct my analysis of Poe's story. There are not many illnesses which not only modify the brain's neurotypical awareness, but *also* the body's whole physiology to such a drastic extent. The Gothic fascination with the perplexing, horrifying duality of the illness is nothing to be surprised at: catalepsy unites a mind which, in most cases, surrenders to loss of all consciousness and sensation, and a body which is halted from all motor functions. Cataleptic bodies are the real-life, flesh and bone *dead alive bodies*.

With that said, I am calling catalepsy a real-life NLTE, because through suspending both mental consciousness and physical awareness, entirely freezing both body and brain, cataleptic bodies work against the doctrine of the linear, entropic bias, which quite possibly generates the sensation of linear time, as I have previously argued. As if cataleptic bodies were wishing to be withdrawn from the entropic universe

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[7]   Or, in one instance, recounting the story of an officer, who was still alive when he got unearthed from his shallow grave, albeit looking dead. However, "he sat nearly erect within his coffin, the lid of which, in his furious struggles, he had partially uplifted" (Poe 2005, 180).

[8]   In the 19th century, this condition or illness left so many afraid for their lives that they began purchasing safe coffins with a built-in airhole and a little bell to ring, just in case they wanted to signal to the world that they are still alive. These safe coffins were initiated by a society called "The Society for Prevention of People Being Buried Alive" (Stien 2009, 2632–33). Poe, himself covering the horror of this disease in short stories such as "Berenice", "The Premature Burial" and "The Fall of the House of Usher," quite likely contributed to raising the level of awareness to a nationwide hysteria, but no source, at least to the best of my knowledge, could credibly testify that he himself actually suffered from this illness.

[9]   Or on occasion, displays "symptoms of intense mental excitement [...] hardly distinguishable from those of hysteria" (Encyclopedia.com).

completely, whilst not *wholly* giving up existence in this cause-and-effect-ordered universe either. Catalepsy is one of the most prominent physiological 'riots' against the linear temporal paradigm. The result of this riot is of course, a state of mind and body which forbids the individual from taking an 'active' part in the creation of entropy, or, to put it another way, from existing and functioning like other live members of society. All sense of progress and motion is gone, the individual is suspended in an immobile state, almost as if it was an illustration of what could possibly happen to humans if McTaggart's B Series of time (the static time, the motionless time) was the actual conducting force in the universe. *Change* is out of the question. There is no motion, no progress, no consciousness. This in turn poses the curious theoretical question whether these bodies are actually dead or alive. "The boundaries which divide Life from Death are at best shadowy and vague. Who shall say where the one ends, and where the other begins?" – Poe's narrator himself muses (2005, 177). He describes the cataleptic body as fully suspended, meaning, it appears to be dead but it does not decompose in any way. It does not cease to exist, it does not surrender to the linear idea that life has an end. It refuses to decay (a process which again, requires energy, hence generating chaos), it stays alive – but it is not *linearly temporally alive*. The body is suspended in NLTE.

Through not only mentally but also physically surrendering the body to NLTE, catalepsy is a terrifying and fascinating idea for minds occupied with questions regarding what possibly lies between the fringes of our understanding on life, death, the finitude of our existence, and the possible irrelevance of linear temporality. This mania is prominently present in the narrator of "The Premature Burial." The narrator of the "Tell-Tale Heart" translates NLTE as a death threat and decides to murder the personification of his own anxieties. The narrator of "The Pit and the Pendulum" chooses to find transcendence by succumbing to the fringe, the abyss between known and unknown, linearity and non-linearity, life and death. The narrator of "The Premature Burial" has a potent anxiety of being buried alive. Brett Zimmerman highlights that the narrator recalls that this mounting obsession and paranoia is the result of developing catalepsy (2009, 8).

The narrator muses on whether he developed catalepsy due to his fears, or his fears appeared because of the experience of catalepsy. In this endless circle of thoughts on either being afraid from or self-provoking catalepsy, he lacks a unanimous answer of what came first. The uncertainty keeps mounting in the narrator like a sort of perpetuum mobile. The way in which this anxiety manifests is the perfect illustration of the temporal paradox which provokes it to begin with. Namely, whether we can surrender temporal dynamism (the A Series), which is the most canonically accepted way for us to physiologically exist in (albeit entailing our own finitude), to a temporal staticness, which could in theory overrule this finitude, yet is unbearable for us to

physiologically exist in. Catalepsy is a strong effort to 'break out' the individual from a paradigm which entails the individual's own death and decay. However, it creates a state which is in turn extremely close to the one meant to be bypassed in the first place: death. As if the universe (or simply our bodies and minds) permitted us to explore what lies outside of the linear paradox by 'rewarding' us with reinstating our most prominent fear, related to that linear paradox. Our physiology cannot seem to interpret engulfing us in a non-linear, quasi-static, atemporal paradigm – at least, this is one of the conclusions which can be derived from Poe's narrator's mania related to cataleptic experiences.

The 'solution,' the story suggests, is to stop being afraid of the most dreadful possibility embedded within the cataleptic experience (being buried alive), by actually experiencing something similar. This whole vicious circle of anxieties arises by virtue of being afraid of having to experience death and life simultaneously, which is contradictory to our linear temporal experience but may be plausible in other temporal schemes. Hence, the best way to combat the anxiety is to surrender to it, and see where it leads. In Poe's narrator's case, it leads not to actually being buried alive, but experiencing a situation that feels akin to it: falling asleep in the berth of a ship and mistaking it for a coffin. Zimmerman argues that by underlining that this shock can actually help to ease the narrator's fears, Poe anticipates the modern psychotherapeutic method of "flooding"[10] (2009, 8). However, the solution is not final, as this self-sustaining circle of anxieties, lack of answers or knowability, can only be neglected for the time being, but never overstepped:

> There are moments when, even to the sober eye of Reason, the world of our sad Humanity may assume the semblance of a Hell—but the imagination of man is no Carathis, to explore with impunity its every cavern. Alas! the grim legion of sepulchral terrors cannot be regarded as altogether fanciful—but, like the Demons in whose company Afrasiab made his voyage down the Oxus, they must sleep, or they will devour us—they must be suffered to slumber, or we perish. (Poe 2005, 190)

6 Edgar Allan Poe's Temporal Horror

Being non-neurotypical, whether we are talking about a fictional character or a real-life person, predisposes one to having a broader, or different perspective on time, on accounts of successfully (though for the most part, only partially) bypassing the brain's

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10 Flooding is "a behavior therapy technique where the person is exposed directly to a maximum intensity anxiety-producing situation or stimulus, either in the imagination or in reality" (N. 2013).

inherent linear bias. I do contend that it is important to acknowledge that there are non-pathological temporal non-neurotypicalities, such as childhood (Nelson and Fivush 2006, 242 qtd. in Hutto 2017, 195)[11]. However, for now, my focus rests on psychopathological tendencies which somehow work towards stirring up the linear bias, as they are prominently present not only in the characters I have analysed above, but also their author. I do aim at avoiding intentional fallacy for the most part; however, when it comes to Poe, multiple researchers sacrificed years if not decades to decode his bizarre life and mind, and there is abundant secondary literature to allow educated guesses about his mental health without claiming anything to be an absolute certainty.

Hannah J. Dean and Ryan L. Boyd conducted a computational analysis to determine the potential role depression played in Poe's life, and according to their findings, "[s]ignificant, consistent patterns of depression were not found and do not support suicide as a cause of death. However, linguistic evidence was found suggesting the presence of several potential depressive episodes over the course of Poe's life – these episodes were the most pronounced during years of Poe's greatest success, as well as those following the death of his late wife" (2020, 482). Francisco Pizarro Obaid, in his article "The Dead-Living-Mother: Marie Bonaparte's Interpretation of Edgar Allan Poe's Short Stories" outlines the staggering potential influence Poe's mother's death had on his life, and particularly his fascination with undead women as characters (2016, 183–203). Though Bonaparte's arguments need to be read carefully, as her approach which strongly relies on autobiography has been widely disputed since then, I believe the relevance of almost pathological fascination with undead women in Poe's fiction still makes for a convincing argument. Carl W. Bazil, MD, PhD devoted a whole article to the study of seizures in Poe's life and works (1999, 740–743), and Roger A. Francis, M.D., F.A.C.R. conducted a differential diagnosis in "The Final Days of Edgar Allan Poe: Clues to an Old Mystery Using 21st Century Medical Science" to map and decipher from a medical point of view what happened just before Poe died under mysterious circumstances (2010, 165–73). Zimmerman, in "Poe as Amateur Psychologist: Flooding, Phobias, Psychosomatics, and 'The Premature Burial'" emphasises Poe's uncanny ability to portray in his characters with a remarkable accuracy psychological conditions which were completely unknown at the time, for instance in the schizophrenic anti-hero of "The Tell-Tale Heart" or the monomaniac of "The Premature Burial" (2009, 7).[12]

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[11] "In sum, by SIT's lights, children only come to be able to think about their pasts in autobiographical terms towards the end of their pre-school years, because they have begun to master narrative practices through which they "are exposed to an ever-widening circle of understanding people as temporally extended persons with temporally extended minds."

[12] "On the other hand, in the days when the science of mind was in its infancy, Poe sometimes depicted characters in modern clinical detail so precise that he seems positively clairvoyant. [...] In 'The Premature

All these diverse resources underline the idea that the psychological and physiological disposal of Poe has been a source of fascination both for literary scholars and medical professionals alike. It is quite possible that Poe was non-neurotypically disposed. His *exact* conditions are, of course, impossible to know for certain. I am content to settle with the idea that somehow, potentially, he was more attuned to NLTEs, either due to poetic hypersensitivity, psychological distress, or a combination of both. Being non-neurotypical is by no means a prerequisite for creating non-neurotypical characters. However, as far as the 'truth value' of fictive temporal experiences is concerned, it is possible to argue that non-neurotypically disposed authors potentially have a more authentic angle of presenting such experiences, since it could well be the case that the character's experiences somehow consciously or unconsciously are drawn from or inspired by their own. The fictive character creates a sort of epistemological borderline, through which the authors can present not only their conscious and known, but also their unconscious or unreflected experiences or anxieties related to temporality.

However, Poe was not only a potentially non-neurotypical author, but also, more specifically, a potentially non-neurotypical Gothic author, and as such, Christopher Benfey argues that he continuously strived to "puzzle his readers" (1993, 27). Creating mystery, the unknowable, the grotesque, the awe-striking in his fiction permeated his public persona, especially what is left for us to decipher after he has been long dead. Poe is not simply a writer, but an emblem, a literary and subcultural icon and symbol. His strange sensibilities find themselves mirrored in the souls of people all through the 19th and 20th centuries. Lou Reed mentions in his tribute to "The Raven" that "Poe's obsessions, paranoia, wilful acts of self-destruction surround us constantly" and notes that "Poe's fears of death and psychological disintegration are not very different from our own" (qtd. in Lima 2010, 22). I contend that the obsession to decipher Poe is related to the obsession reflected in the works of Poe, which in turn poses the question: how much of the enigma is him, and how much of it is a playful (if albeit perverse) literary device which began permeating collective memory around him?

Unreadability is at the core of Poe's specific take on Gothic fiction. Marita Nadal argues that "the Gothic is linked to trauma: both are characterized by disruption and excess" (2016, 179). She elaborates on the parallel by saying that "both trauma and Gothic are concerned with violence, fear, hauntedness, stasis and entrapment, memory and the past, and emphasize the role of the unconscious" (2016, 180). In my reading, the trauma that haunts the characters, related to time and temporality,

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Burial,' Poe provides a narrator whose severe terror of untimely interment amounts to a monomania." (Zimmerman 2009, 7)

is what Tally expounds on as unknowability, that certain ideas *were never completely familiar to begin with*. This 'revelation' of unknowability unfolds in Poe's stories mostly accompanied by a sort of corporeal shock, mania, anger or anxiety. In terms of temporal experience or temporal horror, many of these revelations unfold during NLTEs, as outlined in my three analyses in the preceding sections of this article.

Tally also argues that "Poe cannot be captured by labels like romantic, gothic, transcendentalist, irrationalist, and so on" (2010, 10). He acknowledges that Poe "clearly maintains affiliations with various modes and schools of thought," though. Romanticism and the Gothic mode are definitely two of these prominent affiliations. Nonetheless, I do contend that 'unlabelling' Poe is a beneficial idea. We need to acknowledge Poe's playfulness and resistance, which Tally compares to "Focault's mocking persona" (2010, 10). Poe, as stated before, was fascinated by puzzles, unsolvable human paradoxes, and deep-seated strange perversities. There are certain critics, such as Harold Bloom – as Benfey argues – who acknowledge that Poe cannot be deciphered, he cannot be "read." Others, like Marie Bonaparte, present a way to decode his stories, for the most part, through psychoanalysis (1993, 27).

7 Conclusion

Though fundamentally my approach is much closer to Tally's or Bloom's, in this essay I did attempt to 'decode' a small set of temporal riddles which unravel themselves through a careful reading of Poe's peculiar narratives. However, what my focus rests on in these stories (temporal experience), defies the quest for unanimous meaning, reassuring conclusions or inextricable truth. My argument is that time is fundamentally unknowable to human beings. Starting from the philosophical ideas of J. M. E. McTaggart, I attempted to expound on how his doubts find themselves mirrored in interdisciplinary studies and how these different disciplines mirroring each other altogether strengthen this point. I tried to observe how the paradox of temporal unknowability affects three different characters in Poe's three different short stories featuring their so-called non-linear temporal experiences.

Once faced with NLTE, the three characters react in fundamentally different ways: in "The Tell-Tale Heart," the narrator's all-consuming fear turns into active, murderous mania, in "The Pit and the Pendulum," there is an uplifting embrace of potential transcendence, and in "The Premature Burial," we can witness a deep-seated anxiety at work, which is confronted but not altogether alleviated. All three reactions are understandable once we acknowledge that the fundamental anxieties we can decode from these stories (time is unknowable, what we think we know of it might be flawed,

and what presents as an alternative is not necessarily a viable option for our modern, highly individualised personalities) are irresolvable. Hence, any effort I made to 'decode' these stories was only to underline that we cannot ever fully 'decode' or resolve the temporal anxieties which are manifest in them to begin with.

The short stories of Edgar Allan Poe, displaying a persistent angle of temporal horror through characters stuck between different paradigms of time, are a rich territory for exploration, whether canonised and (over)analysed or not. Poe is arguably one of those strange, enigmatic authors who manages to link poetic sensitivity with a sense of psychological and neurobiological accuracy, a zest of quantum-physical undertones, and an uplifting sense of transcendence, or the harrowing lack of it. His short stories have the potential to show us a complex picture of NLTE in human beings, and lend themselves to interdisciplinary research, not to challenge the existing readings out there, but to hopefully complement them.

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"Nowhere else works like the cities": Liminality in *The City and the City*

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China Miéville's novel, *The City and the City* (2009) introduces a detective story in Besźel and its topolganger, Ul Qoma. The relationship between the two cities is a strange one: even though they occupy the same place physically, they work as two separate autonomous states. By following the main character's investigation of a young girl's murder, the reader also gets to inquire the true nature of the cities. The narrative was adapted to screen in 2018 (*The City and the City*, BBC2), and thanks to the difference between the two mediums, painted a different picture about the liminal nature of the two cities. In this paper, I am going to examine how these two platforms represent the liminal nature of Besźel and Ul Qoma, and how they depict Borlú's liminal transgression.

Keywords: liminality, The City and the City, Miéville, transgression

1 "Nowhere else works like the Cities…"[1]

China Miéville's *The City and the City* (2009) introduces an investigation into the murder of a young girl, Mahalia Geary, and the strange case of two cities, Besźel and Ul Qoma – two topolgangers[2] that still work as separate social and political areas. The exact details about how these two cities relate to each other are not revealed in the first half of the text, so their placement and their dimensions are up to the readers' imagination. While investigating the murder of the mysterious young woman, Mahalia Geary, Inspector Tyador Borlú delves into the secrets of the two cities, and faces situations that can even be called fantastic. Because of the strange combination of crime fiction and (seemingly) fantastical elements, the novel could be categorized as weird fiction, which the author himself describes as the following: "If considered at all, Weird Fiction is usually, roughly, conceived of as

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[1] Tom Shankland, dir., *The City and The City*, Season 1, episode 1, "Beszel" (BBC2, 2018, DVD), 00:00:07.

[2] The word 'topolganger' is created from the combination of "topography" and "doppelganger". It means that the two cities "occupy broadly the same space, but remain separated by the inhabitants' mutual and conscious practice of 'unseeing' people, spaces and objects considered to be present in the other city" (Wilcock 2020, 2).

a rather breathless and generically slippery macabre fiction, a dark fantastic ('horror' plus 'fantasy') often featuring nontraditional alien monsters (thus plus 'science fiction')" (Miéville 2009, 510). Even though adapting this captivating story for screen and keeping its mysterious atmosphere must have been a difficult task, nine years after the publication of the book, BBC2 introduced the television adaptation of the same name, directed by Tom Shankland, comprising four 56-minute-long episodes. Translating the text to the screen meant that the way the topolganger cities are depicted in the novel had to change: while consuming this story in a book form allows the reader to imagine this world as part of a fantastic universe, the television adaptation takes this uncanny element out of the equation, and translates the relationship visually on screen. However, even though the representation of Besźel and Ul Qoma must be different because of the different nature of the two media, liminality plays a crucial role in both of them.

The term 'liminality' derives from anthropological studies and is connected to ritual passages and the state of the in-between. In the former, it can refer to the phase where the initiands of a certain culture have to go through a series of acts in order to occupy a new status or role in their communities (Thomassen 2006, 322). However, the term 'liminal' can be used as an adjective as well. According to Victor Turner, liminal *personae* or "threshold people […] are neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremonial" (1977, 95). Although the previously mentioned definitions focus on the ritual nature of the term, liminality has another aspect that concentrates on human perception. According to Sándor Klapcsik,

> the word goes back to "limen", which means threshold in Latin. In psychology, limen means a *limit* below which a stimulus ceases to be perceptible. Thus, these definitions indicate that liminality is strictly related to perception or the lack of it, and to limits as well as to the breach of limits, transgression. (2012, 7)

In her essay "Seeing is Believing: Perception and Liminality in Miéville's *The City and the City*" Simone Wilcock talks about the liminal aspects of the novel, but instead of describing how the two cities relate to each other, and analysing how Borlú goes through a liminal phase in order to acquire a new identity, she points out that this liminality is shown in the hybrid genre of the novel, the setting, and the plot, "which depicts a rite of passage for the protagonist in identifying and overcoming the mechanisms of his selective perception" (2020, 3). Although she gives a detailed description of the genre and the setting, she does not elaborate on the journey that Borlú has to take in order to receive a new identity. In this paper, by using Turner's and Klapcsik's understanding of liminality, I am going to compare the ways in which the novel and the series depict the peculiar relationship of the

two cities: while in Miéville's text the focus moves from the fantastic to a realistic solution of the nature of Besźel and Ul Qoma, by adapting the story on screen, the television series gets rid of the fantastic portrayal of the two cities but adds another layer of fantasy to the storyline.

2 A Hybrid Genre

In her essay, Wilcock notes how different critics have described Miéville's novel as "unscience fiction," an "existential thriller" (Brown), surrealist "literary fiction" similar to the works of Kafka and Borges, and also "new weird" (2020, 1). Although one of the most plausible ways to categorize this novel would be to call it a case of detective fiction, all of the aforementioned genres seem relevant. Thus, it can be concluded that *The City and the City* has a hybrid genre: it is a police procedural with elements of thriller and fantasy. However, when analysing the genre of the novel, the hybridity of crime fiction itself should also be considered.

In her essay titled "Hybridisation", Heather Duerre Humann argues that "hybridisation has always been a feature of crime fiction" (2020, 57). As writers of crime fiction tend to bend the genre to suit their own needs, "these recent works of crime fiction demonstrate cross-cultural connections while also reflecting the postmodern tendencies toward rejecting boundaries between (so-called) high and low art forms and blurring, when not altogether dissolving, generic distinctions" (2020, 57). According to Humann, the reason why crime fiction tends to hybridise is that it has always been responsive to the changes in culture and society – although the focus is always on crime (social order becoming disordered) and detection (restoring social order), as the world changes, "these very notions (and the order/ disorder nexus) are being called into question" (2020, 58). In the case of *The City and the City*, the social order is disrupted with the murder of Mahalia Geary, whose body was discovered in Besźel, although she was murdered in Ul Qoma. In the case of the two cities, social order means that the border between the two topolgangers is kept by a communal agreement: it is up to the citizens of Besźel and Ul Qoma, and the mysterious police force, Breach, to keep this strange relationship alive. Social order is also disrupted (or at least there is an attempt to do so) by the underground political group, the unificationists, who would like to merge the two cities. Although in the world of *The City and the City* order lies in keeping the two cities entirely separate, the idea of disorder becoming the new order (unifying the two cities) also plays a crucial part in the story. In the case of Besźel and Ul Qoma, "each city has its own national character: politically, Besźel is a democracy, while Ul Qoma is a one-

party nationalist state" (Wilcock 2020, 3). However, the very existence of Breach proves that living in the interstice is an option as well; although living in a place without borders means that the members of Breach " are all philosophers [… who] debate among many other things the question of where it is that we live" (Miéville 2011, 373). Thus, living in a place without borders could mean a loss of identity.

The appearance of Mahalia's body in Besźel could also be understood as a reference to locked room mysteries, as when finding the body, the Besź police does not understand how the body was transferred there without anyone noticing the breach. Locked room mysteries, based on Edgar Allan Poe's "The Murders in the Rue Morgue", are generally "characterized by the representation of crime as an intellectual puzzle, invoking the practice of scientism in clue solving and heralding the detective as a major literary figure" (Cook 2011, 1), while these stories also have a supernatural element to them, as the crimes seem mysterious and impossible. According to Joseph Kestner, "[t]he locked room [...] allows the extension of narrative plot to cover or imply a range of additional significances: repression/return of the repressed, the unconscious, the mother's body (womb), the tomb and death, incest, death and resurrection, narcissism, solipsism, and existential alienation" (2000, 236). In the case of the novel, the return of the repressed plays an important role, as even though the citizens of the two cities are constantly trying to *unsee* and *unsense* the other city, a total *unsensation* is almost impossible.

3 The Depiction of Besźel and Ul Qoma in the Novel

The narrator of the novel is Tyador Borlú, senior detective of the Besźel Extreme Crime Squad, who is investigating the murder of a young girl, Mahalia Geary. As the plot is getting more and more complicated, the reader (alongside the inspector) gets to investigate not only the murder, but the mystery of the cities as well.

The relationship of the two cities is not explained at the beginning of the novel, thus readers could feel like this symbiotic connection between Besźel and Ul Qoma is something supernatural. The residents of each city are conditioned to only hear and see what is happening in their own city – once they react to anything that happens in the other place (e.g. they start talking to someone on the border, or even take a glance at an accident), they are committing breach. The two cities share the same geographical space, but they are divided in a way that they work as two autonomous states. Besźel is democratic and less modern than its topolganger, Ul Qoma, the rich and modern one-party nationalist state. Each of these places has its own colours, way of clothing, and architectural style, which enables the citizens to

quickly realise what they are allowed to see. The opposition between the two cities is so strong that the locals have to *unsee* everything that belongs to the other area, and even though they share the same physical space, the only legal way of crossing into the other state is by going through the building called Copula Hall, which works as a threshold between Besźel and Ul Qoma. The geographical area is divided into four different categories: total, alter, cross-hatch, and *dissensi*. A total area means that all of it belongs to the city from where it is observed, while from the other city it is an alter place, so it should be ignored. Cross-hatched areas are shared by both of the cities, so it is quite easy to breach – to see or even hear what is going on in the area that belongs to the other city. The *dissensi* are also called "disputed zones, places that Besźel thinks are Ul Qoma's and Ul Qoma Besźel's" (Miéville 2011, 61). The sensitive balance of the two cities is controlled by Breach, the authority that punishes those who engage with the other city.[3] This way, the first sign of liminality appears at the city borders: as the membrane between Besźel and Ul Qoma is only metaphorical in the cross-hatched areas, certain places do not belong to either of the states, because the citizens are afraid to go there in case they might breach.

The first sentence of the novel – "I could not see the street or much of the estate" (2011, 3) – may refer to a peculiar way of seeing in the two cities. The dead girl's body is found in GunterStrász, which (although it is mostly total i.e. belongs only to Besźel) has some crosshatched areas, so Borlú cannot see the buildings and the parts that belong to the other city, Ul Qoma. However, when the readers see this sentence for the first time, it may not occur to them that it describes the strange relationship between the two cities.

Although breach in Besźel and Ul Qoma is illegal, by following the narrator of the novel, readers can realize how impossible it is to follow this rule for the citizens of the two cities. Even before being taken away by the authorities, Borlú breaches several times: the first incident happens at the end of Chapter One, when he sees

> […] past the edges of the estate to the end of GunterStrász, between the dirty brick buildings. Trash moved in the wind. It might be anywhere. An elderly woman was walking slowly away from me in a shambling sway. […] With a hard start, I realised that she was not on GunterStrász at all, and that I should not have seen her.

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[3]   In the novel, Breach appears as a noun and as a verb as well. As a noun (with a capital B), it refers to an authority that polices the citizens of Besźel and Ul Qoma so that they do not interact with the other city without permission. In case a citizen breaches, he or she is taken to an area that is also called the Breach. By using expressions like "manifest" and "power", Miéville creates an uncanny atmosphere: in the first half of the novel, the reader is not sure whether this authority is a superhuman power or an organization made up of everyday people. Borlú sees a breaching accident for the first time when he is still a child: the organization is described here as an uncanny phenomenon, made up of shapes that are almost impossible to make out.(cf. 2011, 81).

Immediately and flustered I looked away, and she did the same, with the same speed. I raised my head, towards an aircraft on its final descent. When after some seconds I looked back up, unnoticing the old woman stepping heavily away, I looked carefully instead of at her in her foreign street at the facades of the nearby and local GunterStrász, that depressed zone (Miéville 2011, 14).

The fantastic element of the text comes from the fact that it is never explicitly described how the two cities are related to each other, so readers might come up with their own different versions, thinking of an alternative reality where the two cities may exist in two completely different dimensions. This strange relationship is even more complicated when Borlú finds out that the dead girl was researching Orciny,

[…] the third city. It's between the other two. It's in the dissensi, disputed zones, places that Besźel thinks are Ul Qoma's and Ul Qoma Besźel's. When the old commune split, it didn't split into two, it split into three. Orciny's the secret city. It runs things. (2011, 61)[4]

Although only a few people believe in the existence of the third city, as the investigation continues, even Borlú and his associate detectives start to believe that Orciny is real – that it lies somewhere between Besźel and Ul Qoma, as a place that no one else can see, which adds an extra layer to the fantastic nature of the text. The supernatural element is further emphasised when Borlú describes his first encounter with Breach:

In seconds, the Breach came. Shapes, figures, some of whom perhaps had been there but who nonetheless seemed to coalesce from spaces between smoke from the accident, moving too fast it seemed to be clearly seen, moving with authority and power so absolute that within seconds they had controlled, contained, the area of the intrusion. The powers were almost impossible, seemed almost impossible, to make out. At the edges of the crisis zone the Besź and, I could still not fail to see, Ul Qoman police were pushing away the curious in their own cities, taping off the area, closing out outsiders, sealing off a zone inside of which, their quick actions still visible though child-me so afraid to see them, Breach, organising, cauterising, restoring. (2011, 81)

The description of this powerful authority paints a superhuman picture about the members of Breach, so that readers cannot be sure whether these figures are actual people. The narrator uses the word 'manifest' several times in connection to the appearance of Breach, which also creates an uncanny atmosphere – it is only in the third section of the novel that we realize that Breach actually exists in the places in-between: since they do not behave as Besź or Ul Qoman citizens, they are able

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[4]   This definition of Orciny comes from Drodin, a Besź unificationist. Later in the story, it turns out that Orciny is just a legend and the third city does not exist.

to be everywhere and stay unseen by the people who are always afraid of engaging with the other city.

In the second half of the novel, after Borlú travels to Ul Qoma, readers get a clearer picture of the geographical dimensions of the cities. When Tyador is sitting with the Ul Qoman Senior Detective Dhatt in a coffee shop, which overlooks a Metro station, he glances at one of the posters that were hung in Besźel after Mahalia was murdered:

> Among the many posters on a nearby wall was one I saw then unsaw: I was not sure it was not the poster I had had printed, to identify Mahalia. I did not know if I was right, if the wall was alter to me now, total in Besźel, or crosshatched and a close patchwork of information from different cities.
> Ul Qomans emerged from below the street and gasped at the temperature, shrank into their fleeces. In Besźel, I knew – though I tried to unsee the Besź citizens doubtless descending from Yan-jelus Station of the overland transit, which was by chance a few scores of metres from the submerged Ul Qoman stop – people would be wearing furs (Miéville 2011, 187–88).

After the description of the cross-hatched area, it becomes obvious that the two cities are on the same land grosstopically, however, the existence of Breach and a certain 'membrane' that lies between them still gives the area a fantastic atmosphere. Later on, after Borlú kills Mahalia's friend's, Yolanda's murderer and is taken by Breach, the narrator and the reader realize that the authority is a police-like force made up of people instead of superhuman creatures – it is only their behaviour that distinguishes them from the population of the two cities. People of Breach are everyday citizens in a liminal space, who breached in one of the cities and now are unable to get back to their ordinary lives, because they cannot unsee the other city anymore. After breaching and living in both cities, Borlú cannot get back to his hometown: "But if you breach, even if it's not your fault, for more than the shortest time… you can't come back from that" (Miéville 2011, 370)..

4 The Depiction of Besźel and Ul Qoma in the Series

Tom Shankland's adaptation of the novel – thanks to the change in the medium – paints a different picture about the liminal nature of the two cities. As I have previously discussed, the fantastic feature of the cities lies in the fact that it is never explicitly explained how Besźel and Ul Qoma relate to each other physically, which leaves everything to the readers' imagination, who might think of these two cities as strange places being in two different dimensions. However, putting the scenes on film meant

that this strange relationship between Besźel and Ul Qoma should be visualized in a way that it makes the audience wonder about the true nature of the places.

The city of Besźel is depicted as a Soviet state with old buildings, vintage cars, and brownish sepia colours, evoking the atmosphere of the 1970s, while Ul Qoma is shown as a modern metropolis, with its glaring lights and tall towers, using lots of clear blue and red tones (see fig. 1). The opening scene of each episode shows the two cities standing next to each other; however, Ul Qoma is blurred, as the audience sees the cities from the narrator's perspective (who is also Borlú, just like in the case of the novel).

The first episode also introduces the map of the two cities two times: first in the title sequence, and later on in Commissar Gadlem's office, when he is looking at the places where Besźel and Ul Qoma crosshatch (see figs. 2 and 3). By showing the maps and blurring out the alter areas, the adaptation takes away some of the fantastic elements, however, the creators added another component that corresponds to the uncanny feeling of the series. At the end of the second episode, when Borlú starts a private investigation at Bol Ye'an, the portrayal of the dig is much more fantastic than in the text, which introduces the place as a "wasteland":

> At the northern end of the park, where the ruins themselves were, what looked at first like a wasteland, was scrub punctuated with old stones of fallen temples, canvas-covered walkways linking marquees and prefab office buildings in some of which lights were still on. Ground showed the marks of digging: most of the excavation was hidden and protected by tough tents (2011, 173).

The adaptation paints a more mystical picture with the ancient symbols, emphasised with the clear blue light which is typical for Ul Qoma. At the end of the episode, when Borlú is caught by the guards, he falls into a small pit filled with water, which reflects the glaring blue light and an ancient symbol from the ceiling of the cave (see fig. 4). The scene is accompanied by a choir soundtrack which gives it a sacred atmosphere, and the audience may feel like Borlú is experiencing something spiritual, maybe even falling through a portal (which further emphasises the liminal nature of Orciny).

The true nature of the cities is explicitly shown at the end of the third episode, when Borlú breaches by killing Yolanda's murderer: first the picture of the Old Town is shown in a way that Besźel is blurred but Ul Qoma is not, but after Borlú realizes what he has done, the picture gets clear and we can see the two cities next to each other (see fig. 5). After the breach, the next episode starts with Borlú waking up from a dream about his wife, Katrynia. After Borlú becomes conscious, the mystical feature of Breach is shown by hazy closeups, a moving frame, and short shots, which creates an uncanny feeling in the audience (see fig. 6).

5 Liminality in *The City and the City*

As described previously, the setting of Miéville's fictional universe has a liminal nature: the two cities share a strange border that is taken up by the powerful and mysterious authority, Breach. In the novel, there are some hints that suggest that Borlú breaches several times: sometimes he sees into Ul Qoma in the cross-hatched areas; he takes the phone call from Jaris, even though he calls from the other city, and he sees Mahalia' poster (which is in Besźel) from an Ul Qoman café and he commits his final act of crime when he shoots Yolanda's murderer, so Breach finally takes him. Throughout the novel, as he gets to know more and more about the nature of Breach and Orciny, and he becomes an avatar of the secret organisation, he has to realize that he cannot go back to his previous life: he becomes a part of the in-between.

In the adaptation, Borlú's character development is further complicated with the introduction of a separate storyline about his wife, Katrynia Perla. He meets her in Ul Qoma and stops her from committing suicide after Professor David Bowden treats her badly. Katrynia is a fan of Bowden and a fellow researcher of the secret city in-between, and although she likes Tyador, she is not in love with him – years later, Katrynia meets the professor and then disappears in the *dissensi*. In the adaptation, one of the main reasons why Borlú does not want to stop investigating the case of Mahalia Geary is that he feels that the two cases are linked, and maybe by finding out what happened to the young girl, he could discover the truth behind the disappearance of his missing wife (who, as it turns out later, committed suicide). This romantic touch to the plot adds an extra layer to Tyador's character and gives another reason for him to dive deep into the history of Orciny, which his wife was a believer of, as it could help him find out the reason why his wife disappeared.

At the end of the fourth episode, after Bowden has tried to kill Tyador by sticking a knife into his throat, Borlú sees a vision of his wife: Katrynia tells him to go with her, because he has been "invited". In the interpretation of the adaptation, Orciny is afterlife itself: after committing suicide, Katrynia has found the secret "third city", so she has found peace in her death. Although Borlú is also invited to Orciny, he decides to stay in Breach. By the end of the story, he acquires a new persona: he is not Inspector Tyador Borlú of the Besźel Extreme Crime Squad anymore. Now he is Tye, Breach manifest, whose task is to stay in the liminal and keep the order of the two cities (see fig. 7). His new name means that he receives a new type of identity, as his previous years of being a Besź citizen are over – as the member of Breach he will *tie* the two cities together in order to "maintain the skin that keeps law in place. Two laws in two places, in fact" (2011, 373). Although this change

of persona can be seen as character development, this new sense of identity also includes a sense of loss, as he is not allowed to say goodbye to his former friends and colleagues, and he also has to turn his back on his past life.

The novel and the film depict liminality differently: in both cases, liminality appears in the relationship of Besźel and Ul Qoma and in the transition that Tyador has to go through in order to find out the solution of the mystery and acquire a new identity. However, as the book and the screen are two different media platforms, the way they depict the narrative will be also very different. The most obvious difference can be found in how they represent Besźel and Ul Qoma. In both cases, according to Klapcsik's definition, the two cities are liminal in nature because there is a limit between them "below which a stimulus ceases to be perceptible" (2012, 7). Adapting the story on screen meant that the seemingly magical relationship between the two cities should be made visual, but it was impossible to copy the reader's experience on screen because of the ready-made visuality of television. Shakland came up with the solution of blurring out the *other* city: when Borlú is in Besźel, we can see the blurred Ul Qoma and vice versa. Without having read the novel, this solution can also create a "fantastic" understanding in the audience, who may think that there is peculiar membrane between the two cities that does not let the citizens to take a look at their neighbours' location. In both cases, the "limen" or the threshold is Breach itself: people are unable to see the individuals of this organization because they are walking in the in-between and they do not show any of the features of Ul Qoman or Besź citizens. The people of this border are also liminal: they are always in an in-between state, not belonging to either of the cities but still being able to enter any of them without committing a crime.

The only place in both narratives where people can be in Besźel and Ul Qoma at the same time is Copula Hall, the building that serves as the only legal border between the two cities – it is the only place in the story where travellers can legally enter the other state with a visa. Miéville describes the building as

> […] a patchwork of architecture defined by the Oversight Committee in its various historic incarnations. It sat across a considerable chunk of land in both cities. Its inside was complicated – corridors might start mostly total, Besźel or Ul Qoma, become progressively crosshatched along their length, with rooms in one or other city along them, and numbers also of those strange rooms and areas that were in neither or both cities, that were in *Copula Hall only*, and of which the Oversight Committee and its bodies were the only government. Legended diagrams of the buildings inside were pretty but daunting meshes of colours (2011, 157–58).

The building serves as a space of liminality, where people can cross the borders legally: before travelling to the other city, they have to go through a certain kind

of "initiation": a training where they are taught how to *unsee* the city they come from and how to *see* the city they would like to visit.

Even though every character in the narrative (both in the novel and the series) who wants to cross the borders and has to go through an initiation ritual (the training), the biggest liminal transformation happens in Borlú's personality, when he becomes a member of Breach. In accordance with Turner's definition, the members of this organization can be understood as liminal "threshold people" who are in the in-between "by law, custom, convention, and ceremonial" (Turner 1977, 95). They are the ones who police the citizens' behaviour and who keep the balance between the two cities – once people realize that the borders between Besźel and Ul Qoma are only in their minds and they are free to "cross" between the two, the arbitrary borders and the idea of the two, separate cities will cease to exist. By killing the murderer Yorjavic (who is in Besźel, while Borlú shoots from Ul Qoma) and drawing the attention of Breach to his crime, Tyador is unable to escape his fate and will become a member of the in-between. Although the ending of the novel and the series is the same (Borlú becomes a policeman in Breach), the adaptation ends on a more spiritual note: Borlú is invited by Orciny to join his wife in afterlife, but he does not accept the invitation – he still lives on with the idea that when the end of his life comes, he will become a citizen of Orciny, and he and his wife will be reunited.

6 Conclusion

Miéville's novel, *The City and the City* and its adaptation introduce liminality on two separate levels, firstly, by depicting the borders of the two cities as places of the in-between. As the citizens are afraid of Breach, this threshold becomes spiritual in nature: no one dares to go there in case they might commit a crime. Even though people in Besźel are physically able to see Ul Qoma and vice versa, they *decide* not to – and the only reason for that is fear of an organization that is above them. Copula Hall, the border between the two states also works as a liminal, sacred space: it is the only place where people can cross between Besźel and Ul Qoma legally after going through training that teaches them how to *unsee* the city where they came from and how to *see* the one they are about to enter – which serves as a modern initiation ritual.

By adapting Miéville's text on screen, the fantastic nature of the relationship of the two cities disappears; however, the series replaces this absence with the layer of the transcendental. Although the way Besźel and Ul Qoma work in relation to each other is explained, by choosing to understand Orciny as afterlife, instead of solving the *magical* in the story (like in the case of the text), the supernatural becomes the

ultimate fate of the main character – at the end of his life, Borlú will be able to enter Orciny, which thus becomes a symbolic space. In the novel, however, the third city is a lie, and the seemingly fantastic nature of Besźel and Ul Qoma is dissolved by Borlú's awakening.

Liminality is also introduced in the main character's transgression: when he is shooting Yolanda's murderer and thus breaches, he goes through an initiation and will never be able to *unsee* Besźel from Ul Qoma and vice versa. By committing a serious crime, he will be a member of the betwixt and between, someone who does not belong to either of the cities: his main task will be to police the citizens of Besźel and Ul Qoma, and to keep the self-justifying circle of the system.

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Appendix

Figure 1 Besźel and Ul Qoma in the opening scenes (Episode 1, 00:00:42)

Figure 2 The map in the title sequence (Episode 1, 00:00:58)

Figure 3 The map in Commissar Gadlem's office (Episode 1, 00:11:24)

Figure 4 Borlú's fall (Episode 2, 00:57:56)

Figure 5 Besźel and Ul Qoma (Episode 3, 00:56:56)

Figure 6 Breach (Episode 4, 00:02:27)

Figure 7 Borlú in Breach (Episode 4, 00:58:18)

Pain and Pandemics: Infected and Excluded Bodies in Young Adult Fantasy Literature

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Illnesses can highlight inequalities in young adult fantasy literature as characters undergo exclusion and self-empowerment tied to diseases, disabled bodies, and death. In recent fictions by Marissa Meyer, Marie Lu, and Margaret Owen, heroines navigate epidemics and pandemics inciting either mistrust or mutual aid. In *Cinder* (2012), the protagonist experiences bodily vulnerabilities via her cyborg prosthetics and a worldwide plague. *The Young Elites* (2014) shows survivors of a fever facing ostracism, while *The Merciful Crow* (2019) depicts immunity as a boon and a burden. These books on the interpersonal impact of sickness can resonate intimately with readers today due to COVID-19.

Keywords: Young adult literature, body, disease, disability, death

1 Introduction: Sickness and Fantasy Societies

Can loss of limb, life, or loved ones tear people apart or rather tie them closer together? In young adult fantasy literature, the impact of ailments, illnesses, and injuries straining or strengthening relationships can become a fulcrum for character conflict and social struggles. Especially in recent literary works for adolescent readers, sickness can highlight and heighten interpersonal inequalities as protagonists experience either exclusion or self-empowerment tied to diseases, disabled bodies, and death. Brushes with mortality and explorations of bodily health have long formed an integral part of children's literature, from Snow White's and Sleeping Beauty's deathlike slumbers in the Brothers Grimm fairy tales to scarlet fever afflicting children in Louisa May Alcott's nineteenth-century novel *Little Women,* published from 1868 to 1869, or Margery Williams's twentieth-century picture book *The Velveteen Rabbit*, released in 1922. Moreover, illnesses within narratives push protagonists into frightening new situations when family members pass away or their community is irrevocably altered. Illustrative examples in young adult books of the last few decades include Gail Carson Levine's 1997 fairy-tale-inspired story *Ella Enchanted*, in which the heroine grapples with the loss of her mother, and Alexandra

Bracken's 2012 dystopian fiction *The Darkest Minds*, featuring a new, oppressive government arising to combat the spread of an epidemic. The key role of contagion challenging protagonists' sense of self and place in society reflects Rachel Falconer's assertion that young adult literary works often "focus on the edges of identity, the points of transition and rupture" (2010, 89). On a broader scale, pandemics in contemporary fiction can emphasize social tensions when the almost inescapable spread of infection across vast areas causes fear, friction, and infighting. To illuminate the pivotal role of epidemics and pandemics in recent literature for adolescent readers, I examine the first book of three young adult fantasy series: Marissa Meyer's 2012 publication *Cinder* of *The Lunar Chronicles* quartet; Marie Lu's 2014 release *The Young Elites* of her eponymous trilogy; and *The Merciful Crow*, opening Margaret Owen's eponymous duology in 2019. In this literary trio, the respective heroines Cinder, Adelina, and Fie discover how sickness incites emotional extremes when they encounter both mistrust and mutual aid from family members, friends, and infected individuals. I delve into the interpersonal impact of illness, immunity, and injury in these three young adult books to explore how bodily vulnerabilities underline characters' strengths in the face of suffering. In light of COVID-19 and other contemporary world crises, these works of fiction penned prior to the global outbreak of the coronavirus can resonate particularly intensely with readers today.

Various facets of the body and mortality in children's literature have crescively moved to the foreground of recent research. Examples include Kathryn James's 2009 monograph *Death, Gender and Sexuality in Contemporary Adolescent Literature* or the collected editions *Global Perspectives on Death in Children's Literature* edited by Lesley D. Clement and Leyli Jamali in 2016 and *The Embodied Child: Readings in Children's Literature and Culture* edited by Roxanne Harde and Lydia Kokkola in 2018. As the personal impact and social destabilization of epidemics and pandemics in young adult fiction still require further investigation, I examine how fantasy books by Meyer, Lu, and Owen use widespread disease to accentuate protagonists' navigation of both communal rifts as well as the multisensory intensity of fevers and wounds. I contend that a trio of overarching concepts crystallizes as common facets of characters' interactions with bodies and diseases in these three literary works: duplicitous sight, entwined infection and immunity, as well as interdependent instability of the body and society. First of all, sight in these fantasy settings often appears not only as a means to inspect invalids' symptoms but also as a source of uncertainty when protagonists don disguises or manifest magical abilities to cast illusions. As a second aspect, while detailed descriptions of infection foreground both the sensory immediacy of somatic suffering and widespread fear among a population, key characters' immunity to rampant sickness repeatedly reaps equal disdain. Finally, instability comes to the foreground via public disputes in these fictional

worlds mirroring corporeal frailty, for wounds and prosthetics play a key role in the course of all three narratives. Nevertheless, the heroines' acts of collaboration, compassion, and courage in *Cinder*, *The Young Elites*, and *The Merciful Crow* at times compensate for the discord sparked by pestilence. I analyse how these moments of bestowing and receiving comfort through embraces and altruistic gifts link to Irish philosopher Richard Kearney's insights on the healing potential of tactility in his 2021 monograph *Touch*. Careful tactile contact hereby forms a counterweight to the danger of disease and deep-reaching divisions in fictional populations. In this literary trio, the tension between connection and exclusion reveals that sickness can threaten the body, destabilize the unity of communities, and push adolescent protagonists to reassess their positions of dependence and disenfranchisement. Overall, as pandemics in young adult fantasy literature illuminate the fragility and malleability of both bodies and societies, protagonists in such books evaluate their agency and identity in relation to illness and injuries.

2 Cyborg Cinder: Disability and Disease

The first book of Marissa Meyer's *The Lunar Chronicles*, a quartet spanning from 2012 to 2015, features a futuristic retelling of the fairy tale "Cinderella". The titular protagonist Linh Cinder experiences bodily vulnerabilities firsthand due to her extensive cyborg prosthetics following a horrific accident in her childhood. Moreover, the danger of a global pandemic known as letumosis or the blue fever hangs like a shroud over a technologically advanced Earth in the aftermath of World War IV and especially over the crowded city New Beijing, where the heroine resides. Hereby, literary scholar Angela Insenga notes that Meyer expands upon the "embodiment trope endemic in the Cinderella mythology" by shifting the focus from the heroine's soot-stained appearance to Cinder's body as a whole, encompassing flesh and prosthetics (2018, 55). Meyer's disabled protagonist weathers her neighbors' disgust and her stepmother's disdain directed at her metal appendages and cybernetic interface on a daily basis. Although both Insenga and Ferne Merrylees discuss Cinder's cyborg status as a clash between organic and artificial elements of the body, their articles only briefly address interpersonal links connecting the heroine's injuries to the plague victims' suffering. Building upon their observations, I posit that Cinder's navigation of both her personal prosthetics and the pervasive pandemic hones her attention to notice ambiguities and inequalities related to corporeality. One prominent facet is duplicitous sight, as exemplified by the dark blots appearing on the skin of the infected as an early symptom of the deadly contagion letumosis.

These epidermal indicators of the virulent infection are juxtaposed against the sight of the protagonist's metal hand and leg. This comes to light via her comment, "It's not like wires are contagious" (Meyer 2013, 5), in response to the owner of a nearby bakery tugging her son a safe distance away from the young woman's booth in a densely populated marketplace. Shortly hereafter, there is an outcry when the baker displays letumosis splotches upon her skin. This scene contrasts the heroine's technological limbs against the easily transmittable and terror-inducing sickness. Later, when the protagonist's younger stepsister Peony catches the blue fever as well, the girl's panic at the bruise-like marks leads to tears that overcome the protagonist's own sense of self-preservation as Cinder wraps Peony in a hug in hopes of comforting her. The heroine's silent speculations whether she is also infected let every side-effect of her own heartbreak, horror, and helplessness appear as a herald of the sickness. The focus shifts from epidermal marks to internal sensations and back again while Cinder cares for her stepsister: "She fell to her knees, wrapping Peony up in both arms. […] Bile rose in her mouth. Maybe it was a sign. Maybe stomach sickness was a symptom. She looked down at her forearm, embracing Peony to her. Still no spots" (2013, 53). Despite her stepsister's pleas to stay away lest she also become infected, the heroine lets compassion rather than caution propel her forward. Cinder highlights how the threat of contagion can heighten a sensitivity to possible symptoms and can kindle kindness that eclipses fear.

In contrast to the unmistakable signs of infection appearing on the skin, Cinder has ample experience hiding perceptible indications of her disability by concealing her cybernetic hand with gloves and keeping her metal foot out of sight. Her decision foregrounds both her self-conscious relationship with her body and the constant threat of plague research hanging over her head. Cyborgs, seen as inferior citizens, are drafted for scientific experiments in hopes of developing a cure for the deadly disease running rampant across the globe. The cyborg draft for letumosis testing links disability and disease as two main sources of discrimination and instability in Meyer's futuristic society. Although a test proves that Cinder is free of contagion after her stepsister's infection, the protagonist is forced to take part in medical trials when her stepmother volunteers her for lethal letumosis testing. Cinder's limited opportunities reflect scholar Marit Hanson's argument that cyborgs merge abilities and infirmities. On the one hand, disabilities and injuries are often alleviated or even erased via cybernetic prosthetics, yet, on the other hand, social exclusion and exploitation stress injustices (2020, 101). In Meyer's book, the law submitting cyborgs to the absolute authority of a legal guardian – such as Cinder suffering under her stepmother's tyranny – paints an image of inequality permeating this fictional world and thus mirroring the heroine's defenselessness in the disease research center. When she first arrives, knocked unconscious after attempting to escape, Cinder is in the midst of

a dream reliving the horrific fire that left her an amputee as a child. However, the nightmare fuses past injuries with the present threat of illness, for certain elements are different from her usual dreams of the accident: "Instead of being all alone, she was surrounded. Other crippled victims writhed among the coals, moaning, begging for water. They were all missing limbs. […] Cinder shrank away from them, noticing bluish splotches on their skin" (Meyer 2013, 76). Epidermal signs of infection are interspaced with severed appendages as interconnected examples of bodily harm. Once the protagonist awakens, the medical test proceeds with an injection of pathogens into her arm. The procedure is projected upon an electronic screen that also visualizes the medical alterations to her body, thereby conjoining disease, metal bones, and synthetic limbs in one image. Cinder's thoughts and somatic reactions to the terrifying ordeal reflect this connection: "She flinched at the cold, then again as the needle poked into her sore elbow. The bruise would last for days. Then she remembered that tomorrow she would be dead. Or dying. […] A shudder wracked her body. Her metal leg clanked hard against her restraints" (2013, 91). Shockingly, the heroine discovers that she is immune to the pestilence due to her Lunar heritage. However, her immunity links to further exclusion because Lunars are a supernaturally gifted group of settlers on the Moon heavily mistrusted by most of Earth's population, while the despotic Lunar Queen Levana claims that Lunar fugitives fleeing her rule bring letumosis to Earth. Whereas divisions between Earth residents and Lunars have previously received scholarly attention such as in Sierra Hale's 2021 exploration of representations of race in Meyer's fiction, the cyborg protagonist's disease-driven encounters with exclusion at the testing center and thereafter in a quarantine building garner comparatively little notice.

After Cinder's immunity allows her to leave the testing center unscathed, she seeks out New Beijing's quarantine area to find her stepsister, thereby illustrating the sensory immediacy of suffering associated with pestilence. Freed from the fear of contracting the sickness, she gains a unique view of the remote locations normally only entered by medical droids and fatally infected individuals. Multisensory details highlight the miserable conditions of these hurriedly erected buildings used to house the victims of the rapidly spreading plague. When Cinder first arrives at such a quarantine structure at the city outskirts, olfactory perception first and foremost sets the scene in a nauseating manner: "The stench of excrement and rot reached out to her as she stepped into the warehouse. […] This quarantine had been hastily constructed in just the past weeks as the sickness crept closer to the city. Still, the flies had already caught on and filled the room with buzzing" (Meyer 2013, 146). In comparison to the futuristic technology permeating the rest of the cityscape, helplessness in the face of letumosis's inexorable increase leaves the conditions of this facility in a meager and unsanitary state without any comfort offered to the

infected apart from the basic needs of food and water as well as a few donated blankets. Cinder's repulsed reaction foregrounds the sickening conditions: "She reeled back, cupping her palm over her nose as her stomach churned, wishing her brain interface could dull odors as easily as it could noise" (2013, 145). Her response exemplifies how negotiating corporeality stands at the center of Meyer's young adult book as cybernetic prosthetics form a contrast against the disease's inescapable immediacy. Simultaneously, Cinder's rising nausea due to the sensory assault of the unsanitary conditions showcases how the contagion can impact even an immune individual's body.

Once Cinder receives a vial containing a dose of a rare cure for letumosis, she immediately makes use of her immunity to enter the quarantine once again in hopes of saving her stepsister. However, the young woman arrives too late and can only cradle Peony in her arms during her sibling's final moments. Repeatedly foregoing personal comfort and safety in her quest to save Peony, the protagonist reveals both the extent of empathy and the pain of powerlessness when confronted with a seemingly unstoppable disease. Cinder's embrace stands in accordance with Kearney's analysis of two major patrons of medicine in ancient Greece: Hippocrates and Asclepius (2021, 66). While Kearney associates the former with "optocentric supervision" to detect, classify, and counter sickness (2021, 66), the latter divulges a different method of healing: "The Asclepian approach accepts that even when the doctor cannot completely control mortal suffering, one can choose to be with the patient's pain" (2021, 69). Cinder's visits to her dying stepsister fall within this tradition of alleviating suffering through companionship and caring contact, for she still bestows reassurance through touch even when the cure comes too late. Moreover, the heroine demonstrates altruism amid hopelessness when, following her stepsister's passing, she gifts the cure to a young boy in a neighboring cot in the quarantine building, whom she recognizes as the baker's son from the city's marketplace. Finally, in the book's penultimate scene, the protagonist mirrors Cinderella's midnight endeavor with a vital twist. Cinder heads out to the city ball to warn New Beijing's prince about the Lunar Queen Levana's dangerous machinations. Parallel to letumosis endangering physical health, Lunar abilities can influence humans' bioelectricity. For instance, Cinder once witnesses Levana first enchant and then disperse a protesting crowd with a single glance. When the heroine also falls victim to the ruthless regent's bioelectric manipulation at the ball, the moment of corporeal defenselessness while an outside agent controls the young woman's limbs is reminiscent of an infection. Levana's abilities are a malevolent force invading the body as she attempts to kill the protagonist. The combination of Cinder's cybernetic enhancements and Lunar abilities eventually free her from the murderous monarch's psychic control, thereby asserting the unity of her organic and

inorganic body parts working together. Hereafter, the young woman's prosthetics once again come blatantly to the foreground when she flees the ball. Instead of a glass slipper, the heroine's cybernetic foot falls off during her escape, leaving her helpless and demonstrating how her technological enhancements can either fortify or fail her at critical junctures. This key scene stresses somatic extremes by shifting from bodily vulnerability to vigor and from physiological unity to divisibility in rapid succession. While the body is repeatedly fragmented into individual parts throughout Meyer's young adult fantasy due to invasive pathogens and prominent prosthetics, Cinder represents a merging of biological and cybernetic aspects of corporeality into a harmonic and empathetic whole as she seeks to save several people and thereby displays compassion in the face of contagion.

3 Exclusion and Opportunity in *The Young Elites*

Shifting the focus from a futuristic to a historical, Venetian-inspired fantasy setting, *The Young Elites* is the first book of the eponymous trilogy by Marie Lu published between 2014 and 2016. Lu's young adult series tracks the trials of adolescents bearing physiological marks and developing magical gifts upon withstanding a normally fatal contagion. As superstition and the supernatural intertwine in this fictional society, *The Young Elites* explores how the aftermath of illness can spark either cruelty or kindness. The literary work's opening epigram features a doctor's report detailing the wide range and unsettling effect of the pestilence commonly called blood fever rapidly spreading across the island nation of Kenettra. Although all infected adults inevitably die, several children survive the plague at the cost of first suffering physical pain during the disease and later facing social segregation. In the first chapter, the protagonist Adelina Amouteru's narration over a decade later offers a personal account of the sickness, which not only killed her mother and infected her sister but also left Adelina changed in terms of both physical attributes and uncanny abilities. While Cinder is only briefly exposed to letumosis during plague testing and above all suffers vicariously when she is helpless to save her stepsister, Lu's character contracts the blood fever sweeping through her country at a young age and must ride out the illness on her own. Even years later, Adelina still recalls her suffering with a numbly detached yet intensely detailed precision: "When I was four years old, the blood fever reached its peak [...] You could always tell who was infected – strange, mottled patterns showed up on our skin, our hair and lashes flitted from one color to another, and pink, blood-tinged tears ran from our eyes" (Lu 2014, 4). Akin to *Cinder*, sight in *The Young Elites* predominates in disconcerting ways

as both the epidermis and hair of the infected rapidly shift through a spectrum of different colors. In addition to these multichromatic displays, the intermingling of bodily fluids emphasizes instabilities of the victims' corporeality as the fever causes deep-reaching changes in their bodies. The gory details of Adelina's ordeal ingrain the events in the young woman's memory and accentuate the agonizing trials she managed to survive: "I still remember the smell of sickness in our house, the burn of brandy on my lips. My left eye became so swollen that a doctor had to remove it. He did it with a red-hot knife and a pair of burning tongs" (2014, 4). Resemblant of the overwhelming stench in the quarantine that Cinder perceives, Adelina highlights sensory details of taste, smell, and the sensation of scalding temperatures in her almost clinical description of the highly painful procedure.

The Young Elites above all foregrounds the aftereffects of the virulent infection, thereby underscoring how disease can exert a long-lasting influence on bodies and society even when the initial risk of infection has passed. In the years after the epidemic sweeps across Kenettra, the blood fever is the source of both exclusion and empowerment for several of the survivors. The children and youths who contract but do not die from the disease are disdainfully called *malfettos* due to the physical markings they display – such as vibrant discolorations staining their irises, hair, and skin with bloodred, deep violet, or shimmering metallic hues – as well as more unusual, even miraculous transformations. Consequently, the protagonist discovers not only that her eye has been removed and her hair has turned silver, but also that she can cast illusions. Lu's narrative juxtaposes the changeability of corporeality with social fluctuations as the epidemic permanently alters the bodies of survivors and kindles distrust among the population. In retrospect, Adelina details the gradual shift in public opinion from sympathy to suspicion to aversion as more and more young survivors of the pestilence display changes in their appearance and abilities:

> When the blood fever first passed through, killing a third of the population and leaving scarred, deformed children everywhere, we were pitied. *Poor things.* Then, a few parents of *malfetto* children died in freak accidents. The temples called the deaths acts of demons and condemned us. *Stay away from the abominations. They're bad fortune.* So the pity toward us quickly turned to fear. The fear, mixed with our frightening appearances, became hate. (Lu 2014, 40)

She explains how children like her soon are no longer seen as vulnerable victims but rather as dangerous liabilities to be scorned. Their disabilities reap derision comparable to Cinder's experiences. Adelina later joins a band of adolescent *malfettos* endowed with magical gifts, who are widely known as the Young Elites and whose powers demonstrate that the impact of infection upon the body in this young adult book varies between lethal and liberating potentials. The protagonist exemplifies both of these possibilities as she suffers her cruel father's yearslong abuse aimed

primarily at her altered facial features. However, she discovers her talent of conjuring illusions upon escaping her father and accidentally killing him in the attempt. The dangerous duality of Adelina's supernatural abilities caused by the fever offers freedom and fear, thereby displaying parallels to shapeshifting. As scholars Kimberley McMahon-Coleman and Roslyn Weaver argue, shapeshifting, often associated with werewolves in popular culture, frequently evokes the body's alterations due to adolescence, disease, or physical disabilities (2012, 11–13). Especially McMahon-Coleman and Weaver's emphasis on "the physicality and pain of transformation" as well as "the implications of conceptualizing disability and illness as monstrous" in recent film and literary depictions of shapeshifting (2012, 13) resonate with Adelina's encounters with agony and discrimation. After suffering through the sickness, Adelina copes with contempt on account of her appearance as well as terror in response to her newfound powers.

Whereas the epidemic initially highlights the body's fragility, the illness's repercussions imbue several of the Young Elites with invulnerability. One survivor of the plague displays a resistance to fire, while another acquires accelerated healing. In the latter case, these regenerative powers are gifted to the leader of Kenettra's Inquisition, ruthlessly targeting *malfettos*. Ironically enough in Lu's narrative, this antagonist links immunity to heightened rather than assuaged pain, for he employs his self-healing to tirelessly hunt his fellow survivors of the blood fever and to habitually flog himself as a penance for his supernatural gifts. As a further example, one Young Elite bringing her brother back from the dead illuminates divisions between living and deceased bodies while also illustrating the uncanniness of breaking the boundaries of mortality. In contrast, Adelina's magic advances beyond the supposed harmlessness of illusions, since she manages to mimic pain in others' bodies to the point of unintentionally killing a person when her powers flare out of control, thus resembling the contagion's fatal impact. Gradually, these abilities threaten to overwhelm the protagonist in the same manner as the blood fever that nearly felled her. The young woman's predicament mirrors McMahon-Coleman and Weaver's analysis, in which they state: "Many shapeshifting texts create a sense of instability around the body, where the body is unreliable, uncontrollable, and subject to pain that cannot be stopped, which has obvious connections to the experience of disease" (2012, 122–23). Throughout *The Young Elites*, bodily uncertainty is at the center of these multiple contradictions for the magically gifted *malfettos*: healing as a catalyst for further harm, death no longer a finality, and illusions with all-too real consequences. Moreover, the adolescents with discolorations of hair and skin due to the virulent infection often suffer their neighbors' prejudice and the persecutions of Inquisitors, who presume the multihued markings to be a sign of divine displeasure. The Inquisition crescively intensifies restrictions against *malfettos*, from limiting

citizens' movement to condoning mob violence to leading midnight raids in order to terrify plague survivors. For instance, the protagonist sees her newfound friend and fellow *malfetto* Gemma endure anger and insults despite her high social standing. When Gemma participates as a jockey in a public horse race, Adelina reports, "I hear '*Malfetto*!' spat out in the air, mixing with a loud roar of boos, and when I take a good look at the crowd, I notice people who have put false markings on themselves, jeering and taunting Gemma with exaggerated purple patches painted on their own faces. One of them even flings rotten fruit at her" (Lu 2014, 137). Sight here plays a key role due to the mob's replication of survivors' physical markings, recreated to mock *malfettos*. The antagonism showcases how mistreatment of plague survivors forms the book's key conflict by dividing the society.

However, the protagonist's newfound talents underscore how she can remodel and reclaim her outward appearance through illusions, returning her silver hair to its original, raven hue and replacing her missing eye. Both Adelina's physical disability and supernatural ability thus explicitly connect to duplicitous sight, with the loss of one eye finding its foil in her illusions as she manipulates others' perceptions. She begins with summoning visual apparitions and gradually advances to auditory hallucinations and even excruciatingly intense simulations of pain. This is analogous to Lunars' bioelectric manipulation in *Cinder* and particularly the final scene after the heroine's disastrous encounter with Queen Levana at the ball, when Cinder creates illusions to escape her imprisonment. This forms an inverse to Meyer's initial scene that introduces the letumosis pandemic via visible symptoms of dark blots upon the skin. Cinder masking her metal prosthetic as a flesh hand to flee at the end of the book draws the reliability of sight further into question. As a result, both Cinder and Adelina use illusions to conceal their physical disabilities. In Lu's work, suffering and survival increasingly intertwine when Adelina is even shunned by other survivors of the pestilence on account of her powers. Despite facing exclusion not only from the uninfected members of her fantasy society but also from the Young Elites, Adelina finds support in her sister Violetta, who likewise endured the blood fever yet kept her own markings and magic hidden until recently. As Adelina's supernatural abilities born from the disease isolate her from others yet enable her to save Violetta from the Inquisition, the siblings' shared somatic experiences of overcoming an abusive father, the epidemic, and the Inquisitors' torments tie the sisters closer together. In the book's concluding scene, Adelina's sister evokes Kearney's analysis of tactility's role in compassionate contact. When the protagonist succumbs to despair and begins to cut away her long, silver hair, repulsed by the visual reminder of the blood fever's effects on her, Violetta offers solace under the light of two moons: "All around us are locks of my hair, painted silver and gray by the moons. Violetta pulls me into a tight embrace. I cling desperately to her" (Lu 2014, 341). This mutual support between

siblings mirrors Kearney's observation that touch provides comfort: "[T]o stay with one's own embodied feelings [acts] as a way of staying with the other's wounds. Such mutual abiding with pain becomes a form of shared witness – bilateral healing" (2021, 69). In the aftermath of sickness, social ostracism, and separation from their fellow *malfettos*, the sisters' embrace offers an anchor point in a sea of sorrow.

4 Infection and Immunity in *The Merciful Crow*

Finally, similar to *Cinder* and *The Young Elites*, immunity is both a boon and a burden due to social inequalities and exclusion within the avian-inspired, rigid caste system of *The Merciful Crow*. In Margaret Owen's duology released from 2019 to 2020, the protagonist Fie and her fellow travelers called Crows are responsible for the burial of plague victims due to their invulnerability to a dangerous epidemic. The sickness known as the Sinner's Plague running rampant through the medieval kingdom of Sabor both transcends and reinforces social divisions in the strictly stratified realm. On the one hand, illness elides differences, for all classes from the royal family of Phoenixes to the peasant Sparrows are susceptible to the disease. On the other hand, the Crows, belonging to the lowest tier, are exempt from infection, which kindles both superstitious fears and violent ire among the other castes. The impoverished Crows restlessly wander the kingdom's roads without any right to an alternate occupation, education, or a home to call their own. Their outcast status presents their marginalization as a mirror image to the ostracism of plague victims. Whereas sick individuals in Sabor are often isolated to avert the spread of infection, Crows are regularly persecuted out of deep-seated prejudice. The heroine's caste thus reflects scholar Helen Thomas's description of disease visualized in literary works when "the ill and dying are presented as signifiers of difference, decay or solitude" and are "sometimes exiled from the world of (healthy) others" (2016, 2). Nonetheless, Fie utilizes the negotiating power of her companions' immunity when they are called to Sabor's royal court once the news spreads that two young men recently passed away in the kingdom's capital city due to the plague. Tensions between the highest and lowest castes run high because the last time Crows collected plague victims from the palace occurred nearly five hundred years ago. As the protagonist explains:

> [A]nywhere, from Sabor's western merchant bays to its cruel mountains of the east, a higher caste could cut down Crows for any invented slight. […] The Sinner's Plague spread swift once its victim died. One body could rot a town to stone before year's end. Here in the quarantine court, with two dead boys guaranteed to bring the palace down in less than a half moon […] here was where the Crows could not be touched. (Owen 2019, 6)

For the Crows, disease thus becomes a bargaining chip to counterbalance the oppression they brave on a daily basis. The opening chapter features the royal household refusing to pay the usual fee for the burial of their prince and his personal guard allegedly struck down by the epidemic. The Crows' unprotected social status thus comes to the foreground in the capital, where Hawks serving as soldiers all too gladly intimidate the heroine's friends and family, while the Peacock nobility watches with morbid curiosity. Enraged by the mounting danger and repeated disrespect, Fie leads her crew in a wordless yet effective negotiation by threatening to leave the infected bodies behind, which would imperil the entire city. Yet even after receiving payment and departing with the corpses, their job in the capital holds disruptive surprises in store, for the Crows soon discover that the supposed plague victims are alive and well. The Phoenix prince and his Hawk guard explain that they emulated corpses to escape assassination attempts they faced in the castle. The narrative thus establishes sight as a source of duplicity early on, for Fie and her band use the easily recognizable masks and cloaks of their caste to hide the two royal half-brothers in plain sight. While pestilence incites division in all three young adult books I analyze in this article, contagion in *The Merciful Crow* also functions as a catalyst to bring the protagonist together with two youths of higher castes in order to combat injustice in their kingdom.

However, the Crows' responsibility to ease the passing of infected individuals and to collect the bodies of those felled by the Sinner's Plague also endangers the wanderers. Their duty to regulate the epidemic with the meager means they possess frequently brings them into proximity with higher castes all too willing to vent their ire against the unprotected itinerants. For instance, upon spotting a plague beacon requesting the lowest caste to come and safely bury the contagious corpses, Fie accompanies her adoptive father to a nearby town. She immediately notes the residents' aggression: "They hated the Crows for being here. And they hated themselves for calling them" (Owen 2019, 63). Helplessness in the face of the pestilence morphs into hatred aimed at the Crows serving as undertakers. Yet the threat of the sickness spreading keeps the villagers from acting on their anger, at least momentarily. The heroine knows from experience that any attempts to forego the Crows once the plague strikes have dire consequences for all inhabitants:

> But if the corpses didn't burn by their second sunset, the plague would spread […] Fie knew too well what happened after that. By week's end, no one in the village would be left untouched. Two weeks in, the dead would be piled up, the crops blackening in the fields. By moon's end, only rotten timber, ruined earth, and bitter ghosts would remain. (Owen 2019, 63)

Unlike the public acceptance of quarantine to keep the letumosis pandemic from spreading in *Cinder* or the decade between the blood fever's past rampage across

the land and the protagonist's adventures in *The Young Elites*, *The Merciful Crow* highlights present, prevalent discordance about combatting the spreading sickness. Fie recurringly witnesses abuse and altercations when tensions between upper castes and the Crows' necessary duty reach a boiling point. Moreover, the telling name of the Sinner's Plague reflects the widespread belief in Sabor that miscreants who die of the fever are reborn as Crows to atone for their sins. This shows how sickness can reinforce exploitation enabled by social stratification, especially when villagers vent their fury against the ramblers as a substitution for their anger at the pestilence. For example, during the night after Fie visits the nearby town, a few locals ride after the Crows and set fire to their supplies once the heroine's crew manages to hide from the riders' murderous intent. To underscore the disastrous costs of such cycles of violence, the protagonist shares an anecdote about a different village that once killed a Crow's family and reaped the consequences when the survivors warned all other wandering Crows away from the area: "The band carried word out, and next time the village lit a plague beacon, no one answered until after the whole valley rotted" (2019, 194). One township's crime paid at the expense of an entire valley inundated by the epidemic showcases how the virulent infection counterbalances physical violence.

Another example is when a township kindles a plague beacon to lure Fie and her friends into a trap. Amidst this threat of danger, Fie comes face-to-face with the horrors of the contagion when she arrives to aid a villager in the final stages of the sickness: "The marks of the Sinner's Plague burned clear enough on him: lips dark with bloody tracks, skin bruised with the Sinner's Brand, eyes pasted shut with crusts" (Owen 2019, 196). The sight of the infected individual highlights the frailty of the body in the throes of illness. Fie's unsettling encounter with the plague thus resembles both Cinder's visit to the letumosis quarantine building and Adelina's traumatic memory of surviving the blood fever. Nonetheless, Fie releases the man from his suffering, earning her title as a Merciful Crow. Her soft words of reassurance and the mercy of a swift death are comparable to Kearney's argument that touch can provide solace while caring for fatally sick individuals. He notes that tactful self-awareness and attention to another's pain can allow a healer, when "confront[ing] the limits of one's capacities in the face of suffering", to still confer reprieve via the comfort of company (2021, 69). In contrast to such offers of consolation, the Crows' experience of living cut off from all other castes parallels how threats of bodily harm and corporeal divisibility stalk the protagonist, her family, and her friends. For instance, the grisly, heartrending image of severed fingers upon a lonely road – the last glimpse Fie ever received of her mother after a nighttime pursuit by murderous riders – haunts the heroine's memory for years afterwards and painfully reinforces the horror and violence the Crows undergo on a regular basis.

Nevertheless, the fragmentation of the body serves not only as a source of sorrow but also as a fount of fortitude for the young woman.

In *The Merciful Crow*, all castes are born with supernatural gifts, from the Vultures' tracking prowess to the Hawks' healing skills to the Phoenixes' control over fire. The Crows are remarkable on account of their lack of gifts, yet they can draw upon latent magic residing in teeth, often given in payment for burial duties. Similar to Meyer's and Lu's protagonists, the heroine in Owen's narrative employs magic to avoid visual detection during her quest with the Hawk warrior and Phoenix prince in hopes of altering the unjust status quo in her fictional society. Fie unlocks supernatural potentials slumbering within the body, demonstrating how enchantments and illness can become closely intertwined in young adult fantasy. When Fie describes the struggle of harnessing the power within old milk teeth as a sensation of humming through her bones expanding into severer symptoms, the somatic details of uncomfortable heat, flagging attention, and fatigue portray magic akin to a fever infiltrating the body. Thus, "Fie's sight dimmed with each step, her skull pounding" until all she perceives is "burning lungs and belly acid on her tongue" (Owen 2019, 251). Resemblant of Adelina's gifts born from suffering through the blood fever, Fie's excruciating experience that allows her to conjure invisibility and even summon fire shares some common elements with shapeshifting, since corporeal agony leads to disconcerting and awe-inspiring abilities (McMahon-Coleman and Weaver 2012, 120). Finally, the heroine engages with bodily vulnerabilities not only via teeth or the Crows' immunity but also when a final fight displays her actions as a counterpart to the contagion. In the narrative's penultimate scene, the protagonist compares her combat against the vicious and violent antagonist Greggur Tatterhelm hunting her friends and holding her family hostage to the plague's uncompromising force: "Fie struck like the Covenant's own judgement, blade crashing down on Tatterhelm's forearm" (Owen 2019, 342). Yet after this devastating blow, she chooses to withhold the mercy of a swift death. As the antagonist's lack of infection frees her from any duty toward him, Fie silently argues that their physical altercation is a decisive verdict just like the illness: "Greggur Tatterhelm suffered no plague. He'd chosen his own road, just as Fie had chosen hers. The Covenant could have sent the plague to deal with him. Instead it had sent a Crow" (2019, 350). In contrast to Cinder's prosthesis and Adelina's missing eye, Owen's book depicts the heroine and the epidemic as parallel potencies, with Fie's act of amputation against the antagonist in the midst of battle as recompense for her mother's death and all other mistreated or murdered Crows.

5 Conclusion: Sickness, Strength, and Suffering

In sum, my selection of young adult fantasy literature exemplifies how death, disease, and disability can accentuate moments of extreme emotion for protagonists. In these works of fiction, plagues often evoke uncertainty and loss of control, which eventually push both infected and immune heroines to assume agency amid interpersonal injustices and social upheavals. Cinder, Adelina, and Fie showcase a spectrum of reactions in the face of contagion, ranging from compassion to courage. Within the framework of epidemics and pandemics, these young women endure vulnerability and violence, undergo harrowing encounters and hopeful outlooks, as well as demonstrate sacrifices and sturdiness. Moreover, Meyer's, Lu's, and Owen's narratives employ links between fevers and wounds in order to highlight how characters' personal experiences of bereavement and fear intersect with local and global tensions of oppression and superstition. *Cinder*, *The Young Elites*, and *The Merciful Crow* therefore underline how the rapid spread of virulent infections sparks moments of both social division and cohesion. Disease leads the heroines, on the one hand, to brave abuse and abhorrence due to marks of illness. On the other hand, the youths also caringly reach out to both family members and strangers in the midst of sickness. Furthermore, the fantasy settings of this literary trio imbue immunity with a mystical aura and with the threat of exclusion. Surviving the danger of disease often does not re-integrate protagonists into a community but rather reinforces social fault lines and sets characters on adventurous trajectories to confront resulting inequalities. All three book series thus explore how sickness not only stresses bodily frailty but also accentuates rifts in fictional societies by kindling anger, anxiety, and, at times, altruism. Whereas disease can drive divisions between individuals, protagonists in young adult fantasy both hone their strengths in response to such suffering and discover that they can best withstand illness and overcome injuries when working together.

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COVID Graffiti as a Genre of Literary Writing

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The present paper focuses on COVID graffiti as a unique genre of literature. The application of Multimodal Discourse Analysis research method reveals the narrative potential of COVID graffiti texts. The results of the study point out that COVID graffiti mostly uses intertextuality as a literary discourse strategy to convey an efficient and persuasive message, alongside other strategies meant to express isolated people's existential fears and concerns, the experienced anxiety and discomfort caused by the "new normal." The empirical material comes to affirm the inextricable relationship between literature as verbal and the current harsh reality as non-verbal entities that complement each other in the complex process of meaning-making.

Keywords: graffiti, graffiti discourse, pandemic, COVID -19, COVID graffiti, literary genre

1 Introduction

Street art and street artists all over the world have been noticeable in depicting issues concerning COVID-19, and it seems reasonable to study and explore the role of street art in making public discourse during the pandemic.

Graffiti is a complex public practice which contains a large textual field of investigation. Here all the spheres of human life, people's desires and feelings, personal and mass problems are united. Graffiti is a broad system of texts, images, and various symbolic combinations in which personal and public issues, literature and art, daily life and customs are intertwined. From the Bible to the COVID-19 outbreak, from love confessions to political rebellion and resistance, the walls surrounding us carry all these problems silently and pass them on to others. All these characterise graffiti as a subject of multi-layered research. Today, along with the development of various branches of science, there is an obvious interest in the research of graffiti in sociology, psychology, visual anthropology, cultural studies, art theory as well as in the field of linguistics (Bloch 2021; Hanauer 2004; Marquez et al. 2018; Droney 2010; Philips 2015; Rafferty 1991; Lachman 1988). It should be noted that the perceptions of graffiti nowadays are radically diverse. A group of people regard it to be barbarism against cultural and religious

structures, some others consider it to be a form of modern art. The theoretical studies of graffiti gained an increasing interest mainly in the second half of the 20th century[1] when, along with the development and promotion of various aspects of life, hip-hop culture with all its forms became highly successful. The existing studies on graffiti mainly dwell upon its discourse characteristics; in particular, theorists are interested in what social or physical (spatial and temporal) context graffiti is used in, for what purpose and with what social impact. There is also a tendency to consider graffiti as an indicator of urban identity and a practice inherent to a certain group of people; here researchers are particularly interested in the issues related to the identification of the most notable stylistic means that form this specific type of discourse (Abel and Buckley 1977; Al-Khawaldeh et al. 2017; Cassar and Cremona 2017; Farnia 2014).

Some scholars detail the causes of graffiti production, which range from extremely personal to speaking about political injustices (Graham 2004, 7). As Y. Zaimakis puts it, "[The topics…] range from the protest voices of outraged individuals to political comments and social criticism, and from obscene suggestions or vulgar expressions to utopian and existential quests" (2015, 374). An increasingly large number of researchers single out several social and psychological functions of graffiti, which is a challenge for the authorities and a means of informal communication for marginalised and neglected groups to express their discontent, needs and wishes to those in a higher rank (Mwangi et al. 2015, 3; Nwoye 1993). Speaking generally, graffiti mainly serves three purposes: a) it allows marginalised communities to express themselves publicly; b) it allows marginalised messages to enter public discourse that would otherwise be "dangerous" to be expressed by other media; c) it allows individuals to express contentious messages publicly (Hanauer 2004, 29).

It should be emphasised that when members of minority groups in a society utilise graffiti "to silence other marginalized groups" (Rodriguez and Clair 1999, 3), it may serve as both a form of resistance and oppression for disadvantaged social groups. J. Ferrel discusses the distinctive language that a group of individuals may use in graffiti writings in this context. According to the theorist, individuals may utilise codes that only the author and the intended audience can decode (1993). These codes might be both textually and visually embodied. The definition of the term *graffiti* itself in different theoretical works entails both visual and textual components that are believed to share different common features and complete the intended message for the audience. These two modes of introducing the message constitute the meaning-making process; accordingly, the interpretation of graffiti requires two

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[1] Graffiti as a way and means of self-expression has a long history: its earliest forms date back to 30,000 years in the form of cave paintings, pictographs or simple "wall scratches".

different levels of analysis: visual and textual. Thus, Multimodal Discourse Analysis (MDA), mostly applied in graffiti studies, is strongly believed to validate a more objective and clear comprehension of both the visual and textual components of any piece of graffiti (Rubdy 2015; Paudel and Naupane, 2019; Cassar and Cremona 2017; Stampoulidis 2016; Stampoulidis and Bolognesi 2019, Stampoulidis et al. 2019; Alshreif 2016).

Considering different definitions of the notion of graffiti, we are inclined to admit the claim that any sort of public marking on the wall is called graffiti, regardless of the writer's motivation or the communication goals pursued when creating it. We agree with Ernest Abel and Barbara Buckley, who see graffiti as a form of communication and describe it as a personal activity free of daily societal constraints that prevent individuals from thinking freely and publicly. According to the authors, studying graffiti might provide "interesting insights" regarding the graffiti writers or the community in which the graffiti is made (1977, 3). It should be noted in this context that some investigators agree that not all types of graffiti are monologic in nature. Drawing parallels between graffiti as a kind of art and other forms of art displayed in galleries, Susan Hansen and Danny Flynn especially highlight the following characteristics: graffiti allows viewers or readers to elicit multiple reactions within the same spatial dimension (Hansen and Flynn 2016, 109).

2 COVID Graffiti as a Verbal Entity

Within the framework of our study, COVID graffiti is viewed as a specific genre of literary writing that possesses a number of linguistic means, techniques and strategies that form the message and foster the overall literary character of the text. Among those means, techniques and compositional strategies, the most vivid ones that take part in the meaning-making process, foster the narrative potential of COVID graffiti, and characterise it as a unique literary genre, are intertextuality, visual and verbal metaphors, binary oppositions, and conditionality. The latter structure COVID graffiti as a text and help the authors to obtain their aim, that is, to express themselves and have a certain communicative impact on the audience. The need to study graffiti as a unique literary genre is drawn from the fact that COVID graffiti is laden with panicky, horrific, dystopic, dark and sarcastic overtones, which are meant to describe the lockdown from various perspectives: from the point of view of the safety measures undertaken, their advantages and the difficulties caused by them.

The factual material of the present paper is comprised of graffiti collected from diverse social and physical settings. The selection of the material is heavily influenced by the following factors: these graffiti contain both textual and visual components, as well as demonstrate quite skilled use of language, pointing out the distinctive features of graffiti creation as a discursive practice. The COVID graffiti introduced in the paper are representative of numerous others that share similar structural, semantic and pragmatic characteristics. The potential interconnectedness of textual and visual components as a unique feature of graffiti meaning-making process allows the application of Multimodal Discourse Analysis in this context.

The structure and the content of the present paper are predetermined by the multifaceted nature of graffiti discourse, its interpretative potential and analytical requirements, as well as the goals and objectives set. The first section below (2.1) examines COVID graffiti texts from a literary point of view and studies the embodiment of intertextuality in them, the second section (2.2) deals with the study of oppositions in COVID graffiti discourse as one of the crucial meaning-making strategies, the third section (2.3) analyses the application of visual and verbal metaphors in COVID graffiti that to some extent reflect its cultural and social setting, while the last section (2.4) studies the pragmatic features of the use of conditionality in COVID graffiti discourse.

2.1 The Manifestation of Intertextuality in COVID Graffiti Discourse

Intertextuality is defined as the shaping of a text's meaning by another text (Snyman 1996). The artists in graffiti discourse mostly choose easily recognizable personalities or objects in the visual domain and well-known phrases and quotes in the textual domain and modify them if necessary to convey the desired meaning. In this context, the connection between literary texts serves as a strategy to express one's thoughts, ideas and concerns. It is worth mentioning that within the development of the graffiti culture, intertextuality has broadened its scope of expression, involving various texts and narratives (both graffiti and non-graffiti) and connecting them to modern problems, issues and ideologies. Moreover, in graffiti discourse, intertextuality can connect not only two literary texts but also a literary text, on the one hand, and the ongoing reality considered as a unique text, on the other.

Consider one of the earliest pieces of COVID graffiti (see fig. 1) created right after the outbreak of COVID-19 and the restrictions following it:

Fig. 1

The communicative aim of this graffiti is to advise the audience to "stay at home" (the most widely used expression at the earliest stages of the pandemic), hence the verb *stay* can be considered its communicative centre. One needs to pay closer attention to the verb identified as a hashtag (#), which is more typical of social media discourse. We strongly believe that this way of conveying the message is not random, if we take into account the social context graffiti appeared in (the COVID-19 outbreak), when a number of firm restrictions were implemented and most work was done virtually. The sign of a hashtag establishes a closer contact with the readers, thus ensuring the potential communicative impact the graffiti may have on them. Another example for intertextuality in COVID graffiti (see fig. 2) appeared in Colombia in mid-2020. It consists of a textual component and is placed in an area well visible to the public. The text is constructed by combining COVID-19 with George Orwell's famous *1984*. The message of the graffiti is meant to inform the public about the ongoing social situation (outbreak of the virus – the social context), and to persuade them to act adequately. This aim is obtained thanks to the intertextual connection of the
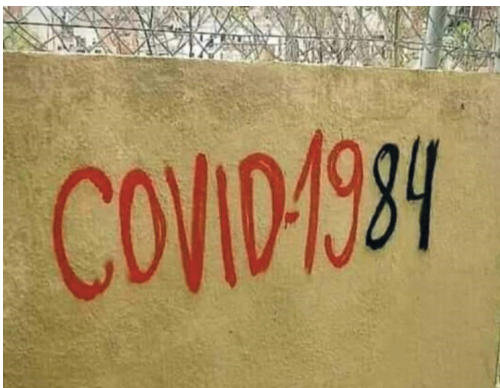

Fig. 2

graffiti with the widely known narrative (*1984* – the textual context). During the outbreak of the virus the supervision over the citizens who tested positive was raised and their personal contacts and location could be determined by the police in order to isolate them. This social situation is intertextually bound to the narrative of the book to which the graffiti creator alludes. Here the police is paralleled with Big Brother, who is "constantly watching you" (1961,

4). The sender of this message obviously meant to make his audience think of the ongoing social situation from the point of view of the safety measures undertaken, i.e. the measures to mitigate the risk of COVID-19, which seem to have become a must (the "new normal" as it is now accepted to say), whereas these safety measures still have a deep connection with the existential issues the author of the book *1984* raised so many years ago. The receiver can get this message properly only if they are familiar with the narrative *1984* and cognizant of the ongoing social situation. After all, the receiver of the message should be able to combine the two contexts (the reality and Orwell's novel) in which the message is generated. Their inability to do so brings about communication noise, which may result in misinterpretations. Thus, the potential effect this message may have on the audience is dependent: a) on the social context (COVID-19), b) on the textual context (Orwell's novel), c) on the way the message is conveyed (drawing parallels between COVID-19 and the novel, changing colours from red to black). The graffiti's interconnectedness with Orwell's classic may make the receiver decode it negatively and cause resistance to anti-COVID measures. We believe that the message can be also interpreted in a positive way, as a warning to undertake the safety measures that are meant to guarantee people's life and health.

Graffiti exploiting the same narrative of "COVID 1984" are widespread (see examples in figs. 3, 4, 5 and 6).
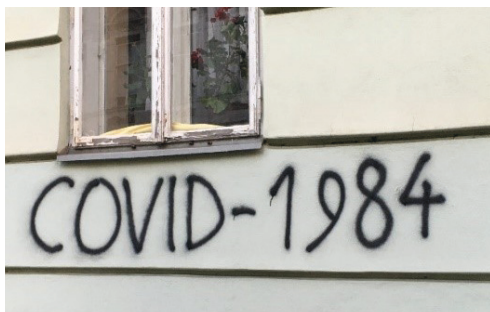

Fig. 3

Fig. 4

Fig. 5

Fig. 6

These graffiti also reflect the socio-cultural context in which they appear. The first feature to be observed here is the intertextual reference to Orwell's novel based on the graphic similarity of the two components (the expression COVID-19 and 1984) – with the number 19 appearing in both expressions. Thanks to this association, these graffiti reflect the ongoing social situation, in which surveillance over citizens was boosted and their whereabouts and contacts could be legally traced.

Intertextuality is the interconnection and „interference"/mutual influence of two texts implying that no text exists in isolation and highlighting the ongoing dialogue between them. As we can see, intertextuality in graffiti discourse mainly performs the function of linking a graffiti message to a text in the broadest sense of the word (images, symbols or reality in general). Thus, the study of intertextuality in COVID graffiti shows how intertextuality has broadened its scope of expression involving various graffiti narratives and connecting them to current problems, issues and ideologies.

2.2 Contrast as an Attention-Seeking and Attention-Grabbing Device

It is quite common to use contrasts between two or more concepts, ideas or phenomena to convey the message in graffiti discourse. Our research shows that unlike intertextuality, which mainly links two texts (as well as realities), oppositions mainly perform a separating function. They draw a distinct line in the readers' mind between the two notions that are considered in a certain graffiti.

Contrasts are constructed in various ways. Mostly the speaker creates two ends of opposition with concepts that can be either connected semantically or not connected at all. The use of the oppositions in graffiti discourse is largely determined by the factor of persuasion too, since graffiti itself is a form of persuasive speech. As a first step, its creator needs to grab the readers' attention and make them think over the issue raised. Consider the following example:

Fig. 7

This graffiti (see fig. 7) clearly reflects the social context it is created in, the COVID-19 outbreak, when there were a number of restrictions on the economy too, particularly on the businesses that were supposed to host mass gatherings (cafes, restaurants, etc.). Also, some small and medium-sized industries had to be closed for the same reason. The graffiti raises a rhetorical question for the readers, who are supposed to choose whether to open the economy and endanger people's lives or to keep it closed for the sake of their lives. Restricted by time and space, as well as aiming at conveying a logical and a brief message, the author makes use of two nouns, "ousting" the other parts of the sentence. The two nouns (*economy, life*) constitute the two ends of an opposition and make the text more illustrative and easily decodable.

The message of the following graffiti (see fig. 8) is also conveyed through a contrast based on the combination of verbal (textual) components, the concepts *plans* and *humanity* being the two ends of the opposition. The verb *cancel* is used metaphorically to convey the communicative force of the message (cancel plans, *not to cancel humanity*), the word *humanity* is used in both of its meanings (literal and metaphorical): 1) people in general (referring to the restrictions implemented after the outbreak of COVID which cancelled people's normal way of living), 2) the quality of being (referring to the safety measures that kept people apart, thus killing the "humanity" in them) (*Oxford* 2005). As we see, the word *humanity* may be decoded as both the whole mankind as such and humane treatment with kindness, care and dignity.
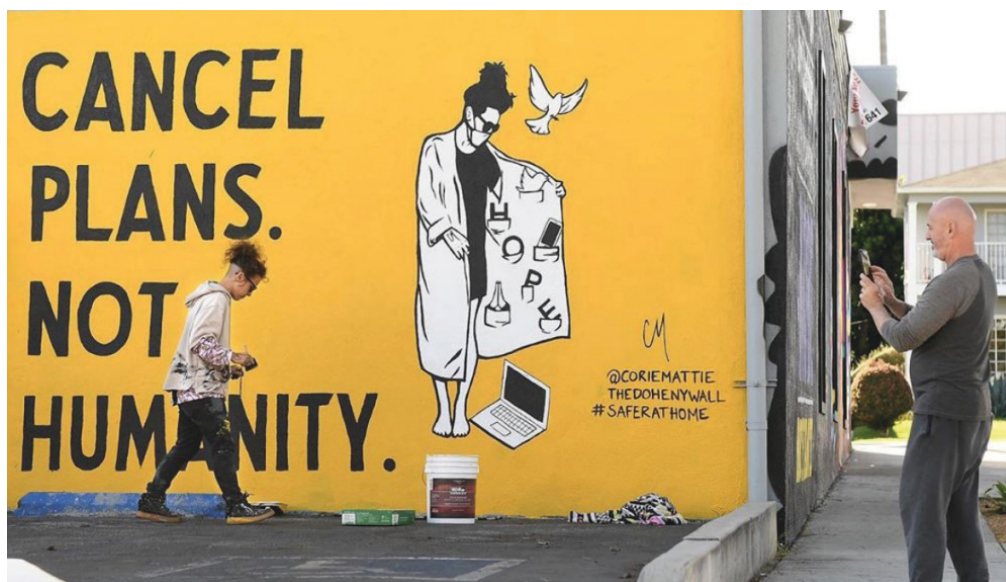

Fig. 8

COVID graffiti, as a specific literary genre, frequently conveys a strong sense of negativity through such devices as irony or sarcasm. The following piece (see fig. 9) is one example for that, in which a parallel is drawn between COVID prevention measures (*6 feet apart* – social distancing) and death *(6 feet under)* through a use of an opposition. The metaphorical transference of meaning in this example is achieved through both the text itself and the accompanying pictorial component, the image of death staring at the text. The communicative aim of this graffiti (as well as that of the others) is to urge the audience to comply with the safety measures imposed on them by the authorities for the sake of personal and public health.

Fig. 9

We can observe the same regularity in the following COVID graffiti (see fig. 10). Here *the character of death* is even scarier than in the previous case (see fig. 9), where *death* was a scary and threatening figure with big eyes and a mask-covered face. In this example, the pictorial component has an intertextual link with the current reality: we see the figure of the then US president Donald Trump holding a scythe in one hand and a mask in the other, symbolising the government's surrender to the spread of COVID (for details, see the newspaper article in *Bloomberg* titled "The White House Surrenders to the Pandemic"; Sample 2020). The accompanying pictorial component, which is one end of the contrast, raises the voice of helplessness, hopelessness and incompetence in terms of fighting the virus properly, when nothing is left but to advise the public "not to be afraid of COVID," which introduces the second end of the contrast textually.

Fig. 10

2.3 Metaphor as a Crucial Meaning-making Tool in Graffiti Discourse

Metaphors are applied in literally every sphere of life. Considering their functional significance in the attention-seeking strategies, authors employ metaphors in different types of discourses. Zoltán Kövecses outlines the following basic features of a metaphor: a) a metaphor is a property of words, b) a metaphor is a "conscious and deliberate" use of words, c) the purpose of metaphoric transference is both artistic and rhetoric, d) the metaphoric transference is conditioned by the resemblance of two units that are compared, e) a metaphor is something "we can do without": it is not an unavoidable part of human communication (2010, ix–x).

Though Kövecses states that a "metaphor is something we can do without," we can say that it has become so closely interlaced with our everyday communication that we simply cannot do without it. People usually use metaphors not only because they want to sound more artistic and illustrative, but also because metaphors are so pervasive in our language and thoughts that the speakers do not have any other choice than use them.

1. The use of metaphor in graffiti discourse particularly pursues the following aims:
2. to have an aesthetic, artistic, emotional impact on the addressee,
3. to be much closer to the everyday informal language, which is abundant with all types of metaphors,
4. in the case of visual metaphors, to be more illustrative and to create messages with a much condensed meaning,
5. to convey the main communicative aim of the text implicitly.

So far, all the COVID graffiti examples introduced were of negative nature. COVID graffiti at times can be positive as well: since the start of the pandemic different people in different national and cultural settings tried to express their solidarity both online and offline (see fig. 11).

This graffiti is a combination of visual and verbal components, the visual component being a metaphorical one: the dandelion shaped like the microscopic view of the virus represents the ongoing social situation – the COVID outbreak. The spreading of dandelion petals in the air symbolises the rapid spread of the virus by airborne means. The textual aspect, which is part of the visual one, implies the communicative aim of the message – to guide the audience to comply with the safety measures and not to spread the virus.

Consider another example (see fig. 12):

Judging from the figures given at the bottom (*confirmed, recovered and death cases* – around 88,000 cases in total compared with more than 600 million cases as of September 2022) this graffiti was created at an earlier stage of the pandemic. The content of the graffiti is quite aggressive and emotional (expressed through the

imperative mood of the verbs – *wash your hands, stop touching your face…,* incomplete, elliptical sentences, a correlation of the pictorial and textual domains). The textual and pictorial components used both literally, metaphorically and often implicitly together create an atmosphere of protest, complaint, danger, threat, fear, suspicion as well as dissatisfaction with the COVID situation. Communicatively, the graffiti demands the audience to comply with the safety measures, however hard they may seem.

Fig. 11

Fig. 12

2.4 Conditionality as a Basis of Graffiti Communication

Conditional sentences are usually believed to emphasize the real or factual condition of a statement and make the understanding of the message easier. In graffiti discourse they can be explicit (with the if-clause) and implicit (without the if-clause). The use of this type of sentence helps the graffiti creators make the communication through graffiti more dynamic and thus urge people take measures instantly and act without delay.

By means of conditional sentences authors fulfil two main purposes:

1. They imply that their potential reader agrees with the statement made and arrives at a certain conclusion after a logical and gradual development of the ideas conveyed.
2. They put the reader in a hypothetical context to achieve persuasion.

The speaker tries to cooperate with their potential readers by putting the latter in an assumed situation. Irrespective of whatever purpose or content the sentence conveys, conditionality makes the connection between the addresser and addressee stronger and more intimate. Such a connection is firstly determined by the integrity of the text (often expressed through the generic pronouns *you, we*, etc.), secondly, by the situation that a conditional sentence creates making the reader an immediate and involuntary actor in it.

Graffiti conveying their message through conditional sentences primarily have the following communicative aims:

1. to advise the audience,
2. to make the audience reason around different events and phenomena,
3. to make the audience question various ideas instead of blindly accepting them,
4. to interpret the meaning of different facts that at first sight might have not been grasped by the potential audience,
5. to force the audience not only to think but to act the way the author prompts.

Thus, conditional sentences help the graffiti text creator to promote cooperation between the addressers and addressees of the message. They place the readers in a presumable context and through well-organised "conditions" direct the readers' attention to the main communicative aim of the text as in the following graffiti samples: "If I had the right word I would have nothing to say"; "If you were waiting for a sign this is it".

The most widespread quote at the start of the pandemic, "Stay at home, save lives," can in a loose sense be considered an implicit condition. This sentence can be regarded as one of the slogans of the pandemic that "travelled" in various ways and forms, including graffiti. One of its striking instances is the graffiti below (see fig. 13). This graffiti is multimodally marked: the figure of death on the right side

spreads the bacteria into the air that infect the world and are fought against by the doctors. The text on the top of the visual component of the graffiti cites the sentence under analysis. Graphically the first part of the text (*Stay at home*) is rather big, more brightly coloured and more visible than the second part (*save lives*). The former represents the imperative part of the utterance, the latter – the purpose. The image and the text are multimodally interconnected: the visual component covers much more space than the text itself and shows the rapid spread of the virus and the efforts of doctors to fight against it. The use of an implicit condition in this graffiti aims to make the audience think about the rapid spread of COVID and the least of the efforts regular people can make to curb the spread of the virus.

Fig. 13

We would like to sum up the analysis of COVID graffiti with an optimistic note. The following two COVID graffiti (see figs. 14 and 15) are contentually more optimistic than the others discussed in the paper. They do not contain conditionality in their form or content, but rather show that COVID graffiti as a public discourse is an ongoing and rapidly evolving public practice that contains both positive and negative, as well as neutral messages and obviously has a long and significant way to go.

The start of the pandemic in 2020 is also known among people as a period of lost dreams, lost hopes, lost optimism and trust. Viewing COVID graffiti as a special genre of writing, we cannot ignore these facts: the voice of support, empathy and understanding is well-marked in most of the pieces.

The first of the two relevant graffiti (see fig. 14) refers to the existing social reality through the expression *stay home*, which was quite common at the start of the pandemic in different slogans and social ads. The author of this graffiti does not

want to lose their hope and optimism towards the future and the happy ending of the pandemic, so they have added *Life is beautiful*, which shows that even during isolation "imprisonment" at home, life can indeed be beautiful.

Fig. 14

Fig. 15

A number of graffiti created during the current year inspire great optimism and allow us to conclude our paper on a positive note. Here is one such example (see fig. 15). In this graffiti we do not see words like *virus, pandemic, infection*, or anything that refers to the disastrous period directly. This piece of graffiti reflects the COVID situation through the ease of several travel restrictions implemented during the pandemic. The graffiti reads *Let us travel*, which encourages the audience to take advantage of the retreat of the virus, of the *freedom 2022*, as the author puts it, and to *travel*, which bears a metaphoric weight that stands for the freedom and overcoming of the pandemic.

Conclusion

COVID graffiti is a constantly evolving discourse. Since the beginning of the pandemic (March 2020) multiple pieces of COVID graffiti have been created, and even now, in the post-COVID period, we frequently come across some new pieces that either express feelings of relief and liberation or highlight the advantages of a COVID-free existence. Given that COVID graffiti is still a continuously evolving discourse, we cannot confine our empirical material to any limitations (physical, social, thematic, etc.) and can only make inferences about its linguo-textual structure and genre features based on samples generated up to this point.

Hence, summing up, we can state that COVID graffiti as a genre of literary writing, in our opinion, shares some characteristic features with other literary genres such as fantasy or horror, literary realism, creative nonfiction but mostly science fiction. As in science fiction, it is also typical of COVID graffiti to have dark, dystopic and sarcastic content to inform and impact the "readers." It is characterised by imaginative and futuristic overtones and at the same time by a strong sense of reality depicted in the sincerest and the most genuine way, which allows us to consider it to be a sub-genre of science fiction, as it is usually believed that "science fiction writers often seek out new scientific and technical developments in order to prognosticate freely the techno-social changes that will shock the readers' sense of cultural propriety and expand their consciousness" (Sterling n. d.). Graffiti in all its visual and textual forms uses the constantly evolving reality as an indispensable component of any literary writing and produces messages that are realistic and rational, and imaginative, fictional and futuristic at the same time.

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List of Illustrations

Fig. 1 "Stay at home…" https://twitter.com/redfishstream/status/1254817589043183617/. Accessed 15 May 2020.

Fig. 2 "COVID-1984." https://theglocalexperience.com/2020/08/10/how-is-the-covid-19-crisis-affectingcolombia/. Accessed 23 Oct. 2020.

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Fig. 6 "COVID 1984." https://buenosairesstreetart.com/2021/07/covid-street-art-and-graffiti-in-buenos-aires-and-argentina/. Accessed 08 Oct. 2021.

Fig. 7 "The economy or life." https://www.facebook.com/co.vandalism/photos/2946068435481996/. Accessed 11 July 2020.

Fig. 8 "Cancel plans…" https://twitter.com/calfund/status/1244651675505262593. Accessed 12 May 2021.

Fig. 9 "Better to be 6 feet…" https://www.instagram.com/p/B-qCzynpeTm/. Accessed 08 Sept. 2021.

Fig. 10 "Don't be afraid…" https://www.usatoday.com/story/opinion/todaysdebate/2020/10/22/covid-herd-immunity-strategy-fits-donald-trump-failures-editorials-debates/3680676001/. Accessed 28 Sept. 2021.

Fig. 11 "Care for all." https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=2699556586830093&set=pcb.2699624553489963. Accessed 14 Oct. 2020.

Fig. 12 "COVID19 'The virus…'" https://globalnews.ca/news/6785128/vancouver-murals-coronavirus/. Accessed 16 Dec. 2020.

Fig. 13 "Stay at home…" https://artreview.com/burmese-street-artists-arrested-over-covid-19-mural/. Accessed 29 Nov. 2020.

Fig. 14 "Stay home…" https://www.facebook.com/photo?fbid=2699553896830362&set=pcb.2699624553489963. Accessed 14 Oct. 2020.

Fig. 15 "Let us travel…" https://kitchener.citynews.ca/police-beat/local-covid-19-assessment-centre-hit-with-graffiti-5356002. Accessed 16 June 2022.

Appendix: Graffiti texts

"If I had the right word…" https://www.facebook.com/co.vandalism/photos/2206100139478833/. Accessed 17 Sept. 2019.

"If you were waiting…" https://www.pinterest.com.mx/pin/100275529183280874/. Accessed 09 Apr. 2019.

The History of English Literature: A New Approach

Az angol irodalom története. Vol. I. A középkor. ['History of English Literature. Vol. I. The Middle Ages.'] Edited by Tamás Karáth and Katalin Halácsy. Editors in chief: Tamás Bényei and Géza Kállay. Budapest: Kijárat, 2020. Pp. 412. ISBN: 978-615-5160-77-6.

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This is the first book of a seven-volume English literary history series (*Az angol irodalom története*)[1] by Hungarian scholars, which is dedicated to medieval literature and is comprised of contributions by six scholars: Andrea Nagy, Tibor Tarcsay, Katalin Halácsy, Zsuzsanna Simonkay, Zsuzsanna Péri-Nagy and, authoring the most sections by far, Tamás Karáth. The volume aims to provide a comprehensive cultural and historical context for medieval English literature in three major chapters. The first, general chapter on cultural history (TK) provides an introduction to the medieval world and its communication models, as well as dedicating some pages to the understanding of medieval literature and the attitudes surrounding it. This theoretical framework is supplemented by the introductions to the chapters on Old and Middle English literature, and in the final section on Middle English, which is devoted to visuality, with more general interpretative methods and paradigms.

A great strength of the book is listing and using recent research results, databases and internet resources. The authors also pay attention to Hungarian literary and cultural history, sometimes in a highly detailed manner. For example, the recent (and yet to be proven) hypothesis that Chrétien de Troyes modeled the protagonist of his novel Lancelot on the Hungarian king Saint Ladislaus is also cited by Simonkay. Occasionally, minor philological remarks can also be found in the volume, such as Karáth's corrections of the published Hungarian translation of Julian of Norwich's mystical work. The volume allows the reader to learn about the history of Hungarian translations of medieval English literature, which is a unique and highly useful feature.

The approaches of the six authors are not uniform. Beyond the index at the end of the volume, cross-references on the margins also help the reader to locate and compare sections on the same texts and issues, even in other volumes of the series. This solution is strongly reminiscent of the codex era, rather than the age of print

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[1]   As such, it also includes general introductory sections and Géza Kállay's theoretical grounding (in the appendix). Those sections, however, fall beyond the scope of the present review.

(or even digital) books. Of course, of the medieval languages of the British Isles, English is given the greatest prominence, and Latin less so, while Anglo-Norman, Welsh and other languages and their literatures are also briefly mentioned.

While the two main, large chapters on Old and Middle English Literature, respectively, mostly focus on texts, they also include historical summaries, discussing the most important events, social structures and linguistic background of each period in England, thus helping to understand the role of literature and arts in the Middle Ages. The chapter on Old English Literature by Nagy, Tarcsay and Halácsy is organised according to genre-specific aspects into respective sections on poetry and prose. The interdisciplinary nature of the volume is exemplified by the fact that the chapters on individual literary works and genres also reflect on history: for instance, the sub-chapter on Old English heroic poetry uses *Beowulf* to illustrate the heroic and societal ideal of the period, as well as the meaning of *comitatus*. A gendered reading also appears in the volume: this chapter repeatedly stresses that although Old English poetry is largely patriarchal, this "does not mean that there are no important and memorable female characters in Old English poetry" (53).[2] It points out, briefly mentioning a few examples like Wealhteow and Hildeburh, that "[through some chapters of *Beowulf*] we also gain insight into the impact of the society of warriors who follow the heroic ideal on the lives of the women who live alongside them" (67). In the subchapter on elegies, the volume gives a detailed account of the poem "The Wife's Lament," which, in addition to its content, is also notable for its genre: "it does not meet Greenfield's definition of an elegy [...] because [...] it ends with the permanence of sadness" (88).

After the introduction to the chapter on Middle English Literature, there are five large subchapters, some of which are linked to genres (romance, drama), others to thematic constraints (religious literature), while the longest subchapter is dedicated to Chaucer. The last chapter ('The Worlds of Imagination') brings together a very wide range of generically and thematically different texts in the context of medieval visuality.

The subchapter on medieval romance describes the development of the genre in 12th-century Europe, and the influence of French chivalric romances and courtly poetry on English romances. It discusses in detail the texts belonging to the three traditional *matières* introduced by the French *trouvère* Jean Bodel (Matter of Rome, France and Britain), as well as the Matter of England (romances based on a plot situated in medieval England). The section gives examples from both English and Old French literature and elaborates on its topic in a manner understandable to the lay reader. Although the definitions (136) draw a sharp distinction between the

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2   All translations from *Az angol irodalom története*, vol. I are mine – Mária Anna Finta.

thematic categories, the subchapters give a nuanced picture of the interrelationship of the three major matters.

The longest chapter on Chaucer – co-authored by Halácsy and Péri-Nagy – provides a chronological overview of the oeuvre after a biographical portrait. Somewhat differently from the other chapters, it offers summaries for most of the author's works, as well as commentaries that draw attention to the difficulties of interpretation due to the frequent ambiguities in Chaucer's poetry.

Religious literature is indeed the largest (most frequently copied, best preserved) corpus of surviving medieval literature, which explains the volume's striking emphasis on religious texts in sections authored by Karáth. Compared with the *Routledge Companion to Medieval English Literature* (edited by Raluca Radulescu, Sif Rikhardsdottir, 2023), which includes separate chapters for Chaucer, Gower, medieval lyric poetry, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* and, for example, mystical poetry, here Chaucer is given 70 pages, mystical poetry 32 pages, lyrical poetry 12 pages and travelogues a 3-page subchapter. The mystical poetry of Julian of Norwich, Margery Kemp and some minor authors benefit from an in-depth interpretation and extensive contextualisation. The chapter on English medieval drama by Karáth discusses in detail liturgical plays, mystery plays, miracle plays and moralities, highlighting the process of detachment from liturgical texts, the increasing prominence of secular episodes and plot threads, and the different attitudes associated with stage performances. Importantly, the chapter introduces the related genres of medieval drama, the fabliau and the chivalric romance, which were also often performed orally: the examples of *Dame Sirith and the Weeping Bitch* and *Sir Orfeo* are used to illustrate this point.

Also written by Karáth, the most original, final subchapter of the volume describes contextual thinking as a general feature of medieval literature – one might even say that the most reliable method of interpreting medieval works is to consider them in their various (manuscript, hermeneutical, generic, intertextual) contexts. Here we find the presentation of scholarly treatises, travel literature and allegorical texts as well as lyric poetry. It also discusses the manuscript context of medieval literary and scientific texts and gives several examples of illustrations that form a close unit with the textual material.

Some minor errors in the book will certainly be corrected in the second edition, for instance when Dares Phrygius's name is translated into Hungarian as Dictys (223), or when Matthew Paris is suspected of taking inspiration from Marco Polo or Willem van Rubroeck (320).

Overall, the project to create a comprehensive English literary history relevant to Hungarian readers is a worthy and niche endeavor. The volume will certainly be an important, valuable handbook for students of English literature and, hopefully, also for the wider public.

New Hungarian Narratives
in the History of English Literature

Az angol irodalom története. Vol. I. A középkor. ['History of English
Literature. Vol. I. The Middle Ages.'] Edited by Tamás Karáth and Katalin
Halácsy. Editors in chief: Tamás Bényei and Géza Kállay. Budapest: Kijárat,
2020. Pp. 411. ISBN 978-615-5160-77-6.
Az angol irodalom története. Vol. II. A kora újkor. ['History of English
Literature. Vol. II. The Early Modern Period.'] Edited by Attila Atilla Kiss
and György Endre Szőnyi. Editors in chief: Tamás Bényei and Géza Kállay.
Budapest: Kijárat, 2020. Pp. 501. ISBN 978-615-5160-78-3.

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The idea of publishing a Hungarian academic book series that provides an overview
of the history of English literature was conceived by Géza Kállay, who intended
to involve all Hungarian scholars in the field of English studies, and remained
the heart and soul of this academic group until his untimely passing in 2017.
Nicknamed HUHI—the Hungarian History of English Literature—by its
contributors, the project supported by the Hungarian National Research Fund
was eventually completed under the supervision of Tamás Bényei. The writing,
editing and publication of this series proved to be an outstanding achievement in
many respects. First of all, it fills a gap in Hungarian scholarship because, since
the single-volume handbook edited by Miklós Szenczi, Tibor Szobotka and Anna
Katona in 1972, there has not been any academic account available in Hungarian
to offer a comprehensive history of English literature void of those ideologically
and politically biased filters that cultural policies in the pre-1989 era demanded in
Hungary. Secondly, every volume of the series was written by a group of experts, the
majority of whom are not only researchers but also lecturers at English departments
of Hungarian universities all over the country. Thus, the style and content of their
contributions have been positively influenced by their teaching experiences. Thirdly,
this historical account is innovative and exceptional because, except for a very
few chapters, rather than drafting monographic portraits of individual authors in
a chronological order, the contributors survey circles or schools of English authors
and their works as they were embedded in their specific social and cultural contexts.
Last but not least, all scholars and editors involved intended to share their knowledge
in a manner that is not only philologically accurate and academically well-grounded,

but also intelligible and reader-friendly. This approach explains both the lack of lengthy footnotes as well as the presence of editorial boxes, in which references to further chapters in the same series are placed, as if they were print substitutes for hyperlinks widely used in digital humanities today. In order to give guidance to readers interested in further details, instead of a bibliography at the end of each chapter, there is only one list of the secondary sources cited at the end of every volume, accompanied by a very useful index of authors and subjects.

The first two volumes in the series offer 21st-century insights into medieval and early modern English literature. As Tamás Karáth explains in his introduction to the first volume, which he co-edited with Katalin Halácsy, the authors were asked to share their general knowledge about British literary history, as well as research outcomes they have accumulated since the cultural turn in English studies in the 1980s. The past fifty years called attention to a number of changes in academic circles, including, for example, a shift in our approach to the concept of literature and texts that are regarded as works of literature, the ways in which gender concerns influence generic discourses, or the blurred dichotomy between classic and popular literature. All six contributors to the first volume, on the one hand, wish to remove the deep-rooted prejudice that the medieval era was dark, and, on the other hand, call attention to references to and cultural counterparts in Hungarian works written in the same period. The volume discusses oral and written literature over 900 years in two main thematic sections, the first of which focuses on Old English Literature from the beginnings until the 11th century, while the second focuses on Middle English Literature, until the end of the 15th century. All chapters on old English poetry and three relatively short chapters on old English prose were written by Andrea Nagy and Halácsy, respectively, while the literacy and monastic culture of the period was surveyed by Tibor Tarcsay. In the section devoted to Middle English Literature, the lengthiest part of this volume, Hungarian experts discuss topics that are at the heart of their own research and teaching interests. Karáth authors the chapters on devotional literature, drama and theatre; Zsuzsanna Simonkay summarises her knowledge on romances; and, last but not least, Halácsy and Zsuzsanna Péri-Nagy portray the heritage of Geoffrey Chaucer. Perhaps one of the most surprising yet brilliant and original chapters is the last one, entitled 'Worlds of Vision,' in which Karáth focuses on those texts from both the Old and Middle English periods that are best described as "visionary," and discusses at length the role of pictures—including drawings and illustrations in historic records, images and visuality—and their influence on authors and writing conventions.

Although the second volume of the series on Early Modern Literature was co-edited by György Endre Szőnyi and Attila Atilla Kiss, the composition of the volume with its 62 chapters written by 23 contributors is credited to Ágnes Matuska. The volume

is divided into three main parts, the first of which, introduced and predominantly authored by György Endre Szőnyi, comprises various discourses on different elements of Renaissance English society and culture, including dress codes, discoveries, transfers of knowledge, science, occultism, and music etc. The second part is based on comprehensive yet not encyclopaedic reviews of literary genres, in which Miklós Péti, Zsolt Almási and Attila Atilla Kiss edited all chapters on poetry, prose and drama, respectively. The third part, introduced and edited by Natália Pikli, targets the afterlife of Renaissance literature as well as the Shakespearean legacy in academic circles.

One of the merits of this volume is the editorial decision to give voice to Hungarian scholars at their best. Thus, it does not take Hungarian readers by surprise that Miklós Péti is the author of chapters on early modern poetics, the influence of medieval poetry on early Tudor poetry, country house poems, and also the heritage of individual poets including John Skelton, Ben Jonson, the Cavalier poets, and John Milton before 1645. Among the chapters that Zsolt Almási wrote, the ones on apologetic prose, Thomas Nashe, the novels of Thomas Deloney, and the influence of the internet and digital humanities on Shakespeare scholarship are the most memorable. Attila Atilla Kiss displays his academic expertise on a wide range of topics that include spectacles, emblematic thinking in early modern theatre, Thomas Kyd and Stuart drama. Tibor Fabiny contributes with chapters on the Reformation, Puritan attacks on theatres, and emblem theory, while Péter Benedek Tóta shares his understanding of works by Thomas More, and Zoltán Márkus discusses the theatrical history of the period. Péter Szaffkó explores English national history on stage; András Kiséry reviews up-to-date academic knowledge on Renaissance orality and book printing, theatres in and outside of London, and the role of religious and political concerns that resulted in the closure of theatres; and Géza Kállay authors the chapter on the changes in Shakespeare scholarship over the centuries. Natália Pikli voices her academic insights on different aspects of popular culture and *The Merchant of Venice*, while Kinga Földváry is the author of the chapters on Tudor chronicles, Elizabethan comedies, and Shakespeare on film. Ágnes Matuska discusses early Tudor drama and the culture of the court, and Erzsébet Stróbl assesses the cult of Queen Elizabeth as well as the popularity of John Lyly's *Euphues* in the 1580s. Another merit of this volume is that it provided early-stage and emerging scholars with the opportunity to share the high-quality outcome of their academic research falling within the scope of the volume. Thus, Anikó Oroszlán surveys female authors in the early modern period; Ágnes Bonácz gives overviews of both pastorals and religious poetry in the first half of the 17th century; and Balázs Szigeti elaborates on his findings about the canonisation of Shakespeare. Last but not least, Annamária Hódosy, Bence Levente Bodó, Dávid Marno and Csaba Maczelka contributed chapters on sonnets, epyllions, metaphysical poetry and 16th-century utopias, respectively.

Although both volumes of the handbook series display an impressive diversity of scholarly and critical opinion, they have slightly different goals, which derive from the particular features of those two historical eras that they cover. While the editors and contributors of the first volume in the series intend to answer the question when and how texts become not only English but also works of literature, the second volume is more interested in shedding new light on texts that are either familiar to Hungarian readers or are most likely to attract interest. Perhaps the only feature that readers may regret is that, in spite of contemporary publication trends, this fascinating storehouse of Hungarian academic knowledge is currently not available in an electronic format to simplify the consulting and referencing process and thus make it more convenient.

Re-Orienting and Disorienting Fairy-Tale Studies

Re-Orienting the Fairy Tale: Contemporary Adaptations across Cultures.
Edited by Mayako Murai and Luciana Cardi. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2020. Pp. 424. ISBN 978-0-8143-4536-8.

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In *Re-Orienting the Fairy Tale: Contemporary Adaptations across Cultures*, editors Mayako Murai and Luciana Cardi have gathered contributions from scholars exploring the possibilities for de-orientation, de-centralisation and de-Westernisation of the fairy-tale genre to create space for more inclusive and more complex approaches to fairy tales. The thought-provoking title challenges readers to expand their existing socio-cultural and methodological frameworks and examine fairy tale material from innovative theoretical perspectives that review, "re-orient" and "disorient" fairy-tale studies: "Disorienting fairy-tale studies thus implies decentering the Euro-American literary fairy-tale tradition and questioning the hierarchical divide between Western tales and other wonder tales" (3). In their "Introduction" to the volume Murai and Cardi discuss the disorienting and re-orienting of the cultural hegemonies at the basis of fairy-tale scholarship, revealing "the dominant power structures that still tend to perpetuate colonial tropes and neutralize cultural differences" (4). Murai and Cardi urge scholars to "investigate the complex dynamics shaping both textual and cultural translation, the power relations that regulate the movement of cultural capital across the globe, and the specific characteristics of the sociocultural contexts affecting the production, transmission, and transformation of fairy tales" (4).

Fourteen contributors apply decentering, dis-/re-orienting strategies (including indigenous and culturally marginalised perspectives, ecocritical and ecofeminist theories, age studies and childhood studies, and analyses of fairy tales in relation to visual and performing arts, not only literary texts) to de-hierarchise the oversimplifying cultural concepts of Euro-American-centric fairy-tale studies. The first part of the volume, "Disorienting Cultural Assumptions", aims to both disorient and re-orient the relations between the Western and non-Western cultures.

In "Fairy Tales in Site: Wonders of Disorientation, Challenges of Re-Orientation," Cristina Bacchilega discusses literary and visual texts. Bacchilega reflects on "adaptations that play in the Orient and Orientalism and on non-Euro-American tales that provide a contrapuntal reading of the genre" (26). Discussing visual art

by Su Blackwell, and adaptations by Neil Gaiman and Toni Morrison's *God Help the Child*, she concludes that adaptations of fairy tales participate in the fight for social justice:

> Fairy tales and wonder tales are too often dismissed as simple stories for children, supernatural remainders of the past, or innocuous entertainment. But historically and in their contemporary adaptations, these tales disorient and re-orient us, guiding us in the forests and urbanscapes of our dreams and nightmares, beckoning us to journey across inner and social barriers, projecting alternative futures, and affecting our sense of what is possible. (32)

"*Mo'olelo Kamaha'o* 2.0: The Art and Politics of the Modern Hawaiian Wonder Tale" by ku'ualoha ho'omanawanui offers an informative description of Hawaiian oral traditions that contain elements of wonder. The critic focuses on the *mo'olelo kamaha* category, particularly "within the context of re-orienting non-European wonder tales" (39), to provide new insights and challenge "the western concept of wonder tale" (39). The chapter examines the development of *mo'olelo kamaha'o* adaptations by Indigenous artists: "Like other Indigenous Pacific peoples, Hawaiians have continually resisted such effort [of the settler colonization] by continuing to affirm our own intellectual and creative traditions through new modes of storytelling that reflect the original *mo'olelo* of our illustrious *kūpuna* (ancestors)" (41). The author emphasises the visual aspect in oral storytelling traditions which is revitalised (not only) in graphic novel and stage productions: "Contemporary Indigenous adaptations and retelling of *mo'olelo kamaha'o*, such as those for Māui, are responses to earlier settler colonial adaptations that disoriented the original *mo'olelo*. Thus, there is power to disorient, as well as re-orient stories" (74). This is important for Indigenous peoples, as the stories are a significant part of their identity.

In "Re-Orienting China and America: *Yeh-Shen: A Cinderella Story from China* and Its TV Adaptations," Roxane Hughes discusses how the "erased history and cultural heritage" of ethnic American writers is recovered. By analysing two 1980s American adaptation of Yexian variants of Chinese "Cinderella," Hughes unveils the stereotypical Westernised and Orientalised adaptations of the Yexian tale that seem to "cater to the taste of an American audience deeply influenced by Disney and quite prejudiced against Asian populations" (101).

Natsumi Ikoma's "Monstrous Marionette: The Tale of a Japanese Doll by Angela Carter" analyses Angela Carter's short story "The Love of Lady Purple," which is usually read as a retelling of Charles Perrault's "Sleeping Beauty." Besides the lineage of dolls and their metamorphoses in Western literature (e.g. Pygmalion's Galathea, E.T.A. Hoffmann's Olympia, Pinocchio), Ikoma sees yet another source of inspiration for Carter's tale in *bunraku* puppet theatre: "Although Lady Purple is manipulated by strings, the performance style comes from *bunraku* puppet theater in Japan, in which

puppets are controlled by three male masters and voiced by male singers, all of which are within a definitive hierarchy" (120). Angela Carter's story is thus ambiguous and challenges the readers' stereotypes and (mistaken) assumptions about the world.

Part II, "Exploring New Uses," critically examines new uses of fairy tales in the contemporary context for entertainment and education.

Hatsue Nakawaki's "Japanese Heroine Tales and the Significance of Storytelling in Contemporary Society" interweaves the storytelling practice of the *mukashibanashi* tales from Japan with fairy-tale analysis. It emphasises the importance of fairy tales in education: "As time passes and storytellers change, *mukashibanashi* will be reselected and transformed. In today's society, telling tales of various women – and at the same time men, or humans beyond gender distinctions – and of various forms of happiness are needed" (161). The essay calls for inclusive and positive portrayals of marginalised groups (women, children, the elderly).

In "Who's Afraid of Derrida & Co.? Modern Theory Meets Three Little Pigs in the Classroom," Shuli Barzilai shows how a pop-up version of the picture book "Three Little Pigs" can be used to teach modern literary theory: "The challenges posed by Derrida, the Big Bad Wolf of modern theory, appear far less threatening when the playfully liberating aspects of his approach to texts and contexts are foregrounded" (195).

Aleksandra Szuhajew's "Adults Reclaiming Fairy Tales through Cinema: Popular Fairy-Tale Movie adaptations from the Past Decade" focuses on popular Hollywood action films (e.g. *Snow White and the Huntsman*, *Blancanieves*, *Hansel and Gretel: Witch Hunters*) that draw on dark fairy-tale scenarios. She suggests that these films can attract an adult audience and offer not only entertainment but also a chance to discuss the cultural history of the tale, cinematic techniques, and the role of the fairy tales "in a globalizing cultural community" (228). These adaptations, Szugajew argues, create "a forum for exhibiting social and other issues" (229).

Nieves Moreno Redondo's "Trespassing the Boundaries of Fairy Tales: Pablo Berger's Silent Film *Snow White*" disorients and deconstructs stereotypes embedded in the Spanish cinematographic tradition. It examines cultural stereotypes "unconnected to the literary and sociocultural environment in which fairy tales developed" (258). The closing section, "Promoting Alternative Ethics and Aesthetics," maps out interdisciplinary research which combines new approaches to analysing fairy tales with insights from other disciplines (age studies, child studies, film studies, ecofeminism and ecocriticism).

In "Re-Orienting the Fairy Tale, Revising Age?" Vanessa Joosen re-orients fairy tale scholarship from a children-centered approach to age studies.

Michael Brodski's "Re-Orienting Fairy-Tale Childhood: Child Protagonists as Critical Signifiers of Fairy-Tale Tropes in Transnational Contemporary Cinema"

combines childhood studies and film studies to discuss transnational live-action fairy-tale movies. This chapter re-orients and challenges the traditional notion of childhood innocence: "By means of a more nuanced fairy-tale criticism approach to the motif of childhood, the dominant Eurocentric tendency toward always accepting the Western models embedded in many traditional texts could be also revealed" (304). Thus, the author challenges not only the construction of child protagonists in traditional fairy tales but also the construction of other models.

Lucy Fraser's "Alice on the Edge: Girls' Culture and 'Western' Fairy Tales in Japan" examines how Carroll's Alice is appropriated in Japan and the development of "a series of 'conversations' across national borders and about gender" (310). Carroll's *Alice* has influenced Japanese girls' culture but there is also a complex interaction between Japan and the West: "This wholehearted appropriation, in turn, has informed complex literary productions from beyond the realm of girls' culture" (329).

In "Magical Bird Maidens: Reconsidering Romantic Fairy Tales in Japanese Popular Culture," Masafumi Monden shows how Japanese popular culture reinterprets and subverts the romantic fairy-tale genre and femininity in fairy tales. The chapter discusses the modern views of female heroines in the romantic fairy tales (fatalistic and passive), and it shows the process of changing and reimagining these stories in the Japanese anime series *Princess Tutu* (2002–3). A special aspect of this chapter is that it focuses on a medium which utilises the conventions of *shōjo manga*, magical girl anime, and ballet, producing *Princess Tutu* as an example of cultural syncretism. The author concludes that "*Princess Tutu*'s (re)introduction of a harsh, almost brutal reality to the story subverts more modern conventions of the genre, offering a clever alternative to the common criticism of fairy tales as primarily reinforcing heteronormative, patriarchal, and anthropocentric romantic ideologies where the passive good girl is always rewarded with a happy ending" (358).

Katsuhiko Suganuma's "When Princess(es) Will Sing: Girls Rock and Alternative Queer Interpretation" explores the intersection of fairy-tale studies, popular music, and queer studies. It analyses a "productive dialogue between fairy-tale retellings and formal critical studies developed in Japan" providing an "intertextual analysis of fairy tales in relation to popular music" (363). To illustrate the queer potential of fairy tales (traditionally seen as reproducing heteronormative discourse), Suganuma tracks the story of the Japanese female band Princess and the lyrics of their popular songs. Sugunama's analysis of the song "Diamonds" demonstrates the re-orientation of the fairy tale and its potential for gender subversion as well as queer interpretation.

The closing chapter, Daniela Kato's "The Plantation, the Garden, and the Forest: Biocultural Borderlands in Angela Carter's 'Penetrating to the Heart of the Forest,'" concentrates on non-human life forms in fairy tales. As Kato emphasises, in fairy tales "animals and plants often display wondrous forms of agency: wolves and birds

speak and seduce; trees and flowers shift from one shape to another and crucially influence the course of events by producing either miraculous gifts or poisonous curses" (384). The chapter offers a radical decentering of human subjectivity. Reading Angela Carter's short story from an ecofeminist perspective, Kato criticises the space the forest occupies in the traditional nature-culture binary hierarchy.

The volume *Re-Orienting the Fairy Tale*, brought together by Mayako Murai and Luciana Cardi, is a stimulating academic publication: intellectually inspiring and challenging, it raises intriguing questions, utilises new approaches and re-orients old material towards new readers. It aims at stretching the boundaries of fairy-tale studies by disorienting Western, Euro-American narcissism, while applying new approaches and re-orienting traditional perspectives. The volume keeps its promise to open the world and the reader's mind and embrace a far more inclusive understanding of fairy tales in new contexts, adaptations, media, and cultures.

An-Other's Maimed Body: Mutilated Stories in Coetzee's Novels

The Body, Desire and Storytelling in Novels by J.M. Coetzee. By Olfa Belgacem. Abingdon: Routledge, 2018. Pp. 212 pp. ISBN 978-0-367-00234-3.

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How can one approach the specificities of literary texts by a close reading without falling into the trap of superficial reading or, worse, a summary of the literary work? This is what Olfa Belgacem, a teaching assistant at the University of Tunis, Tunisia, achieved in *The Body, Desire and Storytelling in Novels by J.M. Coetzee*. Presented initially as a Ph.D. dissertation, the monograph was rewritten for publication. The book was published in 2018 by Routledge in the Routledge Research in Postcolonial Literatures series, making Belgacem one of the few Tunisian scholars in English and American studies to have their monograph acquire such international critical acclaim and visibility.

In this monograph, Belgacem undertakes the task of interpreting four pieces of fiction written by the South African-born J.M. Coetzee. Taking an often-quoted phrase from *Foe* – "the bodies are their own signs" (qtd in 114) – as her vantage point, the author embarks on a journey to explore the body in and of Coetzee's texts: *Waiting for the Barbarians* (1980)*, Life and Times of Michael K* (1983), *Foe* (1986), and *Age of Iron* (1990). The critic's interest, as she explains in the introduction, is in Coetzee's apartheid novels. To the logic of a traditional choice, based on a specific period in the writer's life, the author adds her own rationale: in these four novels, the critic discerns a pattern that would serve as a leading thread throughout the study. She remarks that in the selected novels the "protagonists have bodies that are in a degenerate condition […]. The stories of how the protagonists' bodies are disfigured become an obsession for the narrator. Yet, the narratives' maimed characters obstinately refuse to give their stories as well as their bodies away" (18). Accordingly, in *The Body, Desire and Storytelling in Novels by J.M. Coetzee*, Belgacem approaches the main characters' wounded bodies, explores their scars, and comments on the way their flesh is grafted onto the text. The book's fundamental idea on how the natives' disfigured bodies are used and abused by the white narrator is further discussed in Belgacem's article "Taming the Indigenous Shrew: Torture and Narration as Possible Tools to Translate the Natives' Silence in J.M. Coetzee's *Waiting for the Barbarians* and *Foe*," published in *International Conference Proceedings*

on Science, Art and Gender in the Global rise of Indigenous Languages. In that study, the critic focuses particularly on the barbarian girl's and Friday's bodies as sites of resistance to the white characters' seemingly benevolent attempts to write down their stories, and points out the perversion inherent to this endeavour.

Belgacem expands on the theoretical and philosophical framework of her study in a detailed introduction. In her approach to the body, the focal point of the book, she embarks on a painstaking endeavour as she surveys the discourses inscribed on the flesh. She traces the conception of the body from the Greek Manichean division of the body and soul in Plato's philosophy, then stops at Descartes's mind/matter binarism and moves on to Foucault's socio-political and epistemological approach to the body in the light of what he defines in *Discipline and Punish* as "political anatomy" (qtd in 5). As the study capitalises on post-colonial theory, Belgacem engages with a dialogue between canonical critics such as Edward Said, Bill Ashcroft, Abdul R. JanMohamed, and Homi Bhabha, elucidating the nuanced differences and controversies of their various theoretical insights. For instance, while Ashcroft focuses on how colonial powers, including literature, have shaped the post-colonial others, Said draws attention to the symbiotic relationship between the Western self and the Oriental other. According to the latter, Western identity is defined negatively, i.e. the self is not what the other is, meaning that it is not barbaric. This opposition between the self and the other is contested in Bhabha's work. Indeed, Bhabha contends that a "Third Space" is created at the moment of the encounter between the self and the other, bringing to the fore the ambivalence, hybridity and in-betweenness at play. As far as Coetzee's fictional works are concerned, Belgacem provides an extensive review of leading critics' often conflicting readings: she relies on the insights of prominent Coetzee scholars David Attwell, Derek Attridge, Sue Kossew, Teresa Dovey, Dominic Head, Laura Wright, and Lucy Graham, etc.

Belgacem's grasp on the various theoretical and philosophical approaches is complemented by an aptly organised book structure. The title's tryptich, "Body, Desire and Story Telling," is reflected in the three-partite structure of the text. Furthermore, to tighten her grip on the body text, Belgacem further divides her chapters into two subchapters each. In the first chapter entitled "Negotiating Power in the Other's Flesh," the author devotes the first section "Colonial Bodies… Resurrected?" to revisiting landmark texts in colonial discourse in order to draw a comparison between the representation of the body in colonial writing and post-colonial texts. Swaying between the vilified and erotised bodies of the other in colonial discourses, the bodies in question take on a different form in Coetzee's novels. For him, the body is maimed, disfigured, and emptied of all its sensuality. In the following subchapter, "Desiring the Maimed, or Eroticism Re-visited," Belgacem dwells on the fact that despite their bodily deformities, the native others

are desirable to the white protagonists. She sketches the degenerating conditions of the body and addresses the erotic dynamics displayed in the four selected novels. By the end, she draws the limits of eroticism or what she terms "the disruption of eroticism" (70).

After exploring the white protagonists' disruptive desire to apprehend the flawed body, in the second chapter entitled "White Voices/ Black Bodies: A Politics of Displacement," Belgacem moves on to examine the main characters' ambivalent desire to comprehend the story behind the other's disarticulated body. In "The Story With/in the Story: Coetzee's Shadow Narratives," her preoccupation shifts to the white protagonists as first-person narrators of the other's stories. She examines the white characters' entanglement with the other's narratives and casts doubts on the "white [protagonists'] burden" to tell the other's story, drawing attention to the political implications of the literary undertaking, namely the further displacement of the other's narratives. In the subsequent subchapter "Closed Bodies, Mut(e) ilated Narratives: Negotiating a Story out of the Other," Belgacem pursues the hermeneutic game performed by the white narrator and provides the readers with poignant examples of the narrators' malaise in (mis)interpreting the story of the other in the four novels. As the native other does not open up, the story can neither be retrieved nor told. Thus, the critic undermines the white narrators' authority and reliability in recovering the other's story beneath the scarred flesh.

The last chapter, "Beyond the B(lo)ody Politics," moves beyond the study of the shattered flesh to reflect on the history inscribed on the body. "The Body as a Historicizing Map" centres on the body as shaped by the historical, political, and socio-economical frames, especially because two of the four novels are explicitly set in South Africa under the apartheid regime. The author evokes bloody scenes and traces of a brutal past and dwells on illustrations of "epistemic violence," as well as the subtle violence inherent to the indifference that construes the body as the bearer of historical violence. She also highlights instances of bodily resistance to what Foucault terms "the pervasive intrusiveness of totalitarian violence" (qtd in 151) as a form of identity marking. The author's argument about the body as a site of the "identarian" quest takes full shape in the ensuing subchapter, "The Body as an Identitarian Map." Belgacem capitalises on the findings of phenomenology to approach both white and non-white characters' perception of their decaying body and to comment on their identarian journey. She proves that only when pain is inflicted on the white characters' bodies can they acquire a better understanding of themselves and come close to understanding the non-white others whose stories they strive to tell.

Belgacem's most controversial claim is saved for the end. In a jeopardising attempt to unmask the writer's identity, the critic reflects on the choice of the white characters as the main protagonists and narrators of the non-white others' stories. Despite "the

death of the author," Belgacem 'resurrects' Coetzee and establishes a parallel between the white writer and his white characters. The author goes so far as to claim that, in a metafictional move, the white author transposes on his white narrators his own ambivalence in the representation of the other or what she terms "J.M. Coetzee's own ambivalent authorial identity" (13). The fictional narrators share the writer's anxiety in the strife to uncover and write the other's stories. She argues that, as far as the dilemma of representation is concerned, the narrators become the author's alter egos. In the # me too spirit – and much in accordance with Benita Parry's widely known earlier critique of Coetzee – Belgacem invokes Coetzee to lay bare his own racism.

In the conclusion, Belgacem stops again at the main issues raised in the monograph and further comments on her thought-provoking invocation of the spectre of the author. She comments on the limits of the narrative project, as it offers "no way out of the colonial representation of the other as a body" (194). With a quite original move, she concludes her volume with a meta-textual reflection on one picture of J.M. Coetzee, taken for the book cover of Derek Attridge's *J.M. Coetzee and the Ethics of Reading*. She comments on his mysterious "à la Mona Lisa" smile (196), but more importantly, she shrewdly observes his spectral presence in his in-front-of-the mirror stance, with his right hand beyond the frame. The readers realise that Coetzee's body, too, is maimed and it is the writing/ right(ing) hand that is missing. Readers are left with a mirror, i.e. a reflection – the original story of the other's disarticulated body can never be recovered. It can never be re-membered.

Belgacem's logically structured and clearly argued volume has its own weaknesses, too. Unwittingly, the meticulously detailed introduction runs counter to one of the major promises of the book. The introductory chapter is the book's weakest part, since – contrary to the body of the text – it is not reader-friendly. Many of the theories and definitions provided do not directly or obviously relate to the issues to be discussed. It could have served the reader better were they incorporated in the related chapters once a particular issue was evoked. Concerning Belgacem's argument, it must be noted that in dealing with the wounded body, Belgacem invokes Freud's *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* and brilliantly demonstrates that not only the barbarian girl but also the Magistrate are traumatised characters. However, she systematically links the main protagonist's wounded psyche to the sight of the tortured barbarian girl, not paying heed to Cathy Caruth's major argument formulated after Freud. For Caruth maintains that "[t]raumatic experience, beyond the psychological dimension of suffering it involves, suggests a certain paradox: that the most direct seeing of a violent event may occur as an absolute inability to know it; that immediacy, paradoxically, may take the form of belatedness" (*Unclaimed Experience*, 91). Yet, Belgacem "suggest[s] that it is the encounter with the other that can account for

the Magistrate's traumatic symptoms […]. Indeed, the first time he has that dream [children playing, building a castle or sculpting a man of snow] coincides with the arrival of the barbarian girl" (169).

On the whole, however, Belgacem successfully manages to handle J.M. Coetzee's elusive corpus as she reads the four novels from one specific point of reference, "the body," relying on a strong methodological and theoretical apparatus and offering insightful comments on complex scenes. "Against allegories," she revisits the dynamics of the other's body, the representation of the mutilated body, and, paradoxically enough, the voicing out of the muted organ. Her thought-provoking arguments prove to be well-founded and productive. By the end of the hermeneutic journey, through the dissection of the characters' degenerating bodies, the readers acquire a better insight into the sexual politics and power dynamics at play in Coetzee's bodies and texts. *The Body, Desire and Storytelling in Novels by J.M. Coetzee* is a reference book for all readers interested in J.M. Coetzee, especially in his apartheid fiction. It deserves the special interest of researchers engaged with post-colonial writings, body theory, trauma and gender studies.

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