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KNOWABLE CONSPIRACIES: A REASSESSMENT OF FORMAL AND IDEOLOGICAL ASPECTS IN JONATHAN FRANZEN'S *THE TWENTY-SEVENTH CITY*

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1. Introduction: complicating pictures

Jonathan Franzen is one of the most prominent American novelists of our time both in terms of sales figures and critical assent, but his work has given rise to a conspicuously small amount of academic criticism to date. A significant part of that academic engagement with Franzen's work has been of a political nature and for the most part rather critical. Thus, Franzen's third and highly successful novel, *The Corrections* (2001), was rather censoriously analysed by Annesley (2006) from a political point of view. Evidently influenced by the latter, Hutchinson (2009) and Hawkins (2010) provided accounts of Franzen's work which also included an analysis of his previous fiction. In spite of individual differences, all three critics coincide in denying Franzen's work a truly progressive character and even accuse the novelist of inadvertently reinforcing the system he is out to criticize. Although their assessment concerns chiefly *The Corrections*, Hutchinson and Hawkins trace to Franzen's first novel, *The Twenty-Seventh City* (1988), the origin of what they see as Franzen's inadequate ideological stance, namely a deterministic view of the capitalist system as an intractable entity immune to all attempts at progressive reform. The problem with categorical dismissals such as this is that they often prevent in-depth examination and attention to the wider ideological context. Thus, while acknowledging some grounds for these critics' claims, this article aims

to complement their somewhat reductionist view of *The Twenty-Seventh City* with an ideological account that is attentive to the historico-cultural determinants which act upon Franzen's political stance, as well as to the ideological constraints at play derived from the specific formal characteristics of the novel. This will be accompanied by an assessment of the novel's Utopian stake in the light of Fredric Jameson's theory and a new appraisal of its place within the whole of Franzen's work.

In matters of form, Franzen's career is characterized by a stylistic evolution from a postmodernist-influenced fiction to a more traditional, realist narrative. In this regard, *The Twenty-Seventh City* has often been ascribed to the distinctively postmodern genre of the Systems novel. Certainly, the scope of the novel's social critique is wide enough to be called systemic. In the same way, the motif of conspiracy, elevated to postmodernist fetish by Pynchon and DeLillo, plays a fundamental part in this novel. As Franzen has put it, he adopted "a lot of that generation of writers' concerns —the great postwar freak-out, the Strangeloveian inconceivabilities, the sick society in need of radical critique. I was attracted to crazy scenarios" (in Antrim 2001). Thus it is that, in a rather typical Pynchonesque way, the novel's scenario is indeed weird: a cabal from India infiltrates the St. Louis police force with the aim of gradually taking control of the city's politics and economy. However, Franzen's strictly narrative-formal development is a considerably more complex affair than critical accounts usually imply and this is reflected in The *Twenty-Seventh City*. On this subject, we will be discussing how *The Twenty-Seventh City*, commonly taken as the most markedly postmodernist of Franzen's novels, presents certain distinctively realist attributes, namely an obvious topographic quality, a calling —even if not fully realized— for the representation of different social groups as inextricably connected, a world view relentlessly based on contingency, and, not least of all, an aversion to showing radical social change all of which may be regarded as nothing but realist. This makes for a remarkable, unresolved tension between the two different approaches to the novelistic form, the realist and the postmodernist, which coexist within *The Twenty-Seventh City*.[1] As one of the most influential critics of Franzen has argued, there was always a realist writer in Franzen, "hidden beneath all the Po-Mo machinery" (Rebein 2007: 204).

There are some interesting peculiarities as well in the novel's conspiracy. Conspiracy has often been referred to by Jameson as a substitute for an adequate mapping of an all too complex totality (e.g. Jameson 1991: 38). In postmodernist fiction, usually influenced by post-structuralist theoretical tenets, conspiracies have often become a manifestation of the perceived impossibility of attaining any kind of unassailable social knowledge or meaning. In contrast, in Franzen's first novel the conspiracy,

controlled by chief Jammu with a panopticon-style system of surveillance, is rather a narrative means to pry into the different power hubs of St. Louis, and as such performs an analytic function which is a main attribute of classic realism, as we discuss below. In a way, since, rather unusually, we are shown the two sides of the conspiracy —that of the schemers and that of their victims— we could speak, paraphrasing Raymond Williams, of a *knowable* conspiracy[2], one that is intended to force the reader to *listen* and *see* and thus increase her social and political awareness.

2. The (non-)politics of irony: agency and apathy

The ideological implications of Franzen's implausible conspiracy of Indians may be further probed. Its sheer unlikeliness and the suspension of disbelief it requires, are revealing of the difficulty of conceiving radical change in a contemporary American society which has not only lost all trace of the relations of production but also the memories of any other modes of production. Hawkins argues that choosing a foreign origin for the conspirators enables Franzen to "render literal the xenophobia that is the byproduct of the exceptionalist nature of American nationalism" (Hawkins 2010: 65). It seems more likely though that what the Indian origin of the plot really affords Franzen is the possibility of bringing forth a group of people who seem genuinely capable of transformative action. It is significant that such people must come from the Third World, a locus which for a long time has evoked in the Western imagination an "outside" —to use Jameson's term— still unassimilated by totalizing systems. It simply appears that any such capacity for agency should be conceived on American soil. The (dubious) revolution must be imported then, smuggled in, under suspicious certificates of verisimilitude, from what Žižek has called "the mythical Other Place where the authentic happens […] and for which Western intellectuals have an inexhaustible need" (Žižek 2008: 108). The system, however, will prove unassailable and the conspiracy fails mainly due to generalized apathy. In the novel, the only foreseeable event of consequence is nuclear war, a possibility which does not seem to change the widespread torpor either, perhaps because after all an impending apocalypse renders any prospective change pointless. Consequently the novel ends with a suffocating atmosphere of stagnation which has earned Franzen hard-hitting criticism from otherwise perhaps not so distant ideological quarters. In order to fully grasp the nature of this critical animosity, we need to briefly examine the novel's plot.

The Twenty-Seventh City is a novel in which a group of Indian conspirators, led by newly-appointed police chief Jammu, are intent on carrying out a large-scale political and financial operation aimed at reversing the flow of capital from the increasingly derelict inner St. Louis to the affluent municipalities of the

surrounding St. Louis County. This initiative, which involves the administrative merger of city and county and the subsequent redistribution of wealth via taxes and business relocation, is presented as unequivocally reasonable and fair, a last chance for a city in a shambles. However, Franzen undermines this apparently desirable move from the very beginning. To start with, the operation is to be carried out by a rather improbable outfit, which cannot but weaken the credibility of the novel's commitment to the actual viability of change. Then we learn that the conspirators, former Marxists whose methods are rather iniquitous, actually have spurious objectives: moneymaking by means of a large speculative operation. To make things worse, we are shown that the process is causing great social damage through gentrification and forced relocation of population to a forsaken ghetto. Finally, after a considerable build-up of expectation, the whole enterprise fails because people just cannot be bothered to vote on the referendum on the merger. The plot self-deconstructs, and the novel seems to collapse in what Hawkins has called "an act of novelistic bad faith" (Hawkins 2010: 67). Apathy reigns triumphant and any chances of intervention to change the status quo are rendered futile:

> America was outgrowing the age of action […] With a maturity gained by bitter experience, the new America knew that certain struggles would not have the happy endings once dreamed of, but were doomed to perpetuate themselves, metaphorically foiling all attempts to resolve them. No matter how a region was structured, well-to-do white people were never going to permit their children to attend schools with dangerous black children […] Taxes were bound to hit the unprivileged harder than the privileged […] The world would either end in nuclear holocaust or else not end in a nuclear holocaust […] All political platforms were identical in their inadequacy, their inability to alter the cosmic order. (Franzen 2010: 503-4)

This and the accompanying paragraphs have caused dismay in Franzen's critics. Thus, Hawkins deplores that the novel, instead of offering a prospect for change, "extends an olive branch of irony to the reader, who is encouraged to join Franzen in shaking his or her head in mutual understanding of the nation's intractable awfulness" (Hawkins 2010: 70). Similarly, Hutchinson observes of the novel's ending: "Historical forces grind on, crushing all agency and resistance" (Hutchinson 2009: 194), although it rather looks as if it is the *end* of history that actually makes agency futile, as we argue below. For Hutchinson, the novel already shows the dominant political tone in Franzen's novels:

> One that both accepts and regrets the apparent draining of all possible resistance, conflict or meaningful difference. "Unideological" in this sense is not the true absence of ideology, but rather a complete surrender to the power of the prevailing ideology. (2009: 193)

And he finally summarizes:

> Although the novel's categorical and ethical reversals make it aesthetically pleasing, they compromise Franzen's professed project of writing a social novel that combines aesthetic achievement with progressive engagement, in that the work's subversive intent falls victim to a content that emphasizes capitulation and quietism. (2009: 194)

Hawkins and Hutchinson are representative of a current of academic criticism of Franzen informed by a mixture of hopeful excitement at the possibility of a successful socially engaged novel, raised precisely by Franzen's work (specifically by the success of *The Corrections*); and disappointment at what they regard as a failure in satisfactorily producing such a novel. It is therefore a judgement brought upon Franzen by his own declared social preoccupations. In any case, it is a critique informed by a tacit Lukácsean view of what a socially critical novel should be. Its censorious attitude against Franzen's shortcomings powerfully recalls the Hungarian critic's disparagement of Modernism. For Lukács, the ideology of Modernism "asserts the unalterability of outward reality", while "human activity is, a priori, rendered impotent and robbed of meaning" (Lukács 2006: 36). The result for Lukács is *angst*, the basic disposition associated with Modernism. As an example, Lukács mentions the "mood of total impotence, of paralysis in the face of the unintelligible power of circumstances" in Kafka's *The Trial* (2006: 36). This narrow view of course implies an at least questionable denial of critical power to dystopian social descriptions that do not offer effective instances of opposition to the state of affairs, and involves an equally contentious dismissal of any subversive or critical thrust that might lie in the expression of disgust, anxiety or angst.

At this point, it seems best to avoid moralizing judgements and try instead to ascertain whatever factors drove Franzen to undermine and ultimately deny the possibility of a change that he obviously regarded as desirable, in an admittedly political novel written with the intention of "bringing news to the mainstream" (Franzen 2002: 95). As Hawkins has noticed, the way in which the novel abruptly denies the possibilities for socio-political change that it has previously evoked is essentially ironic. We hold that this reversal may be seen in turn as determined by the pervading irony that permeates our postmodern culture and which has become a distinctive feature of much postmodern fiction. In her influential *A Poetics of Postmodernism* (1988), Linda Hutcheon celebrated the critical power of irony in postmodern art, mostly deployed through parody, which she identified as one of the most distinctive postmodern modes (Hutcheon 1988: 39). However, Hutcheon has later engaged in a more nuanced exploration of the implications and potentialities of irony, one that acknowledges the inescapable pitfalls of its essential

ambivalence. Thus, in *Irony's Edge* (1994), Hutcheon points at the "transideological" nature of irony (1994: 10) which inevitably works to undercut the ironist's stance. Indeed, it seems clear that if irony does have an obvious subversive potential, it can also work as a powerful deterrent of agency and engagement. As Moretti has put it,

> a culture that pays tribute to multiple viewpoints, doubt, and irony, is also, by necessity, a culture of *indecision*. Irony's most typical feature is its ability to stop time, to question what has already been decided, or to re-examine already finished events in a different light. But it will never suggest what should be done: it can *restrain* action, but not encourage it. (Moretti 2000: 121)

In his essay "E Unibus Pluram: Television and U.S. Fiction" (1997), David Foster Wallace traces the origins of postmodernism in the United States back to a rebellion, by means of irony, against the hypocritical myth of America spread by television and advertising. However, Wallace explains, postmodern tools such as irony and self-referentiality were gradually co-opted by TV and have since become agents of despair and political paralysis, in a culture characterized by a weary cynicism:

> I want to convince you that irony, poker-faced silence, and fear of ridicule are distinctive of those features of contemporary U.S. culture (of which cutting-edge fiction is a part) that enjoy any significant relation to the television whose pretty hand has my generation by the throat. I'm going to argue that irony and ridicule are entertaining and effective, and that at the same time they are agents of great despair and stasis in U.S. culture, and that for the aspiring fictionist they pose terrifically vexing problems. (Wallace 1997: 171)

As Wallace observes, not only is irony "singularly unuseful when it comes to constructing anything to replace the hypocrisies it debunks" (183), but it also "tyrannizes us" (183) posing the threat of ridicule over any proposition that presents itself as meaningful. Certainly, shedding one's shield of irony in a cynical environment renders one vulnerable. In this sense, it is easy to relate the way in which the novel refrains from asserting an effective form of agency —as well as its general low emotional temperature— to that pre-emptive power of irony, and it is equally tempting to suggest that Franzen himself pre-emptively deconstructs the novel in order to avoid charges of political naivety. In his 2002 essay "Mr Difficult", where he disavows the most self-referential trend in postmodernism, Franzen seems to acknowledge postmodern irony as a sort of defence mechanism:

> Indeed the essence of postmodernism is an adolescent fear of getting taken in, an adolescent conviction that all systems are phony. The theory is compelling, but as a way of life it's a recipe for hate. The child grows enormous but never grows up. (Franzen 2002: 269)

Richard Rorty has also discussed the political implications of irony. For Rorty, irony is an inherently private —as opposed to political— affair, basically useless for progressive action:

> There is no reason the ironist cannot be a liberal, but she cannot be a "progressive" and "dynamic" liberal in the sense in which liberal metaphysicians sometimes claim to be. For she cannot offer the same sort of social hope that metaphysicians offer. She cannot claim that adopting her redescription of yourself or your situation makes you better able to conquer the forces which are marshalled against you. (1989: 91)

Finally, irony may also be regarded as a symptom of the impossibility of achieving what Jameson has called "critical distance" in current postmodern culture, of articulating a position of one's own outside "the massive Being of capital" (1991: 48) from which to criticize it, in a system that furthermore seems to instantly reabsorb and disarm any critical intervention. Irony is then an acknowledgement of the inevitable, ineradicable ideological *infection* that one shares with everyone else.

3. Systemic paralysis and Utopian drives

Together with the political ineffectiveness of irony, there's a quality in the lineage of postmodern fiction in which *The Twenty-Seventh City* seeks to inscribe itself that also works against the assertion of agency. In other words, there seems to be a problem with the chosen form. Jameson has shown how "an already constituted 'narrative paradigm' emits an ideological message in its own right without the mediation of authorial intervention" (2002: 73). In "Mr Difficult", Franzen refers to *The Twenty-Seventh City* as his "own Systems novel of conspiracy and apocalypse". This quintessentially postmodern genre was defined by Tom LeClair, in his study of DeLillo's narrative *In the Loop* (1987) as a scientifically informed variety of fiction, strongly influenced by systems theory, distinctively concerned with the workings of "the System", which is conceived as an intricate network of systems of all kind: economic, ideological, etc. As may be expected in an age obsessed with language, the ultimate model for any system is language itself, which in our post-structuralist era means of course a bottomless play of free-floating signifiers in which the referent is forever out of reach and subject positions are always precarious. This implies the representation of an ultimately incomprehensible society which certainly makes little room for assertions of agency. In Hawkins' words:

> *The Twenty-Seventh City* is a Systems novel, a text that attempts to expose the workings of the System that is consumer capitalism, even as it reinforces the System's power by replicating many of its structures without submitting an alternative vision

> of human relations. In this way, the System looks all-consuming and inescapable except for those, such as the author himself, who have armed themselves with the theoretical tools capable of naming it and thereby withdrawing from it. (Hawkins 2010: 65)

That theoretical knowledge may allow anyone to "withdraw from the system" is a questionable proposition indeed. However, Hawkins' remarks on the systems novel are pertinent inasmuch as they point to the fact that, as Jameson has frequently observed, successive advances in the systematization of totality may paradoxically lead to a feeling of impotence before the immense global system of exploitation formed by late capitalism. More specifically, he has called attention to "the dangers of an emergent 'synchronic' thought in which change and development are relegated to the marginalized category of the merely 'diachronic'" (2002: 76). Jameson exemplifies the political implications of such a view with Baudrillard's suggestion of a "total-system" concept of society which reduces all possibility of resistance to "anarchist gestures, to the sole remaining protests of the wildcat strike, terrorism and death" (2002: 76)[3].

From a different point of view, Beck has examined the ethical implications of overplaying the concept of system, which for him ultimately amount to the dissolution of responsibility and agency. Thus, in a highly systemized environment, "corresponding to the highly differentiated division of labor, there is a general complicity, and the complicity is matched by a general lack of responsibility. Everyone is cause *and* effect, and thus *non*-cause". As a consequence, "one acts physically, without acting morally or politically. The generalized other —the system— acts within and through oneself" (Beck 1992: 33). Žižek, for his part, has linked these circumstances to an abandonment of the Hegelian notion of *determinate negation* and the generalization of the "wholly Other" as the utopian prospect of overcoming the global techno-capitalist system. In his words:

> The idea is that, with the "dialectic of Enlightenment" which tends towards the zero-point of the totally "administered" society, one can no longer conceptualize breaking out of the deadly spiral of this dialectic by means of the classical Marxist notion according to which the New will emerge from the very contradictions of the present society, through its immanent self-overcoming: the impetus for such an overcoming can only come from an unmediated Outside. (Žižek 2008: 337)

Such perceived deadlock may easily involve a certain feeling of despair which was surely not uncommon in a decade marked in great measure by an escalation of the Cold War (whose approaching end apparently no one seemed able to foresee), while conservative governments in different countries seemed intent on removing all previous legal restrains on capitalism. Significantly, the collapse of the Soviet Union and its satellites, that great historical turn beginning in 1989, paradoxically

only added to the generalized feeling of history coming to a halt which would be sung triumphantly by Fukuyama (1992) and others. An age characterized, in Jameson's words, by an "inverted millenarism" (1991: 1) that predicates the end of politics, art or history itself. In 1988, some twenty years after his *Society of the Spectacle*, Debord sees the process of spectacular transformation of society as having achieved completion in the state of "integrated spectacle", characterized by a complete destruction of history which suggests a closed future:

> The society whose modernization has reached the state of the integrated spectacle is characterized by the combined effect of five principal features: incessant technological renewal; integration of state and economy; generalized secrecy, unanswerable lies; an eternal present. (Debord 2002: 11-12)

It seems likely that Debord would have received criticism similar to that levelled at Franzen by critics such as Hawkins, Hutchinson or Annesley, as *The Twenty-Seventh City* obviously chimes in with such depressing pictures. Perhaps, however, it is time now to complicate the picture of the novel's disavowal of its own investment in the perspective of radical political change, by recalling the fact that it is not only the postmodern genre of the Systems novel that is characterized as conceiving of the state of affairs as being basically unchangeable: the realist novel too is characterized by a distinctive kind of inherent conservatism which Jameson has described as an "ontological commitment to the status quo as such" (Jameson 2013: 145). For Jameson,

> realism requires a conviction as to the massive weight and persistence of the present as such, and an aesthetic need to avoid recognition of deep structural social change as such and of the deeper currents and contradictory tendencies within the social order. To posit the imminence of some thoroughgoing revolution in the social order itself is at once to disqualify those materials of the present which are the building blocks of narrative realism. (Jameson 2013: 145)

From this point of view, the novel's final vision of social stasis would be in keeping with its realist affiliation, and yet one cannot discount its postmodern drive to provide a mimetic account of a postmodern society. Another important aspect that the critics mentioned above seem to overlook in their account of Franzen's novel is that, as Jameson has consistently argued, although our impoverished sense of history may atrophy our Utopian imagination (our ability to envision future alternatives to the present), Utopian drives will inevitably find their way consciously or not into every future-oriented project, and most likely in disguise. For Jameson (1994: 56), the Utopian text is usually non-narrative and "somehow without a subject position". And what is more, there is always something to be learned from the failure of Utopian thought, from the flaws and elusions of Utopian vision, since they may negatively define the limits of our imagination and representation

abilities, our capacity to map the totality, as they are shaped by the present state of affairs. In Jamesons's words, "the best Utopias are those that fail the most comprehensively", and therefore make us more aware of our mental and ideological imprisonment (Jameson 2007: xiii).

Thus, even the corrupt, failed conspiracy of Jammu and her followers furnishes a flickering image of the possibility of public officials acting as revolutionary leaders determinedly taking effective action in favour of the needy, deftly reversing the (generally regarded as irresistible) forces of capitalism, successfully fighting them with their own (financial) weapons. This is a prospect which would hardly have been acceptable in the novel, but rather would have been dismissed as wish-fulfilment, had it been textually dramatized *in good faith*. We could argue, following Jameson, that in *The Twenty-Seventh City* "the Utopian impulse has come as close to reality as it can without turning into a conscious Utopian project" (2007: 8). To this Utopian charge, furthermore, we may add the implicit communitarian element that, according to Paula Martín, can be found in the *topos* of conspiracy (Martín Salván 2013: 225).

At this point, readers of the novel are likely to be wondering why a text so ostensibly concerned with the workings of the system can dedicate so many of its most brilliant pages to a splendid dramatization of the problems of communication and disenchantment of a white upper-class family who live in Webster Groves. In his seminal *The Political Unconscious* (1981), Jameson declares that all narrative acts are symbolic acts which address an unsolvable social contradiction. It would be logical to add that they also seek to symbolically mend their author's ideological and psychological contradictions. Then it would make sense to ask what the novel is trying to do for its author with its "swashbuckling, Pynchon-sized megaplot" (in Antrim 2001). To which question it could be answered that what the novel is trying to compensate for is the fact that it is a novel about a white upper-class family who live in Webster Groves (and written to boot by a white middle-class writer who happened to grow up in Webster Groves). Previously we alluded to the difficulties inherent to the form chosen by Franzen for his novel, when it comes to articulating positions of resistance and effective agency. It is interesting, however, to inquire as to the narrative choices available to Franzen or, to put it another way, what is it that makes the postmodern Systems novel the genre of choice for American straight white male novelists with social concerns. The answer is likely to be found in the current compartmentalization of an identity-based literary scene which hinges around the margins. Those same margins, by the way, which according to Franzen form the last vestiges of vitality in "the inner city" of American fiction (Franzen 2002: 62).

4. Nostalgias of the industrial age

In any case, there is in *The Twenty-Seventh City* an undeniable vindication of the middle class that transpires in its characterization of the Probsts, something which has become recurrent in Franzen's fiction. Any objections as to Martin Probst's class affiliation in view of his (self-assigned) hefty income of $190,000 a year should be dismissed as a droll example of his funny little middle-class ways. Probst is after all a self-made man, at only one generational remove from actual poverty, a firm believer in hands-on work with a built-in abhorrence of speculative operations possibly inherited from parental experiences previous to the Depression. But, as Jameson reminds us following Bakhtin, class discourse is essentially dialogical in structure and mostly antagonistic, so that "the individual utterance or text is grasped as a symbolic move in an essentially polemic and strategic confrontation between the classes" (2002: 70-1). The antagonistic class in *The Twenty Seventh-City* is certainly an oligarchic upper-class represented by genuinely rich, conspiring characters whose aristocratic debauchery, as in the case of Probst's brother-in-law Rolf Ripley, or whose politically reactionary stand, as in the case of Colonel Norris, contrast vividly with Probst's paternalist entrepreneurship and the *probity* which his name suggests.

Probst, the builder of the Arch, stands, like Alfred Lambert in *The Corrections*, or Walt Kowalski, Clint Eastwood's character in *Grand Torino* (2008), for a classic tradition of American productiveness, of proud, solid hands-on work which has all but vanished before the intangibility of modern financial industry. In this sense, the symbolical identification drawn by the novel between Probst and the city is apt enough, as both seem destined to irrelevance and decay in the elusive, speculative times of what Bauman (2000) has described as liquid modernity or light capitalism. It is surely not hard to perceive a certain authorial identification with Probst, which can also be interpreted as an expression of nostalgia for American industrial society, in the sense that Beck has given to the term. Franzen thus seems to feel that the latter, in a way the golden age of the American middle class, was more promising community-wise than the subsequent phase of late capitalism in spite of the inescapable ideological and environmental contradictions it entailed, and which the novel also shows. Indeed, in this respect there seems to be an irreparable ambivalence in Franzen's stance. There is a nostalgic yearning for a time in which American inner cities thrived and harboured vibrant communities, together with an idealized vision of the city as the agora-like actual site of what Habermas described as the public sphere. To this we may add that in *Strong Motion* and *The Corrections* public utilities and industrial infrastructure become symbols of a planned, collective vision with obvious communitarian implications. However, Franzen is also aware that industrial

society, the classic urban model, was no less dependent on social inequality than the present times are: the ghetto of East St. Louis was not created by Jammu —it was already there for her to fill with the human refuse of gentrification. In the same way, the novelist reflects that it is that same industrial society, or heavy modernity, in Bauman's expression, that initiated the unending expansion that has led to what Jameson describes as the abolition of Nature and the disappearance of the outside: it is Probst himself, after all, who has covered enormous expanses of former woodland with concrete as part of the relentless suburban expansion. Bauman has referred to the era Franzen seems to idealize in the following oppressive terms:

> That part of history, now coming to its close, could be dubbed, for the lack of a better term, the era of *hardware*, or heavy modernity […] the epoch of weighty and ever more cumbersome machines, of the ever longer factory walls enclosing ever wider factory floors and ingesting ever more populous factory crews […] To conquer space was the supreme goal —to grasp as much of it as one could hold, and to hold to it, marking it all over with the tangible tokens of possession and 'No trespassing' boards. (Bauman 2000: 113-4)

It turns out then that the seeds of what is lamented today lay within the past one idealizes. We may notice a similar circumstance in *The Corrections*: when Franzen sets the solid, productive world of Alfred and Enid Lambert's youth against the evanescence of life under contemporary late capitalism as experienced by their offspring, it becomes apparent that the latter world is nothing but the product of the former. Franzen's nostalgias are then irremediably conflict-ridden. Ultimately, what is highlighted is just the obvious point that postmodernity was contained in modernity. Last but not least, there is the unavoidable fact that Probst's paternalism is inseparable from the patriarchal character of industrial society. As Beck argues, industrial society is based upon a specific distribution of gender roles which, insofar as they are ascribed to the individual by birth, confers upon him or her a certain feudal character. For Beck, this distribution of roles between the sexes is "both the *product* and the *foundation* of the industrial system, in the sense that wage labor *presupposes* housework, and that the spheres and forms of production and the family are separated and *created* in the nineteenth century" (Beck 1992: 106). Needless to say, this separation of the spheres of production and family involves male ascendancy. This configuration of roles and the distinct kind of antagonism between the sexes that it causes is visible in the Probst family. For Martin Probst, home is the haven of well-earned tranquillity where he can retire each day, always in command, after the exertions of an exhausting but comfortingly structured, reassuring world of work where a man can find "the consolations of pure activity, pure work, the advancement of physical and organizational order" (Franzen 2010: 461). Not incidentally, if for

Bauman classic modernity —a concept comparable to Beck's industrial society— was the era of hardware, here we see how Probst embodies such modernity by visualizing himself as machinery:

> Of course, he could also see that for thirty years he'd worked too hard, could see himself in hindsight as a monstrosity with arms and hands the size of Volkswagens, legs folded like the treads of a bulldozer […] He'd failed as a father and a husband. But if anyone had ever tried to tell him this he would have shouted them down, since the love he felt for Barbara and Louisa at the office had never waned. (2010: 461)

In his longings, however, Probst seems again as outdated as the city itself. As Beck explains, reflexive modernity and its dynamic of individuation do not stop "at the gates of the family, marriage, parenthood and housework" (1992: 106). Individuals are liberated from traditional forms as well as from ascribed roles "in the search for 'a life of their own'" (1992: 105). Thus, he ends up in baffled estrangement from his wife and daughter, who flee from the suffocating positions allocated to them in the realm of the family.

5. Unhappy endings, or, the persistence of realism

In Jameson's theory, the conditions of possibility for realist or modernist praxis are historically determined, and thus are not equally accessible to writers of different socio-historical circumstances. Similarly, certain forms of political and ideological resistance seem not to be readily available to Franzen, as resistance against the mainstream is always best deployed from the margins, which is especially true in a postmodern theoretical environment that tends to focus on the "ex-centric" (see Hutcheon 1988: 59). Realism, that time-honoured way of investigating reality (and thus backing agency) is another not easily accessible (not to say disreputable) tool for a novelist living in postmodern times. It is not just a question of "Po-Mo machinery", it is that realism is certainly incompatible with a world-view informed by the notion that history has come to an end. Indeed, within that paradigm a Systems novel would be more mimetic. Without a sense of history there can be no "perspective", a notion which for Lukács implied not only a social point of view but also a vision of evolutionary unfolding in history. Obviously, certain key elements of classic realism are here absent: Lukács' class consciousness has fallen prey to social entropy; and Auerbach's "social forces" pale confronted with the overriding, hegemonic force of capital. And what Balzac, for example, inevitably perceived as a merely contingent arrangement of the status quo, a temporary state in the flow of history, seems quite naturally to Franzen to be an unassailable "system"; not the least because, if "our imaginations are hostages to our own mode of production" (Jameson 2007: xiii), Balzac's contemporaneity with more

than one of such modes is very different from our own total immersion in liquid modernity, to use Bauman's term.

That being said, it is evident, however, that Franzen strives for historicity: he investigates the city's past, traces Martin Probst's background to Dust Bowl Oklahoma and even provides a substantial account of the personal background of the Indian plotters. There actually is a clear microcosmic quality to *The Twenty-Seventh City*, in that the socio-political and economic workings of St. Louis are intended to be representative of those of the nation and indeed the wider world of Western capitalism, much in the same way as Baltimore is presented in David Simon's series *The Wire* (2002-2008), another fictional artefact which relies on wiretapping both as a framing narrative device and as a way to show a certain perspective on social totality. Nevertheless, Franzen's attempt falls short of a Lukácsean synthesis in which characters are both individual and representative of the most significant features of a historical period. Furthermore, although we learn about the overall dynamics of St. Louis' economy and we are informed of the unfairness of its social consequences, the actual narrative focus is as unevenly distributed as the city's wealth. It is not necessary, for example, to compare *The Twenty-Seventh City* to Eliot's *Middlemarch* to notice that, apart from the police chief, only one of the characters actually lives in the very city that is the concern of the novel, namely RC White, the only significant black character in a novel about a mostly black city. He forms the only counterpoint to the wealthy suburbanites and conspirators who constitute the dramatis personae of the novel. Albeit in somewhat tepid scenes, we follow White through the novel, from his employment in menial jobs to his appointment as a police officer, and even witness his ouster from his house due to triumphant gentrification. This is something that tells *The Twenty-Seventh City* apart from the rest of Franzen's novels: we will not find a similar case of sustained concern with the fate of a lower or working-class character in Franzen's subsequent fiction, in which the perspective is exclusively upper-middle class. But there is yet another important circumstance related to realism that is exclusive to *The Twenty-Seventh City* within the whole of Franzen's novelistic production, namely the virtual absence of rhetorical strategies and proairetic schemata derived from genres such as *Bildungsroman*, romance or melodrama to *soften* the hard edge of realism or symbolically make up for irreconcilable social contradictions, as is increasingly the case in Franzen's subsequent novels. In *The Twenty-Seventh City* there are no individual perspectives of salvation, and no comforting retreat to the more manageable, small communities of family and lovers to compensate for the intractability of the system and the decomposition of the public sphere. On the contrary, the novel's central family, the Probsts, are as beset by disintegration as the city they inhabit, and their house ends up burnt to the ground. The end of the novel is marked not only by the failure of Jammu's

plan to merge the county and the city due to prevailing apathy and resistance to change, but also by Barbara Probst's absurd death, Jammu's suicide, and Martin Probst's bewilderment at such a display of contingency. These grim circumstances, which powerfully contrast with the Austen-like type of epilogue that the rest of Franzen's novels end with, suggest a kind of hard core of realism in *The Twenty-Seventh City* which is diluted in Franzen's subsequent work. As Eagleton has put it, "[y]ou cannot marry everyone happily off in the last ten pages and claim that this is how life is" (Eagleton 2003). Moretti has also identified unhappy endings as a distinctive feature of realism:

> The identification of real and rational, of legality and legitimacy, so characteristic of the classical *Bildungsroman* and of Hegel's philosophy of history, has fallen apart. Reality's essence lies not in embodying a society's professed values, but in its violent rejection and open derision of anyone who tries to realize them.
>
> This is why realistic narrative does not tolerate happy endings: these portray the harmony of values and events, while the new image of reality is based on their division. There must be no justice in this world: a realistic story must be *meaningless*, 'signifying nothing'. Even though it comes at the end, the unhappy ending proves here to be the rhetorico-ideological *foundation* of nineteenth-century realism: narrative verisimilitude itself is initially sacrificed by the compelling *need* of these novels to finish unhappily. (Moretti 2000: 120)

In a way, this takes us to where we started, to that striking tension between two novelistic paradigms, the postmodern and the realist, coinciding within the same novel. The first one is embodied in the chosen topic and form: the workings of late capitalism are explored by the typically postmodern subgenre of the Systems novel. To the influence of that paradigm we can also ascribe the use of a conspiracy as a fundamental narrative resource. This is also the case of the pervading irony, an irony which we can describe as *structural*, since it may be perceived across different dimensions of the novel, such as the detached narrative voice, the tricky plot itself and its perplexing conclusion. At times, we can perceive as well a certain affinity with the linguistic experimentalism of the likes of William Gaddis and John Barth. Not least of all, there is an evident influence of post-structuralist theory —a cornerstone for much postmodernist fiction, probably the narrative mode most clearly informed by critical theory— such as that of Derrida or Althusser. Not incidentally, a rejection of critical theory eventually played a part in the strident politico-literary disavowals Franzen carefully staged. In any case, set against this stance of postmodern influence we find a decidedly referential impulse and —crucially— an explanatory vocation which is a sure mark of high realism. This is apparent in Franzen's interest in showing the mechanisms of different spheres of political and economic power in a St. Louis which is representative of many other American and Western cities. But perhaps Franzen's referential intention is

nowhere more evident than in the topographic quality of the novel, realized in abundant locale description and reinforced by the inclusion of an actual map of St. Louis and its vicinity. With this the novelist honours a central aspect of the realist tradition which is, as Peter Brooks (2003: 2-3) has argued, the attempt to recreate a typically urban world perceived as actually existing in a synthetic, small-scale model-like way, in order to analyse it and thus make better sense of it. This takes Franzen's first novel close to what McLaughlin posits as "the agenda of post-postmodernism" (2004: 67): the production of a socially engaged fiction that is theory-aware enough to lay bare the language-based nature of many oppressive constructions, thus opening our eyes to the fact that other realities are possible. Be that as it may, the aforementioned strain between two different approaches to narrative that characterizes *The Twenty-Seventh City* will decrease visibly in Franzen's following novels. Certainly, it is noticeable enough in *Strong Motion*, but at the end of that novel Franzen introduces the crucial salvational elements around which he articulates a metanarrative, that of his own literary *conversion*, by means of which he justifies his politico-literary evolution through the vicissitudes of his characters. None of this is present here, but this does not mean that the novel is unrelated to Franzen's subsequent turn. As Franzen argues in the *Harper's* essay (1996), it was precisely his writing this kind of fiction that was a factor in the depression he underwent in the early 1990s, which in Franzen's metanarrative will constitute a fundamental source of justification for his act of political and literary recantation.

Notes

[1]. It is surely this duality within that has led critics such as Ribbat (2002) or McLaughlin (2004) to ascribe Franzen to what they perceive as a new literary trend which they present as "post-postmodernism". This is also the case of Burn (2008), the author of the only monograph on Franzen to date. In his study (more concerned with generic and stylistic aspects than with political analysis), Burn uses the term post-postmodernist to characterize Franzen's fiction as well as that of David Foster Wallace and Richard Powers. It may be argued, however, that none of these critics successfully articulates a notion of post-postmodernism that enables one to tell it apart from different nuances of what is usually known as postmodernism. In this sense, Parrish has dismissed Burn's case for that concept since in his opinion "nearly all of the qualities he identifies as post-postmodernist are exactly what Hutcheon and Jameson describe as postmodernist" (Parrish 2010: 651), and has also observed that Burn's attempt "only underscores the degree to which these writers remain postmodernist and arguably belated in relation to Gaddis, Pynchon and DeLillo" (Parrish 2010: 652).

[2]. "Knowable Communities" is the title of Williams' fundamental essay on George Eliot's fiction, included in *The Country and the City* (1973).

[3]. The perception of the political import of post-structuralism is thus a matter of controversy within the Left itself. We may remember, however, that Badiou has vehemently contended that the demystifying work of Lacan, Foucault or Althusser constitutes a fundamental advance for emancipatory politics (Badiou 2001: 4-7). In a similar way, Laclau has argued that as a result of the work of thinkers such as Derrida the metaphysical discourse of the West is coming to an end, opening thus the way for new and radical political possibilities (Laclau 2007: 123). Similarly, theorists such as Callinicos deny incompatibility between the determining power of structures and the assertion of agency. For him, structures may be seen as limits that curtail the individual's range of action or that which precisely enables such action. This is the case of what the Marxist tradition regards as the most important single social structure, namely the relations of production. In this sense, Callinicos (2004) sees those relations as constituting relations of power over individuals and productive forces. For Callinicos, this conceptual position

> accords causal powers to structures without falling into the kind of Althusserian structural determinism that treats individuals as the 'supports' of the relations of production. It can therefore accommodate the rational-choice Marxists' demand that social explanations have 'microfoundations'—that is, that they show how the existence of social mechanisms and structural tendencies depends on the incentives and interests they give individual actors. (Callinicos 2004: 22)

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NEITHER CHUCKWAGONS, NOR SASKATOONS, AND A MISSING MARLBORO MAN: POSTCOLONIALISM, REGIONALISM AND THE INEFFABLE CANADIAN WEST

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1. Introduction: the global/local lens of the Canadian postcolonial

Early debates on the Canadian postcolonial were built *grosso modo* on the ruptures that contemporary nations and culture/s produced on the body of the state, or the country's peculiar postcolonial condition (see Hutcheon 1991; Bennett 1993-94; Slemon 1990; Brydon 1995; Lawson 1995).[1] Currently no one questions the relevance of these arguments, largely because their revisionary energies helped to mould, for example, a spatially charged nature of the *domestic* Canadian postcolonial. Accordingly, what Sugars terms the multiple *intra-national forms* of postcolonialism gave impetus to the settler-invaders' representation of their place in the new reality, as much as for the consequences of white colonisation, the *dis-ease* it produces in aboriginal peoples, or, for instance, the immigrant experiences of dislocation (2004: xiii). In the last few decades Canadian postcolonialism has been attempting to reconcile regional peculiarities, historical specificity and spatial differences to eventually emphasise provisional locality as the adequate lens through which to envision the newly revised postcolonial (see Brydon 2014), an in-process concept branded with emergent dialogues from (provisional) centre to (provisional) periphery, or among replicating centres/peripheries that can challenge primeval locations of knowledge, place and site. This local emphasis is

apparent at a moment in which, thanks to past and present discussions on the global, the Canadian postcolonial cannot avoid its contamination from international debates on cosmopolitanism, diaspora and newness (see Brydon 2004; Chowdhury 2006; Brydon and Dvorak 2012), all three concepts embedded in a world dynamics fostering the ongoing revision of premises in and outside Canada. "The theoretical field of postcolonialism is far from static and […] accounts of Canadian postcoloniality are being continually revised and complicated", foretold Sugars shortly after the opening of the new century already advancing the axial guidelines governing these recent debates. "Discussions of Canada as postcolonial have slipped into discussions of postcolonial communities within contemporary Canada", she sentences to later conclude that this is "a move that is paralleled in the context of postcolonial theory worldwide" (2002: 28). The immediate aftermath has materialized in a number of critical volumes whose structural axes underline the importance of dialogue, cross-talk and transnational nurturing to study Canadian cultural manifestations *vis-à-vis* American or transcontinental paradigms of theory (see Dobson 2009; Siemerling and Phillips Casteel 2010; Brydon and Dvorak 2012), in such a way that this globalising system of "friction and flow", in Brydon and Dvorak's words, comes to query the presumed autonomy of literature and the nation.[2] Thus, the contributors to their collection, *Crosstalk: Canadian and Global Imaginaries in Dialogue*, "analyze the ways in which Canadian imaginaries, […] are shifting in response to globalizing pressures" (2012: 1-2).

Once regarded as the antagonist of the nation, globalization is now decidedly leaving its imprint on the form in which we conceptualize the nation in Canada, and, as Kit Dobson has observed, "it seems that the national and the global are […] interlocking scales of capital. The existing arguments that seek to read Canadian Literature in relation to globalization or transnational studies have made inroads in discussions of Canadian literature but have not yet been articulated in depth" (2009: x). A further step in the process of that articulation has been based on contradicting the popular views of globalization as synonymous with deterritorialisation. I would argue, in contrast, for emphasizing the *global in the local* or, in other words, for analyzing how the international bears on the local to stimulate its eventual reshaping, and triggers a new approach to space, and a reinterpretation of place (Derksen 2009: 10). Nevertheless, the timely opening of the Canadian postcolonial to a *worldly* dimension attentive to locality goes hand in hand with a historical phase in which some critics have already described the situation of postcolonial theory either as a field infiltrated by anxieties and indeterminacy (Miki 2004: 89), situated at a dead end (Hardt and Negri 2000: 137), or presently reorganising its agenda to incorporate environmental or ecocritical concerns (Huggan and Tiffin 2010; Mason et al. 2014), for example.[3]

Thus, "while the field needs to move beyond a 'politics of blame' and challenge itself to think how it might become more relevant for the masses whose situation it hopes to alleviate", Camille Isaacs sustains, "the 'job' of postcolonial theory has not yet been completed since marginalised groups continue to be marginalised and new forms of Othering continue to emerge" (2005: 233; see Brydon 2004). As Sugars has more recently pointed out, in Canada, and possibly anywhere else, the dynamics to be avoided should be the prescriptive replacement of one model for another, since "[t]he turn to intranational constituencies (regions, ethnicities, sexualities, etc.) or to transnational models is potentially as prescriptive and homogenising as the national formations that such discourses aim to circumvent" (2010: 39). In this state of affairs, the question "Is Canada Postcolonial?", firstly launched in the 1990s, far from being outmoded, continued to fuel research work after the turn of the century (see Moss 2003; Bessner 2003; Brydon 2003; Pennee 2003), as new nuances and perspectives gain relevance and others wither.

In line with this contemporary revisionist trend of postcolonial theory, this paper addresses one of these forms of othering, a vested representation of the Canadian west and the prairies, which aims at keeping at bay the spectrum of fragmentation that poses a threat for the hermetic body of a national literature and culture. That othering process, conversely, contributes to the two-fold effort, pedagogical and performative, that Homi K. Bhabha (1990) has detected underlying the narration of the nation. Indeed, "[i]n postcolonial Canada where national unity has been a matter of political negotiation rather than the consequence of geographical uniformity, the preeminence of region has been viewed by some as an impediment to the fostering of a literature of universal scope, the cause of an endemic tendency in Canadian literature to fracture along regional lines" (Omhovére 2007: 40). Traditional patterns of history and fiction have unified the west under a recurrent attention to ossified issues of landscape, human progress, homesteading, or taming of the wild, parameters of iteration to maintain a narrative of white settling. From different angles and perspectives, the prairies and the west have been renewed from the late 1960s by authors like Robert Kroetsch, George Bowering or Aritha van Herk, who critically approached and reshaped the master narratives of history and tradition, decomposed the founding myths designed from and by the centres of Canadian culture, and unveiled the constraining images devised for the plains in parallel. These writers' renovation is now reinvigorated by a different way of tackling of time/space: provincialism, communication technology, cultural change and globalization have transformed the plains, thus creating the need for a new definition (Calder and Wardaugh 2005: 13-14), one that unifies the former prairies and the west in just one single economic and social experience. In the plains and elsewhere in Canada, and to judge from a vast number of the works of fiction produced in the last quarter of the 20th century, it is perceptible that time and place

have lost part of their hegemonic structuring potential, thus giving a sense of urgency to the desire to reshape national history. As part of that process, it then follows that in the western regions such a narrative has been mostly defined by coordinates to a greater or lesser extent modified recently, like the oral tradition of Native North Americans, the textual settlement of immigrants and the print or screen capitalism that characterized the 19th-20th centuries, and the last decade, respectively. "At a time when the Canadian prairies are undergoing extensive cultural, economic and political transformation", Calder and Wardaugh explained ten years ago, "it is necessary to offer new theoretical frameworks for understanding the area" (2005: 16). On the one hand, an alternative model of time that interrogates the equation between starting point and white settlement; on the other, an extension of the former prairie's spatial limits to draw attention onto the fact that these newly included zones also fit into the prairie ontology and its defining traits.

As the region's space/time triggers an ongoing process of negotiation, it causes a further disruption of the supporting axioms of a national literature and canon. "The narrative of the nation-state is a powerful modern enunciation that defines the ways in which we configure space and time", Erin Manning explains. "[W]ithin the narrative of the nation-state, space is delineated as a stable modus of containment while time is located as a linear organization of the events that take place within this receptacle" (2003: xxx). Their different histories and stories notwithstanding, common traits between the Canadian west and its US counterpart seem to have traversed the border, the displacement making the hegemony of the political nation-state recede against the regional trans-frontier impulses. As Felske and Rasporich think, "the identity and identities of the Canadian West are resilient, kept alive by unique landscapes, by changing relationships with other regions in Canada and around the world, by its diversity of cultures and by its ongoing processes of community building" (2004: 1).

The acceptance of negotiation at the core of regional identities is part and parcel of a very Canadian penchant for continually rethinking and adapting to new realities in transformation, nation, culture and their coterminous policies being by no means an exception, since they have a long history as shape-shifters. "The history of making culture in Canada is also the history of making *and* troubling the cultural imaginations of the nation itself". As affirmed by Jeff Derksen, "at the present moment we stand at a nexus where our previous narratives about national cultures, multiculturalism, the role of the state and the possibilities of culture have been simultaneously expanded and fragmented". Such premises lead him to conclude that "the distance that a national, state-shaped notion of culture has travelled in Canada […] has indeed been great" (2013: viii). I agree with Derksen

that part of that great distance travelled in Canada is a contribution provided by the processes of globalisation, which now affect how we (de)construct the nation, how we produce and perceive notions of place and space, but also how writers, readers or critics produce and consume literary artefacts. The region and its ethos are also prey to the force that the market impels in its representation, its adaptation to film and online circulation; its eventual consumption in mobile devices, and endless reproduction across social networks the world over. As Debjani Ganguly concluded shortly before the end of the first decade of the century, the present century is rendering globalism "the state-of-the-art literary paradigm", one materialised in a two-fold appearance: first as a field featuring a transnational production, circulation and reception of texts; and second, as a discipline requiring a theoretical/methodological approach that collapses "the Eurocentric underpinnings of the comparative literature discipline and the Nation/Empire literary studies models of the last century" (2008: 119). Therefore, globalization, market drives and the contemporary ways of producing and consuming literary texts are going to be fundamental in dismantling the historical concept of region to mould it in response to the demands of the new century.

2. Region: the productive juncture of time and space

Calder and Wardhaugh's *History, Literature and the Writing of the Canadian Prairies* (2005) opens by dismissing the separation between the prairies and the west to immediately posit the existence of the Canadian plains at the intersection of the vectors of space and time. These two elements were previously identified by George Woodcock (1980) as the seminal coordinates engendering the discourse of regionalism, which he finds less constraining than nationalism. "A confederation of regions" ([1981 (1980)]: 38), Canada is a scene with a dubious national hold, in his opinion. Yet Woodcock could neither bear in mind the recent pliability that globalism has predicated on the discourse of nation, nor foresee the scope of the newly revised demarcations of the Canadian postcolonial. These shifting posts make the time/space juncture all the most productive, a local (non)place that, as Calder and Wardhaugh sustain, is the ground for the consciousness of "existing as a prairie subject", as well as the stance of the writer that (re)produces that consciousness. The intersection of time and space witnesses as well the interaction of factors associated with them such as culture, history and geography and the multifarious relations that they deploy (Calder and Wardhaugh 2005: 5). These implications informing region can be produced inside the region as such, and internalised by the locals that, in turn reproduce them; or created outside it, in a supranational scene where the region mirrors or absorbs the state identity politics.

In this frame of Canadian state fracture, the prairies have historically been the *beyond*, the other of the Europeanised east (see Angus 1990; 1997), repeatedly construed in turn as the embodiment of culture and economic development; the prairies, meanwhile, have been the land of the permeable, imprecise limits where the untamed inhabits and menacingly looms over the individuals and their own self-conception of settling and settlement; the plains are, in other words, the non-location where the definition of the community is unlikely, were it not for an endless play of difference and deferral of the self/other binary. Such is the unstable representation of the prairie in fictions like Martha Ostenso's classical *Wild Geese* (1925), Sinclair Ross's *As For Me and My House* (1941), or W.O. Mitchell's *Who Has Seen the Wind* (1981). In different ways they confirm that the defiance the plains pose to the state's self was heightened during the last century by their hosting of immigrants from all over the world, this added to their historical reception of Canadian settlers and homesteaders from every ethnic background. Their defining characteristics have come down to more recent narratives like Alice Munro's "Hateship, Friendship, Courtship, Loveship, Marriage" (2001), to which we now briefly turn to engage with its representation of prairie space.

In the course of a conversation between its protagonist, Johanna Parry, and a Canadian railway employee in charge of cargo transport, Munro's story lets us know that '"[a] lot of places out there it's all Czechs or Hungarians or Ukranians'" (2001: 4). The *out there*, a vast geography of self-deconstructive limits, veils a rather pejorative echo of, not to say a warning about, the diverse ethnic origin of prairie inhabitants. Cultural markers in open friction opens up for Parry a territory that menaces her subjectivity, leaving the imprint of a modern colonising effort, while situating her at a level not dissimilar to that of non-Wasps, all of them struggling with a landscape that erases eastern manners and is bound to haunt the newcomer Parry. As Marlene Goldman states, the prairie settler is the embodiment of haunting in being first directly threatened by the *unsettling* presence of the woods, the Native, and, finally, by the unjust, remorseful possession of a territory viciously taken from its rightful inhabitants (2012: 42). In Munros' title-piece, the deceived Parry mirrors former settlers-invaders, and crosses the line between her Wasp origin and that of recent immigrants, the privilege of her ethnicity undone on account of her gender position. Originally from Glasgow, Parry, an orphanage internee sent to Canada as a participant in an education plan, pursues a promise of dubious materialisation, when ferried westwards by the love letters written to her by a couple of local teens who map out for her a paper liaison with Ken Boaudreau. Dazzled by the girls' high hopes, Parry sends by train to the *unknown*, Gdynia in Saskatchewan, the furniture that will support her future of domesticity in the west, where according to the CPR worker, "[t]owns out there, they're not like here. They are mostly pretty rudimentary affairs" (Munro 2001: 5).[4] And, although

initially propelled by her will to cease being the local spinster, Johanna corroborates once there: "[t]here was a discouraging lack of formality, or any sort of organisation, to this place […]". And the most discouraging of it all, an overwhelming feeling of solitude, since "[n]obody was out in the yards, and why should they be? There was nothing to tend, only clumps of brown grass and once a big burst of rhubarb gone to seed" (Munro 2001: 42), she concludes, sorrowful at the apparent lack of civilisation to judge from an uncared for train station, the spot where she meditates on her dislocation and her ambivalent role, dispossessed of authority and exerting the authority over the local space and its dwellers that the power of representation endows her with. "What was of more concern to her was that there did not appear to be a town", we know through a distant view given by the narrator's access to Parry's mind. "The station was an enclosed shelter with benches along the walls and a wooden shutter pulled down over the window of the ticket office" (Munro 2001: 41).

As Munro's Johanna notices in her particular depiction of how nature erases the traces of settlement, nature in prairie fictions, like Adele Wiseman's *The Sacrifice* (1956) or Laura Salverson Goodman's *The Viking Heart* (1923), dispenses a distinct identity for the human collective and erases the traces of that community as well; nature is one and many. "[T]he west manages to remain a veritable monster of indifference and mistress of camouflage. It continues to practise its role as escape artist and tightrope walker, ineradicably beautiful, and oh-so silently eloquent", describes the Albertan writer Aritha van Herk (2004: 16). "The West is beginning to blunder beyond its appropriate edges", she goes on, "starting to step over the boundaries of signification". Van Herk affirms that he was at pains to validate before a non-Canadian some of the symbols usually attributed to the West from outside, namely the shooting of the tiny red berries called saskatoons, the pioneer entertainment of schooner or chuckwagon racing, and the well-known Marlboro Man, recurrently featuring on the inviting billboards disseminated across the Canadian plains (van Herk 2004: 21). All these signifiers, seemingly transcending region, and national-state borders, imply an intended reification of culture that can hardly stand the pressure of renewal in a global world: the death of the cow-boy image, the extinction of the pioneer, not to mention the personal and legal reinforcement of anti-tobacco narratives, largely replaced by metanarratives of personal health and care. A bombardment of mass media viral messages has reported the Marlboro actors dead from lung cancer (see Pearce 2014), while in a newly digitalised version of its classical anthem "Go West" (1997), the band, The Pet Shop Boys, keeps designating the west as the land of gay liberation and inviting their fans again and again to head for this enclave of promise, and to counter there the stereotypical masculine presence of the silent cowboy that personalised the values of the cigarette brand.[5] As suggested above, globalism has brought about a further

splitting of intra-national constituencies into regional and intra-regional ones, in parallel with their intersections with factors of gender and sexuality.

And, while van Herk tellingly expresses the impossibility of *grasping* the west thanks to the bleaching of its classical signifiers-signifieds, which become extinguishing loci of meaning, R. Douglas Francis has tackled the tough theorisation of the west region, once again materialising the contradictory moves of territorialisation and deterritorialisation to which Canadian culture has always been prone. In his effort to territorialise the west, Francis has distinguished firstly a formal regionalism, indebted to issues of environmental determinism of the individual; secondly, a functional regionalism, underlining the dynamic character of the region in its being dependent on economic, social and/or political relations established by the locals with other Canadian regions or internationally; thirdly, a mythic regionalism upholding the region as a mental construct. Finally, Francis concludes by affirming the existence of a postmodern perspective relying on the ineffability of region, whose essence cannot be portrayed in any form (2004: 29-49), thus partially reaching common ground with van Herk. In Francis' study, however, the landscape is the primordial element, since its shifting image has historically given way to different assumptions about nature, and consequently, to different conceptions of region. Previous to Francis, Henry Kreisel had asserted that "all discussions of literature produced in the Canadian west must of necessity begin with the impact of the landscape upon the mind" (1968: 171), an affirmation later ratified by Laurie Ricou when he stated that prairie literature has its basis in the psychological impact and the determinism consequent on the confrontation with the surrounding landscape (1973: xi; see Ricou 1983). Much of that space directly influenced the creation of a sense of collective self by opposition, out of which there emerged the national consciousness, and the national literary consciousness, this latter transcending regional markers, as repeatedly pointed out by a long list of Canadian authorities during the nationalist boom and later (see Frye 1971; Atwood, 1972; Angus 1997). "Canadian nature is, first and foremost, a physical challenge", Irmscher proposed. "But it is also, because it follows none of the established rules, a challenge to the powers of the writer" (2004: 95), who automatically takes up a problematic stance from which to contribute to the twofold pedagogical/ performative effort of nation-state making via its bond with the preservation of culture. Not in vain, "[i]n Canadian literary history and criticism, literature has been to culture as culture is to nation", Renée Hulan writes. "Literature affirms the presence of culture, and culture in turn grants the nation legitimacy" (2003: 3), thus culture is one of the sustaining pillars of the nation as well as the most effective tool to deconstruct its ideology (Manning 2003: xxi). The writing of the prairies was prompt to adopt this role within the project of the Canadian nation-state and its pedagogy of a fractured territory of diversity under a precarious national unity.

3. The ineffability of the west

In the age of the local/global, the borders between the west and the prairies have blurred to admit a similar set of iterative basics in the representation of the landscape, on the one hand, and the interaction between the individual and the space around, on the other. In the meantime, the performative impulse of nation building increasingly shows its complacency with playfulness and the ironic inclusion of narratives that interrogate its own existence, in this way incorporating a very postmodern trend of deconstructive erasure and eventual ineffability.

In the US and Canada, the colonisation of the west acquires a unique morphology to become a "New World Myth", one that "exchanges its traditional functions as transhistorical master narrative […] for a function characterised by postmodern indeterminacy, complex postcolonial attitudes, a questioning of history and a developing self-consciousness that creates provisional and relative identities" (Vautier 1998: xxi). In different guises, these traits equally characterise Guy Vanderhaege's *The Englishman's Boy* (1997 [1996]) and Thomas Wharton's *Icefields* (2005 [1997]) to be examined next. They also host a postmodern myth of westering that, through a double game of absence/presence, inscribes stories that analyse their own manufacture and fallibility. From the late 1990s of their launch, these novels anticipated many of the postcolonial trends of theory of the early 21st century: embedded in deeply local realities and inflected by the global scene, *The Englishman's Boy* and *Icefields* produce a fracture in the time/space linearity of the national narrative; these novels intertextualise and play with a national illusion in times of national revisions. The reading and writing of the Canadian West that their pages contain is self-reflexive and brandishes an ongoing reflection on its participation in the discourse of nation. From the moment of their publication at the turn of the century, these novels look back to immediately look forth; they echo the voices of groundbreaking postmodern narratives of the west like Robert Kroetsch's *The Studhorse Man* (1969), Aritha van Herk's *No Fixed Address: An Amorous Journey* (1986) or George Bowering's *Caprice* (1988) and their *territorialized* self-conscious deconstructive impulses. They reuse the metafictive tendencies of the 1980s and 1990s and the growing awareness on the history-making processes and their role in the conformation of postcolonial societies in general, and Canadian societies in particular. Yet they also paved the way for a revision of the national through global lenses that opt for scrutinizing first the local grounds, thus simultaneously laying down the paths for much of the postcolonial theory produced in the initial decades of the present century.

The Englishman's Boy, to date Vanderhaege's "most daring and accomplished book" (Cooley 2002: 1162), dramatises different periods of the national and cultural definition in the US and Canada, paying special attention to western history and geography as bodies in dynamic processes of change and intervention. It brings to the fore the film-making of the western myth to support a 20th century American national self. In the novel, the Canadian script writer Harry Vincent is hired by the Hollywood film tycoon Damon Ira Chance to trace the life of the once legendary cowboy Shorty McAdoo as told by himself. In the 1920s, the present of the story, a decrepit McAdoo earns his living as a secondary actor in B-class western movies, but some fifty years earlier, the same McAdoo was a direct witness to some of the expansion episodes. Chance intends Shorty's western hardships to be the basis of the epic movie attempted by his studios: "Remember the frontier —how savagery answered savagery?" he questions. "Picture the lonely cabin in the forest, the eyes watching from the trees, waiting for the opportunity. The lonely hunter on the plain, naked in his solitude. The children hatched in the corn patch, the mutilated man in the grass. The wife raped. The barn burning, the cattle slaughtered, the carrion crows descending", he exhorts Shorty to follow his mediating prompts. "We did not fail that test" (Vanderhaege 1997: 255).

The scriptwriter's search for the former cowboy's autobiography, however, is then rapidly mediated by Chance's interest in transforming some of the narratives that could undermine the reinforcement of the national consciousness being attempted. Such is the case of his biased rewriting of the Cypress Hills Massacre to exonerate the American fur traders involved in the slaughter of a group of Assiniboine Natives.[6] The episode is one of those presented through the quasi-anonymous Englishman's Boy, a young McAdoo, who in effect offers the point of convergence between the present and past scenes of the novel.

Much of the story presented in *Besieged,* the title of the movie by Chance's studios, is a white-biased rewriting of the Cypress Hills Massacre. For Chance, the gang-rape of a Native girl proves especially troublesome, and, in control of the final product, demands from a reluctant Harry: "Rewrite it. Change the girl. The enemy is never human" (Vanderhaege 1997: 256). Unable to cope with Chance's demands for falsification, Harry will leave the script unfinished, and Chance takes upon himself the rewriting of McAdoo's life. At a moment of an American national crisis, the 1920s with a sense of decline after the economic boom brought about by WWI and accentuated by the 1929 crack, *The Englishman's Boy* portrays the performative impulse driven by the ideal of nation in its portrayal of the Hollywoodian film-making of a western epic. "It is the movies that have the chance of making everybody —the immigrants, the backwoods Kentuckian, the New York cab driver, maybe the Ivy League Professor, all feel […] what it means to be American. The Constitution

and the Declaration of Independence are all very well, but constitutions make states, they don't make a people" (1997: 181). Chance's *Besieged* attempts to follow the paths of D.W. Griffith's *The Birth of a Nation* (1915), but here the cultural myth of the conquest of the west historiographically exhibits the process of its own fabrication, not to say falsification, in a classical, Canadian postmodern metafiction (see Hutcheon 1984; 1992; 2002; Colavincenzo 2003; Morrison 2003: 3-52). "Birth became America's history lesson on the Civil War. For the first time, everybody, rich and poor, Northerner and Southerner, native and immigrant, found themselves pupils in the same history class […]. If Lincoln was the Great Emancipator, Griffiths is the Great Educator" (1997: 107).

In the course of its action, *The Englishman's Boy* criss-crosses the US-Canadian political borders and in its displacement comes to make of the cultural and national myths intertexts of its plots, while it also creates maps of continuous displacement that defy the coordinates of a unified nation and/or culture (see Kuester 2000). "I feel some guilt that I have not confessed to Chance that he is seeking help for making the great American film from a Canadian […]. I have found that Americans […] recognise no distinction between us" (1997: 111), reveals Vincent. The text envisions the west as a myth that is now more than ever aware of its condition, while acknowledging its power to homogenise the collective on both sides of the border. The megalomaniac film tycoon reveals in *The Englishman's Boy* that "myths are the only spurs to action, […] a complex of pictures which express the deepest desire of a group. [The myth] is there to motivate people" (1997: 270).

Thomas Wharton's *Icefields* is a novel in which the postmodern western myth helps undermine the colonialist gaze through a revisionary and deconstructive reading of western space, portrayed as in continuous flow. As a matter of fact, *Icefields* presents the reader with stories that overlap, intertwine and impinge on each other to bring about false beginnings and partial ends, exactly like the process of freezing and thawing of the glacial territories in which the novel takes place, and whose morphology comes to shape the book's structure. Nevé, Moraine, Nunatak, Ablation Zone and Terminus are the sections that model the narrative as well as any glacier according to an accumulation of stories/sediments, and their fragmentation; Nunatak implies an observation vantage point, Ablation narrates the death of an explorer and Terminus proclaims both narrative culmination and the end of the glacier (Omhovère 2005: 46).

The glacier contaminates with its iterative temporality the many stories disseminated, producing a centre in continuous erasure; it locates all these accounts on the outskirts of Jasper, and, as a consequence of their very multiplicity, produces the opposite effect of dispersal and globalization of the local: the stories of the last Snake People of the area, the South Asian echoes brought to Jasper by the Victorian

Lord Sexmith and his Indian butler with his British accent, the narratives of biological preservation and the presence of progress in the form of a blooming tourist industry at the beginning of the 20th century. All that is rapidly called into question by the influence of a local myth that swirls around the tangible, casting doubt on itself. The spectre of uncertainty, thus, overshadows most of the stories told here, decentring history, the subject, and location. All that seems to be the side effect of an uncertain and repetitive geography, since "glacial dynamics reminds the observer that, far from being a static subject to behold, the landscape is subjected to erosion, and is produced through time, as are cultural representations of the landscape" (Omhovère 2005: 46; see Banting 2010).

The novel covers a time span between 1898 and 1923. It opens when Dr. Edward Byrne, a member of an exploration team, falls into a crevasse while climbing Arcturus Glacier. This accident leaves Byrne inarticulate for a while and unable to narrate what he saw in the icy darkness of the fissure, seemingly a female winged figure, blurred and of unclear origin. Rescued and lodged in a nearby hut till eventually evacuated to Edmonton, and later back to Britain, Byrne gets to know his temporary nurse Saravasti, the daughter of the local Snake woman, Athabasca, and Viraj, the former South Asian butler of the famous Victorian explorer of the region, Lord Sexmith. The conflation of the shock produced by being trapped in the crevasse and his innability to come to terms with the mythical stories told by his carer return Byrne to a pre-symbolic stage from which he is unable to understand the space and the local cultures around. Once back in England he recovers from that experience of ineffability by putting all the fragments together, and eventually returns to Jasper and becomes the chronicler of the progress of the area, narrating its evolution from mere stopover in the onward displacement west to a promising land of spa resorts after WW I.

The inadequacy of the English language to present the Canadian space proves as relevant as the juncture of space and time is productive, which balances the conflation of fact and fiction nourishing the novel, and both unmark their corresponding boundaries in a mutual act of self-reflexivity. Actual events such as Collie's expedition merge with others that are false, just as real and imaginary maps coalesce altogether with the visible and the characters' visions. Thus, in "A Note to the Reader", we find that "this book is a work of fiction", but turning the page, the reader finds two maps of the area, one of which is real. Similarly, in the section "Acknowledgements", the author declares that he has used, among other sources, "Edward Byrne: A Life on Ice" by Yoshiro Kagami, which turns out to be a fictional reference (Wyile 2002: 292n34).

This calling into question of facts also overshadows the transparent representation of maps, on the one hand, and the clear demarcation of spatial benchmarks, on the

other. Maps are given a mythical quality that transcends their category as simple representations of geographical space on paper. It suffices to say that Lord Sexmith's expedition in search of new routes for gold is fuelled by the maps on Athabasca's palm. No less important, when seemingly established, certain spatial references may be subject to erasure, any location is questioned from several angles. Etymologically speaking there is no agreement on the origin of the name Jasper, "an early surveyor spelled it Jespare in his published journal. What local meaning this phrase has I don't know", Trask confesses. "But on one old map the region is labelled Despair, which might be a further corruption of the original French phrase" (Wharton 2005: 86). Neither is there any consensus on the physical spot that it occupies for Byrne, who, once back in the area after his period in Europe during the First War, finds the distance between the log houses and the riverbank greater than he had remembered it (Wharton 2005: 74). As with Jasper, some of the famous landmarks to which travellers have flocked are uncertain: Mount Arcturus remains to be conquered, and so does Mount Brown: "Find it or prove it a hoax", a fictional Collie explains. "It's been on every map in the empire for sixty years as the highest on this continent" (Wharton 2005: 18).

Icefields describes two contradictory movements, one repetitive predicated on the glacier space, and one linear which moves forth, as if drawn by the unquestionable path to progress. In Wharton's novel the ossified image of the Canadian plains, exemplified in Jasper's surroundings, cannot stand aloof any longer and gives in to the power of tourism, and early globalisation; the translation of cultural signifiers and the looming presence of sameness and the hybridity of spaces that globalisation has made popular. In his path through the dying glacier, Byrne finds a Calypso Orchid from some tropical climate. How it has come to Alberta remains a mystery, but its presence certainly speaks of the arrival of people from distant latitudes whose access to the regional space requires translation and interpretation, as well as an obvious customization of space for the sake of a booming industry that has transformed the frozen glaciers into zones of therapeutic treatments. In this state of affairs, an interpretation of space as mobile as the discourses predicated on it proves essential for the creation of postmodern myths of the west. These myths, with their volatile nature, their shiftiness and the impossibility of reifying signifiers are fundamental for new readings of the plains and the west.

From Margaret Laurence's Manawaka Cycle to *After the Harvest* (2005), Jeremy Podeswa's film adaptation of Martha Ostenso's *Wild Geese*, now more *globalised* than ever; from her microcosmic *Agassiz Stories* (1987) to Sandra Birdsell's Mennonite diasporic *The Russlander* (2001), prairie fiction has become a mosaic of many colours, whose polychromatic palette has been diversified centripetally by fictions such as Gail Anderson-Dargatz's family-farm narrative *The Cure for Death*

by Lightning (1996), or centrifugally by Margaret Sweatman's *When Alice Lay Down With Peter* (2001), both of which reflect the productivity of the time/space juncture. Like Vanderhaege's text or Wharton's, these novels are inextricably connected to the local, and launched onto a global scene; in different forms, their times shatter the linearity of the national narrative and its supporting historical pillars, which are now set against each other with the consequent revealing of seams and unravelling of stitches. These novels produce a highly original reading of region, which, from its self-conscious reflection on its fabrication, playfully blinks at the national mirage of unity in times of dispersal and fracture. That reading of the Canadian West reflects on its own ontology and, from the intersection of its space and time, ruminates on its contribution to the discourse of nation. The nation, in turn, now read from transnational perspectives has relaxed its discursive limits to let the global impinge on its production. From the region to the international arena, inside out and outside in, the Canadian postcolonial brings about an abiding revision and reformulation of its premises to open its doors to the shifting realities of 21st-century Canadian societies.

Notes

[1]. Brydon (2007) notices that students and critics of CanLit have been reiteratively analyzing the nation, and it is time to shift the critical attention onto the state to wonder how institutions encourage or constrain literary work, or, for example, if CanLit itself has become an institutionalized body with the mechanisms of book publishing, academic reviewing and teaching contributing to the solidification of a canon, and this, in turn, to the boosting of the nation-state paraphernalia. "The nation-state, which in Canada has a distinctive history that has shaped our culture and our values, is one of these institutions that should be neither dismissed nor underestimated", Brydon asserts to conclude by advocating a multiple-approach perspective that never loses sight of the literary. "Attention to the interactions of institutions, citizenship, and literature should complement but not replace attention to other dimensions of literary study" (2007: 3; see Pennee 2003).

[2]. Launched in 2011, the Spanish *Canada and Beyond: A Journal of Canadian Literary and Cultural Studies* is fuelled by this transcultural impetus and directly tackles many of the issues that advocate a revision of nation in transcontinental terms (see http://canada-and-beyond.com). I am indebted to an anonymous referee for reminding me of the focus of *Canada and Beyond* and suggesting some other views that s/he may find reflected in this paper. I am also grateful to a second referee for providing me with a number of comments on previous versions of this paper that I have tried to incorporate through these pages.

[3]. The sense in which the term *worldly* is being used here is close to Edward Said's (2004: 41), as generally synonymous to *international*. In contrast, Spivak (1985) inscribed *worldly* in the implementation of imperialist policies, since for her it helps identify colonized spaces as marginal within an imperialist design (see Sugars 2010: 32; 45).

[4]. Although certainly outside the scope of this paper, Munro's story is home to a multitude of conflicting gender narratives, from the wayward trip by Parry to the futility it presumably announces, unveiled by the rapid, inescapable equation between herself and the furniture, both transported to displace a life of lonely domesticity in the east onto the west accompanied by a potential, as yet unaware fiancée, who accepts her when presented with no other option. The present and future lives that the protagonist envisions are however equally determined by the powerful alliance between patriarchy and the narrative of (western) colonization and the dual sketch of women's lives in both, a constraining reality far from mitigated by the crossing of space, from Ontario to Saskatchewan ending in Salmon Arm, B.C. Munro's fiction has recently been adapted to screen by Marc Poirier. The film *Hateship, Loveship* (2013), starring Kristen Wiig and Guy Pearce, was directed by Liza Johnson for the New Orleans-based IFC Films, produced by Dylan Sellers and premiered at the Toronto Cinema Festival (see Scott 2014).

[5]. Originally by the American The Village People, "Go West" (1979) did not reach the popularity of other hits of theirs. The remake issued by Pet Shop Boys in 1993, however, rapidly gained the status of a gay anthem that portrayed the west as a site free of sexual repression, and endowed with potential liberties, epitomized in the US city of San Francisco. The iconography with which the official video presented the single also extolled an image of communism in need of expansion over the west (see http://www.petshopboys.co.uk/), thus making the national and international coordinates of the west conflate. The encouragement to go west firstly launched by the photographer John P. Soule (1828-1904) to young American men also bespeaks the classical alliance of colonization, patriarchy, and, no less important, capitalism (see http://historicca mera.com/cgi-bin/librarium2/pm.cgi?action=app_display&app=datasheet&app_id=2400&), all of them governed by a reproductive zeal that the hymn by the British band definitely contests: it allures (gay) men to the west and exhorts them to establish there a land of communal well being, thus displacing and undermining the supporting pillars of the classical westward expansion, based, among other elements, on the settling of a (heterosexual and heteronormative) community in ongoing reproduction.

[6]. In 1873 a group of US wolfers, fur traders known to have poisoned buffalo carcasses and later to have collected the pelts of wolves and coyotes that had fed on the venomous meat, lost some horses while staying near Fort Benton. They blamed the Nakoda or Assiniboine who lived nearby and, seemingly drunk and intending to forcefully recover their property assaulted the Indian camp and killed some twenty. After being reported to the Canadian authorities, they fled south and were eventually exonerated by the American courts. The area between Montana, Alberta and Saskatchewan witnessed the almost free smuggling of whisky to sell it to the Natives of the area, as American and Canadian desperadoes infringed the Canadian law (see Vanderhaege 1997: 168). Similar irregularities and crimes against the British regulation, once the Hudson Bay Company lost its power on the zone, led to the creation of the Western Royal Canadian Mounted Police. *The Englishman's Boy* presents the account of the Blackfoot freighters and robbers to be read against the testimony of the wolfers, one of whom was the Englishman's boy later known as McAdoo. Winner of six Gemini Awards, Vanderhaege's novel on the making of a film script was turned into John N. Smith's CBC TV movie in 2008, starring Nicholas Campbell (see http://www.canada.com/story.html?id=d38ad91c-4760-4f1c-b53e-030ec6d429c6).

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ON THE ROAD TO "SOME" PLACE: SOFIA COPPOLA'S DISSIDENT MODERNISM AGAINST A POSTMODERN LANDSCAPE[1]

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> Post-modernists may be said to have developed a paradigm that clashes sharply with [my definition of modernism]. I have argued that modern life and art and thought have the capacity for perpetual self-critique and self-renewal. Post-modernists maintain that the horizon of modernity is closed, its energies exhausted —in effect that modernity is passé. Post-modernist social thought pours scorn on all the collective hopes for moral and social progress, for personal freedom and public happiness, that were bequeathed to us by the modernists of the eighteenth-century Enlightenment. These hopes, post-moderns say, have been shown to be bankrupt, at best vain and futile fantasies, at worst engines of domination and monstrous enslavement. Post-modernists claim to see through the 'grand narratives' of modern culture, especially 'the narrative of humanity as the hero of liberty.' […] I [try] to open up a perspective that will reveal all sorts of cultural and political movements as part of one process: modern men and women asserting their dignity in the present —even a wretched and oppressive present— and their right to control their future; striving to make a place for themselves in the modern world, a place where they can feel at home.
>
> (Berman 1988: 9-11)[2]

Coming on the heels of *Marie Antoinette* (2006), her highest-budget film (and biggest box-office disappointment), Sofia Coppola's next feature film, *Somewhere* (2010), has consistently divided (and confounded) audiences and critics alike since its release. Such a divide is not limited to this particular film. As Belinda Smaill has documented, the "unique" nature of Coppola's "brand or name" has led to

"different narratives that construct Coppola's public image", conflicting narratives of "significant success and also derision and reproach" that are almost always linked to the perception of her "important position as a female director of independent features" (2013: 149). That said, the critical reaction to *Somewhere* was particularly divergent, even for Coppola. The film won the Golden Lion at the Venice Film Festival, led to Coppola receiving a special honor from the National Board of Review, and earned intense praise from major critics, such as the *New York Times*'s A.O. Scott, who called the film "exquisite, melancholy, and formally audacious" (2010). The negative responses, however, were not mild. Tom Long's *Detroit Free Press* review, titled "Coppola's *Somewhere* Takes us Nowhere", claims the film "dares to have nothing very interesting at all going on, unless you find cigarette consumption fascinating" (2011). Kyle Smith titled his *New York Free Press* review "Audiences Would be Better Off Somewhere Else" and proceeds to claim "this isn't an artistic effort, it's a vacant lot whose signpost reads: 'Space available. Movie can be made here. Or not. Whatever'" (2010). *Slate*'s Dana Stevens is more direct, asking if "maybe Sofia Coppola is more of a tastemaker than a filmmaker" (2010). In short, the response to *Somewhere* followed the precise pattern of Coppola's first three feature films, only at an ever increasing volume.

One of the few things that critics from both sides of the divide seem to agree upon, however, is that this is Coppola's most "European" film[3], in terms of subject matter, pace/style, cinematography, and, more than anything, its enigmatic nature. A large number of reviews make direct reference to the Italian filmmaker Michelangelo Antonioni, and almost every review comments (often at length) about the film's unique and off-putting first scene —a 150-second still shot of a Ferrari inexplicably driving in circles in the desert— which seems, for critics, to embody both the film's enigmatic nature and its decidedly "European" type of filmmaking. And, to be clear, the references both to Antonioni and to European film in general, are entirely fair and worthy of further discussion. But what I find most interesting about this film is that its enigmas may be *best* understood not in the film's relationship to European cinema, but, rather, in its relation to philosophical debates between modernism and postmodernism, with regard to American films such as *Modern Times* (Charlie Chaplin 1936), *The Graduate* (Mike Nichols 1967), and *Five Easy Pieces* (Bob Rafelson 1970), and, even more importantly, in its relationship to one of the oldest and most dominant tropes in US literature and culture —that of the hobo-hero. In fact, both *Somewhere*'s iconic opening and its even more mysterious final sequence seem to make most narrative sense when viewed within the context of these conversations. Coppola therefore creates a film that subtly invokes —and comments upon— American identity, the postmodern culture of Los Angeles/Hollywood, and one of the central questions

of modernity, outlined at the end of the epigraph that prefaces this article —the ability (or inability) of individuals to "make a place for themselves in the modern world, a place where they can feel at home".

Early in this article I will offer a brief examination of what I argue is a dominant trope in US modernism, a trope in which the figure of the lowly hobo is elevated as a means of preserving, at least in imagination, an integrated sense of self. Once I have explained that connection, I will return to Sofia Coppola in order to look at *Somewhere*'s use of the hobo-hero in order to ask a more far reaching question: is there a way in which the hobo-hero can allow modernism to openly defy postmodernism itself, even while expressing and exploring a postmodern landscape, a postmodern world? In the epigraph that precedes this article, Marshall Berman begins to re-define a dissident version of modernism that poses questions in response to many of postmodernism's assumptions. Elsewhere in the same preface, Berman writes, "Lionel Trilling coined a phrase in 1968: 'Modernism in the streets.' I hope that readers of this book will remember that the streets, our streets, are where modernism belongs. The open way leads to the public square" (1982: 12). For at least a century and a half, American literary modernism has attempted to use those streets and roads, that quintessential search for an open way, as a means of preserving individuality in the face of a crushing modernity. And still it remains one of the most apt means of making such an assertion amidst —and against— a postmodern urban landscape. Surprisingly, one of the most articulate and pressing examples comes from the most unexpected of sources: Sofia Coppola.

1. Sofia Coppola's fourth feature film

For the better part of two decades, Coppola has been both one of the most divisive and original filmmakers to work within the Hollywood system. The daughter of Francis Ford Coppola (arguably the most important filmmaker in US film history), Sofia Coppola has been blessed with the financial ability and social connections necessary to retain more autonomy than most Hollywood directors, and certainly far more than most female directors. As outlined at the beginning of this article, such privilege and "brand" has dominated both the public and critical discourse surrounding her films, and that discourse has almost always been sharply, and uniquely, divided between soaring praise and scathing attacks.[4] As I argued in my article "Off with Hollywood's Head: Sofia Coppola as Feminine Auteur" (2010), Coppola's first three feature films all openly invoke, and question, feminist gaze theory as they provide the spectator with a young, female screen surrogate. In each case, the surrogate/protagonist is a young woman who searches, often in vain, for identity within an imposing landscape, constantly controlled both by her

environment (often architecture) and by how others see her —both within the film (other characters) and without (the spectator). Coppola's approach is to ask us to neither sympathize with, nor criticize, these flawed heroines. Rather, we are simply asked to empathize with them on a human level. Other critics, such as Lucy Bolton and Pam Cook, have likewise argued that Coppola has developed a model for challenging male-dominated cinema. For Cook, this model emerges in *Marie Antoinette* as fashion and travesty become a means of exposing the manner in which society —and film— codes and constructs feminine identity. Meanwhile, for Bolton, the manner in which Charlotte "becomes" a woman in *Lost in Translation* (2003) —instead of being presented as a projection of the male-other— works as an embodiment of Luce Irigaray's ideas of femininity as self-fulfilling, ideas Bolton posits as a potential roadmap for contemporary feminine auteurship.

Following her third feature film, *Marie Antoinette*, which was her most ambitious project, her most heavily funded project, and which garnered the most divisive responses so far in her career, Coppola retreated and made a low-budget, concept film ostensibly inspired by European cinema. It was also her first film in which the screen surrogate is a man. On its surface, *Somewhere* seems to be entirely about stasis. The film is set almost exclusively at the Chateau Marmont, the hotel that has stood as an iconic getaway for the Hollywood jet set for over fifty years. The film follows Hollywood star Johnny Marco, played by Stephen Dorff, as he lives a life of stasis, surrounded by a plethora of visual, sexual, and culinary consumption —in a sense, the typical Hollywood star, living the dream associated with it. But, in spite of the surface appearance of a lifestyle of excess, the film is mostly about emptiness, lack, and the overwhelming nature of depthless stimuli. Drawing upon the cinematic style and themes found in her two most successful films, *Lost in Translation* and *Marie Antoinette*, *Somewhere* seems to follow a narrative in which the main character will experience some sort of "coming-of-age" transformation. However, the spectator is denied the culmination of such a transformation, as the film ends with the main character walking away from the vehicle that has driven him through his postmodern urban landscape as we wonder what he will find on the road before him, if anything at all.

Whether Johnny finds something at the end of the road —echoing the promise of many a Hollywood hero before him— is not at all Coppola's focal point in *Somewhere*. Instead, as in her previous films, it is the imagistic landscape that compels Johnny Marco away from stasis and toward movement as he attempts to flee his environment. As Anna Backman Rogers points out when she likewise tries to situate *Marie Antoinette* vis-à-vis the director, Coppola's films all seem to contain a "lost adolescent who wields little power over her own destiny". Coppola's style, she therefore argues, *seems* superficial because it focuses on how diegetic

spaces affect characters. In *Marie Antoinette* specifically, Backman Rogers shows how Coppola rejects classical Hollywood films "that often cite the female body as the site of spectacle", instead of attempting to depict "how that body is harnessed and regulated via ritualistic processes: how it is *turned into* a spectacle and, by extension, a commodity to be owned by a patriarchal institution, and then, by the state" (2012: 82). While Johnny Marco is not a French queen controlled by the environment and people of Versailles, he is controlled and commodified by the image-machine that is Hollywood. Instead of showing the construction of history with elaborate costumes in the halls of Versailles, Coppola reveals how culture creates spectacle via images that Johnny fails to live up to. Thus, her depiction of Johnny trapped by an empty world of room service and strippers acts as a treatise on the denied potential for movement in a postmodern world. Her Los Angeles is anything but the "paradise" that some postmodern critics, such as Jean Baudrillard, describe, and Johnny Marco's powerful Ferrari that circles LA's freeways never gets him anywhere. He spends most of his time static, on his couch. When he is in motion, usually in his car, his movement always follows cyclical patterns —until, at the end of the film we are offered the *promise* of linear/forward movement. In other words, it is a crisis of identity depicted almost entirely along spatial lines.

2. The industrial metropolis, the hobo-hero, and filmic modernism

American identity, traditionally, has also been imagined as spatial. As a nation of immigrants, it should come as no surprise that, since the earliest attempts to define themselves, Americans have often linked their identity to images of mobility. Such an allegiance to a fluid identity —rather than a fixed one— echoes Ralph Waldo Emerson's claim that "there are no fixtures in nature. The Universe is fluid and volatile" (1841: 302). One particularly clear expression of this imagination can be found in Thomas Wolfe's *You Can't go Home Again*, when he proclaims "Perhaps this is our strange and haunting paradox here in America —that we are fixed and certain only when we are in movement. At any rate, that is how it seemed to young George Webber, who was never so assured of his purpose as when he was going somewhere on a train. And he never had the sense of home so much as when he felt that he was going there. It was only when he got there that his homelessness began" (1940: 53). Such an ethos has dominated American letters from the earliest, colonial writings,[5] and, "Song of the Open Road" can be seen as one of the major driving forces behind the most "American" of American poets, Walt Whitman.

At the turn of the twentieth century, the rise of the modern metropolis only worked to strengthen the perceived threat to individuality that had been present

in American culture for decades. To quote an influential 1903 speech by the German sociologist Georg Simmel "the deepest problems of modern life derive from the claim of the individual to preserve the autonomy and individuality of his existence in the face of overwhelming social forces, of historical heritage, of external culture, and of the technique of life" (409). Literary realists and naturalists similarly used the city as a symbol for the crushing and deterministic environment they imagined everywhere around them. American literary modernists such as John Dos Passos, John Steinbeck, William Faulkner, Willa Cather (and many others)[6] drew upon *that* representation in order to then draw upon America's spatial identity in order to heroicize characters who left urban landscapes, choosing a life of misery in order to remain in motion, thereby not succumbing (at least without a struggle) to the modern, destructive "technique of life". In my article "Bob Dylan's Highway Shoes: The Hobo-Hero's Road through Modernity", I call such a figure a hobo-hero —defined as someone who is "portrayed as heroic because he rejects the society that entraps them, instead choosing a life of ceaseless wandering. In other words, if the human condition is one of uprootedness to begin with —as modernism claims— then the hobo-hero at least retains a *sense* of agency unavailable to his static counterparts" (2009: 40). For these modernists, however, the hobo-hero is not wholly a happy, romantic figure; vagabondage will not lead him to joy, success, or an epiphany. The hobo-hero does not search for Jack Kerouac's "road to Heaven" (1957: 181). Instead, the hobo-hero is an ambivalent figure who is only redemptive because, at great cost, he constantly attempts to assert his autonomy with no hope of success.

Marshall Berman's positing of a modernism that unites mankind via a "unity of disunity" (1982: 15) as we each seek, often in vain, to find a home, or a place of comfort and connection, is utterly linked to the image of the hobo-hero. As the epigraph at the beginning of this article hints, such attempts are often futile, and the experience "wretched" and "oppressive". Yet, like Whitman and Dos Passos before him, Berman places more emphasis on the struggle. To quote Berman, "if we think of modernism as a struggle to make ourselves at home in a constantly changing world, we will realize that no mode of modernism can ever be definitive" (1982: 6). Thus, even modernism itself is often imaged as existing in a constant state of motion, ranging from Zygmunt Bauman's definition of modernism as an "obsessive march forward" (1991: 12), to Gilles Deleuze's discussion of a state of constant "becoming" across a "rhizome" (1987). Effective modernism, this implies, must be with no destination in sight, simply "a hundred miles down the road" (Dos Passos 1936: 447), "away from any Here" (Steinbeck 1962: 10), "to see nothing anywhere but what you may reach it and pass it" (Whitman 1856: line 173).

The imagination of authenticity as part of a destinationless voyage has also dominated US film history as characters find themselves leaving the film frame toward a place that remains unknown to both themselves and the spectator. Such a trope dominates the road-buddy genre, but one of the earliest examples is Charlie Chaplin's iconic *Modern Times*, which tells the comic tale of a factory worker (Chaplin) and his "gamin" (Paulette Goddard) as they repeatedly attempt to make a "home" amidst a bleak modern cityscape. The film opens by visually comparing factory workers to sheep led to slaughter and proceeds to invoke questions of individuality amidst a technical, mechanical, and clock-driven world reminiscent of Georg Simmel's warnings about the rise of the modern city that I quoted earlier, not to mention Fritz Lang's *Metropolis* (1927). Chaplin's character comically attempts, and utterly fails, to achieve success as a factory worker, a repair mechanic, a night watchman, a longshoreman, a waiter, and a singer/entertainer. Amidst this failure, the couple imagine a Utopian image of house and home that they can never quite reach, as all of their attempts to create an actual home, literally, fall down around them. In a mostly silent film in which only machines have voices[7], Chaplin's character is rejected in each of his attempts at success because he cannot adequately adapt his individuality to the mechanized world that surrounds him. In one scene, he is fed through a machine with neither agency nor autonomy. In a scene of great irony, the closest Chaplin's character ever comes to achieving a romanticized version of "home" is in jail. Finally, rejected by all sectors of society, unable to find a home, the couple takes to the road and a life of vagabondage. Their future is uncertain, but when the gamin asks "what's the use of trying?", Chaplin's character replies with a non-answer answer: "Buck up —never say die. We'll get along!". The couple then happily walk up the road in a classic final shot, with a hobo's bundle draped over one of their shoulders. Having already shown that the factory worker's optimism is not matched anywhere within the modern world in which they live, the film still ends on an optimistic note in terms of written text, music, and cinematography. The hope, however, is entirely in the search.

Chaplin's factory worker and gamin thus serve as prime examples of Berman's description of men and women who are heroic because they struggle to make a home in a world that condemns them. That is the same primal drive that this article attempts to diagnose within the ontology of the hobo-hero. The hobo-hero is, in my opinion, the embodiment of the dissident strain of modernism that Berman describes. In the words of John McGowan, modernism has a distinct quality that stems from "its strategies of engagement with the enemy, […] Doubtful whether victory can ever be won, the modernist *either* struggles without hope or (more usually) retreats to a barricaded world of art where he or she can work in peace and associate only with those of similar views" (1991: 8). The latter

choice includes the likes of Ezra Pound and T.S. Eliot. The first choice, in which the modernist "struggles without hope", can be found in works as divergent as F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* (1925) and Pablo Picasso's *Guernica* (1937). But one of the most common, and complex, expressions of that strain of modernism has repeatedly come from use of the hobo-hero, ranging from Walt Whitman to John Dos Passos, from Bob Dylan to Gillian Welch, from the final sequence of Bob Rafelson's *Five Easy Pieces* to Luisa's journey at the end of Alfonso Cuarón's *Y tu mamá también* (*And Your Mother Too*, 2002), and even in the laughable couple at the heart of Chaplin's comedy. The hobo-hero draws upon American myths to try to forge an expression of selfhood in the wake of the overwhelming obstacles posed by modernity.

3. Postmodernism and Los Angeles as Utopia achieved

By contrast, many would claim that such an expression of hope through desolation seems almost to disappear within postmodern art. To return to McGowan, "Postmodernism is distinguished from modernism by the belief that artistic autonomy is neither possible *nor desirable*. Postmodernism questions the efficacy of strategies of transformation associated with autonomy, declaring that modernism inexorably reaches a dead end. The modernist hope that intellectuals can occupy a space outside capitalist society is not only illusionary but also artistically and politically sterile" (1991: 25). Such a sentiment is alluded to even within the epigraph that precedes this article; the idea that somehow the "hopes" of modernism "have been shown to be bankrupt, at best vain and futile fantasies, at worst engines of domination and monstrous enslavement". Such pessimism infuses postmodern representations of the road story, seen in novels by writers as diverse as Don DeLillo, Cormack McCarthy, and Paul Auster,[8] and in films as diverse as David Lynch's *Lost Highway* (1990) and Jean-Luc Godard's *Week-end* (1967).

The idea that the postmodern road story proclaims the death of modernist hopes of authenticity is what compelled French cultural critic Jean Baudrillard to go in "search" of America in the late 1980s by taking to the road, particularly the cyclical highways of metropolitan Los Angeles, as he sought what he called "Astral" America, defined by him, as "the lyrical nature of pure circulation […] not social and cultural America but the America of the empty absolute freedom of the freeways, not the deep America of mores and mentalities, but the America of desert speed, of motels, and surfaces" (1988: 27, 5). While the hobo-hero set out with no particular destination in sight, "away from any Here", the modernist still saw the journey as "getting" him somewhere on an ontological level. He was preserving his autonomy, or, at the very least, attempting to do so. Baudrillard's

empty, "pure circulation" rejects such an ontology by embracing not movement, but speed; not the desire for a home, but the temporary comfort of motels; not a desire for depth of feeling, but the newness of surfaces.

Thus, Baudrillard romanticizes his travels specifically because of this surfaceness, a shallow image. For Baudrillard, it is redemptive precisely because his car can pull away "effortlessly, noiselessly, eating up the road, gliding along without the slightest bump, riding along as if you were on a cushion of air" (1988: 54). He sees such easy travel as a "collective propulsion" (1988: 53) in which he has absolutely no autonomy over which exit or direction to take. "Why should I tear myself away to revert to an individual trajectory, a vain sense of responsibility?" Baudrillard posits (1988: 53). Not only does this assertion specifically deny any responsibility to fight for autonomy such as was earlier asserted by modernism, but it *rejoices* in that denial of responsibility. To Baudrillard, there "are no lies because it is only simulation" (1988: 85). In summation, Baudrillard asks:

> But is this really what an achieved Utopia looks like? Is this a successful revolution? Yes, indeed! What do you expect a successful revolution to look like? It is paradise. Santa Barbara is paradise; Disneyland is a paradise, the US is a paradise. Paradise is just paradise. If you are prepared to accept the consequences of your dreams —not just the political and sentimental ones, but the theoretical and cultural ones as well— then you must still regard America today with the same naïve enthusiasm as the generations that discovered the New World. (1988: 98)

Baudrillard thus implies not only that Los Angeles represents a Utopia achieved, but, also, that if we can simply push aside our biases, be they Romantic or Modernist, we would realize that such a Utopia is the natural and logical end-point of the American journey. Sofia Coppola's *Somewhere* refuses to accept such consequences as a natural product of the American dream. In fact, it seeks to openly defy such a supposition by making visible the temptation of surfaces and speed and demonstrating how it destroys the individual as her protagonist speeds by every opportunity to know himself or make meaningful connections with those around him —even his own daughter.

4. Sofia Coppola's dissident modernism

In many ways *Somewhere* is Sofia Coppola's Los Angeles movie, and the film's interest in surface pleasures, as well as the city's cyclical highways, are reminiscent of what Baudrillard most admires about LA. *Somewhere* is, aesthetically speaking, a postmodern film that is about images —the degree to which they are shallow, the degree to which they both attract and repel us, and the degree to which they dominate our identity.[9] But what is so interesting about *Somewhere* is that it is a

postmodern film that expresses a desire to return to modernist efforts to preserve autonomy. Although such attempts are still seen as nothing more than depthless images, the film finds such images preferable to remaining in a hell that Baudrillard describes as "paradise".

Time and again, Coppola's films open with an unorthodox first shot, always in front of a still frame, that sets the thematic tone for her entire movie.[10] *Somewhere* begins with a still camera in the California desert and no non-diegetic sounds. For an awkward *two and a half* minutes we watch a Ferrari drive in circles while listening to the engine. It disappears off screen to the right, reappears crossing to the left, disappears, and reappears over and over again, as the driver, Johnny Marco, inexplicably drives round and round, getting nowhere. Coppola then immediately cuts to a shot of Johnny at the Chateau, coming downstairs with a party. He slips, falls, and breaks his wrist. We then proceed into a largely silent twenty minutes of film, that matches the empty tone of the entire story, as we see Johnny wallow in isolation and fleeting pleasures within the hotel's confines. He parties, he drinks, he gets massages, he plays video games with his daughter, but, all the time, the camera is still, the soundtrack silent, and Dorff's facial expressions emphasize the utter lack of connection, of comfort and pleasure he finds in these activities. At one point early in the film, we watch for nearly two minutes as he stares at a wall, absently smoking a cigarette. Two separate scenes invite the spectator to watch twin strippers for upwards of five minutes, to the point that their actions become banal and dull —matched by Marco's reaction of either falling asleep, in the first scene, or slow, methodical clapping in the second. The film silently shows Marco as he shaves, eats hamburgers, sees random women flash him their breasts simply because he is famous, walks past models at a photo-shoot as if it were an everyday occurrence, and falls asleep while performing oral sex on a woman he picks up at a party. All of these interactions are depicted as equally banal, and all work in a cyclical pattern to return Johnny to his couch, alone and directionless. Johnny's professional life is shown to be no more fulfilling, as he blankly answers insipid questions about his new action film and sits, silently, for three minutes as a facial mold that will be used for his next film solidifies around his face. Surrounded by an environment of excess and consumption, not unlike *Lost in Translation*'s Tokyo and *Marie Antoinette*'s Versailles, Coppola again attempts to show such boundless "pleasure" as being, simultaneously, alluring and superficial. Living in a hotel that has recently undergone refurbishment in order to preserve a Hollywood golden age image of itself, surrounded by every possible type of pleasure, Marco is hopelessly adrift and hopelessly bored. Even the film's most ambitious, albeit brief, vacation from the Chateau Marmont, when Johnny takes his daughter to Italy, ends inside another famous hotel where sex leaves Johnny unfulfilled. His professional life is represented by receiving a joke award in

which he does not even have a voice in accepting, and his daughter swims laps in a ridiculously short pool, again, getting nowhere.

Although the film is ostensibly set almost entirely inside hotels and is seemingly about a life of stasis, a single prop acts as the dominant trope in the entire movie: Marco's black Ferrari. From the moment the film opens with Marco driving, literally, in circles, the image, and the sound, of his Ferrari is never allowed to stray too far from the spectator's consciousness. We see him endlessly driving around Los Angeles's roads, highways, and freeways, always with the sound of the engine, and his smooth change of gears as he accelerates, as the only soundtrack. The camera follows his car in long tracking shots as he slides, smoothly, on and off LA's throughways, driving underneath road-signs that never represent any actual destination because, time and again, the camera next finds him right back where he started: the Chateau Marmont. Such seamless, easy, fluidity of movement matches Baudrillard's imagination of these same spaces, as he claims driving in postmodern LA to be

> a total collective act, staged by the entire population, twenty-four hours a day. […] The machines themselves, with their fluidity and their automatic transmission, have created a milieu in their own image, a milieu into which you insert yourself gently, which you switch over to as you might switch over to a TV channel […] Thus the freeways do not de-nature the city or the landscape; they simply pass through it and unravel it without altering the character of this particular metropolis. And they are ideally suited to the only truly profound pleasure [in it], that of keeping on the move. (1988: 52-53)

The question for Coppola's film, however, is just how pleasurable such circulation actually proves to be. While I have already glibly pointed out that both in the plot of the film and in its opening sequence, his driving takes him nowhere (both in terms of actual and metaphorical movement), his "smooth" drives are even more empty than I imply. In one scene, for no apparent reason, and without further comment, when Johnny pulls out of the Chateau's parking lot, the camera oddly juxtaposes his car with another, wrecked car. Elsewhere, while driving from mundane shopping location to mundane shopping location with his daughter, his car breaks down, causing him to call a cab. Earlier in the film, Marco pulls up at a red light next to a pretty woman in a convertible, to whom we can tell from his facial expression he is attracted. Then, borrowing from a common Hollywood trope in which the male driver pulls out of a red light in order to follow an attractive woman, Marco begins to tail her. Such a trope, traditionally, ends in either sexual conquest or comic sexual rejection. In Coppola's film, however, we follow this woman for a minute and a half until she pulls into her driveway. Her gate closes and she apparently never even sees that Johnny is following her. The film then immediately cuts to him staring at models in the hallway at the Chateau. Instead

of conquest or refusal, Johnny's sexy car chase ends in, quite literally, a nothing. A closing of a gate, in which nothing has happened or changed. There is no point, no pleasure, no success, no rejection —simply wasted gas and a cinematic cut to another image of femininity, the models, whom Johnny walks by uninterestedly with barely a glance. While the Ferarri in *Somewhere* works as a trope not dissimilar to Baudrillard's discussion of LA's highways, Coppola does not see implicit pleasure in the figure of the car. Just like the hotel, it is one more location in which one is asked to view, pass, and consume superficial images that bring neither fulfillment nor connection, simply banality.

In short, the film is, at its heart, about the lack of authenticity and connection available in a postmodern world. For instance, early in the film, Marco reacts badly to a masseur who wants to give an *image* of an "authentic" connection via a massage set to eastern music and given in the nude, intended to "meet [the client] at the same level"—a process, he asserts, that is explained "in-depth" on his website. Such lack of authentic connection is also evidenced by his relationship, or lack thereof, to the series of women he sleeps with, the mother of his child, his agent, his own mother, his friends, and his co-stars. Nowhere is this lack of authenticity more evident, however, than in the film's driving plot device —his relationship with his daughter whom he gets roped into looking after for a few weeks on short notice. While the movie's pattern tempts the spectator to think the film is going to be about Johnny's transformation, and although the ending hints that Coppola is interested in a desire for authenticity and change, all of which are sparked by the time spent with Johnny's daughter, it is important to remember that we do not actually see Johnny undergoing such a transformation. When his daughter cries, he has nothing to say. When she takes him to see her new ice-skating routine, he tells her he was unaware she knew how to skate, to which she replies "I've been skating for three years". When, in their last scene together, he wants to apologize for the distance between them, she does not hear a word he says because of helicopter noise.[11] She smiles and waves, happy for the time they have spent together. But, there is no scene of transformative connection. Johnny, similarly, returns to the Chateau, and we see the same, empty, silent shots of him in his hotel room that began the film —a damning indictment of Baudrillard's cyclical "paradise".

The depiction of Johnny's car and the depiction of the hotel room(s) therefore work, in tandem, to create a cyclical pattern that is not broken until the film's final, linear sequence. A movie that opens with two and a half minutes of driving in a circle becomes, more or less, an hour and a half of a metaphorical circle —a circle that is in every sense lacking in depth (which is precisely what Coppola's critics claim her films to be). But that is precisely Coppola's point. Much as the body of

Chaplin's *Modern Times* (and Dos Passos's *Manhattan Transfer* for that matter) is solely interested in depicting a deterministic, industrial modernity that prevents the protagonists from finding their "home" (thereby justifying the film's final sequence), Coppola's film is primarily interested in depicting a no-less deterministic postmodern landscape that forces Johnny Marco into his shallow life/identity, and in depicting that environment in a manner that wholly overwhelms the spectator. One is made to actually feel, and experience, the emptiness. And it is important to focus on the manner in which that cyclical, empty pattern returns to the space of a hotel room. Hotels offer the *promise* of home —a place to sleep, to eat, to make your own. This is especially true of Johnny's hotel because he is a long-term resident, knows all the staff, and because the hotel is completely cordoned off from the outside world and is particularly self-sufficient —for example, his daughter is even able to order ingredients from room service to make Eggs Benedict. But Coppola's cyclical pattern works to emphasize just how far removed a transient hotel room is from any sense of "home". Johnny Marco is no closer to finding a space "where he can feel at home" than Chaplin's prison cell. And the film's style and its cyclical pattern invite the spectator to be fully aware of that fact, and will not allow us to distance ourselves from that awareness. In the scene where Johnny is fitted for the facial mask the camera slowly creeps closer and closer to Johnny's face. It is a reverse of an important scene in *Marie Antoinette* where the camera slowly pulls back, allowing the façade of Versailles to overwhelm Marie, thus emphasizing her isolation and lack of agency. Johnny is shown to have no more agency and to be no less isolated, but here the camera forces us *into* that emptiness. Coppola makes us experience the postmodern hell Johnny is living firsthand, trapped in his transient, and empty, hotel life.

What proves particularly interesting about this film, I argue, is that her indictment of postmodern Los Angeles, through a postmodern film aesthetic, ends by returning to a very modernist ethos that draws upon the trope of the hobo-hero. In a movie in which actual, transformative movement within society is shown to be impossible, the closest we get to redemption or transformation is a rejection of that society and the beginning of a journey toward an undisclosed destination. Upon Johnny's return to the Chateau, and Coppola's repetition of the empty shots of his empty life from the beginning of the film, the only sound we hear is that of the cars going by outside in the street. Wallowing in his own self-pity, and his own inability to cook a successful meal as his daughter had, he calls his daughter's mother in tears, complaining "I'm nothing. I'm not even a person". When she refuses to come over, but suggests that he should chase the prototypical Hollywood image of "volunteering", he hangs up and cries alone —unable to connect to any person and not satisfied by the suggestion he engage in an image-based activity meant to offer him direction. We then see Johnny drifting, à la *The*

Graduate's Benjamin Braddock,[12] alone, in the hotel pool, just as he had with his daughter previously. Unlike Braddock, however, he is allowed to drift entirely outside the frame. Next, he calls the front desk and informs the receptionist he is checking out but, as of yet, has no forwarding address. We then follow his car, and its engine, in tracking shots as he drives through the Los Angeles interstates, which slowly devolve, shot by shot, into locations that are more and more rural. Finally, we follow him as he drives on an empty two-lane road with nothing but fields and mountains as far as the eye can see. We hear the car's engine sputter and slowly run out of gas as he pulls over to the side of the road. He gets out of the Ferrari, and we hear the disturbing, off-putting noise of the car beeping at its lack of occupant with keys still in the ignition. Johnny then walks toward the horizon in a shot reminiscent of the end of *Modern Times* (as well as *Five Easy Pieces*[13]). As the film suddenly fades to black —Johnny still walking toward the horizon— a loud, upbeat, non-diegetic song (Phoenix's "Love Like a Sunset Part 2") immediately begins and takes over the scene's mood, dominating the spectator and seeming to offer redemption, as Johnny presumably continues to walk toward a destination that the narrative suggests not even he can know or understand. The film's sound and cinematography may ask the audience to find this action redemptive, but the film's narrative does not at any point provide a reason (or an answer) as to exactly *why* the spectator might feel moved in this way. It relies, as Coppola's films often do, entirely upon mood, and upon the spectator's assumed/implicit relationship to the American trope of the hobo-hero, which allows the mood at the end of the film to be so effective.

Coppola thus openly questions postmodernism's assertion that attempts to preserve authenticity are "neither possible nor desirable". By not showing, emphasizing, or showcasing any actual moment of transformation or connection —in fact she denies both— Coppola seems to accept the basic postmodern tenant that authenticity is impossible. That image is all. But, unlike Baudrillard, she refuses to accept that such surface imagery is a desirable destination. While the film's ending may well copy an *image* of authenticity borrowed from literature and film traditions, namely the ontology of the hobo-hero, Coppola's film seems wholly aware of that fact. The ending uses linear movement to defy the film's heretofore cyclical patterns, but Johnny's actions do not make logical sense within the narrative; even if one wants to chuck everything and begin a new life, one does not drive toward a horizon until the gas runs out and then proceed to walk toward that horizon. As such, the meaning of the ending (and of the film) can best be understood as a parable —a parable made richer because it is an allusion to such literary and filmic traditions and images. Yet, faced with a postmodern world in which *everything* is a shallow, baseless, non-redemptive image, this particular image, of a hobo-hero claiming to preserve a sense of integrated self by turning to a life of wandering, seems preferable to Coppola.

Johnny is not heroic, nor are we asked to completely identify with or admire his position. Instead, we are asked to empathize with him at a human level, and to find hope in his rejection of Los Angeles, the Chateau Marmont, and the society they embody. Marco's destination is unknown, the whole of the American continent lies before him, and the film does not offer any solution, other than the bleak, and nondescript, refusal of all that his society has to offer. He embodies the qualities of the hobo-hero, demonstrating the possibility that such an ontology still provides, insisting upon its continued pertinence to the American condition. His destination is, quite literally, 'some'where, or anywhere, other than the postmodern hell that is nowhere.

Notes

[1]. I would like to thank Ashlie Sponenberg, of the University of Massachusetts-Lowell, for her input on this project.

[2]. This quotation, along with all of the quotations I use from Berman, comes from Berman's preface to the Penguin edition published in 1988. I choose to draw from this later preface because it allows Berman to place his 1982 treatise on modernism in direct conversation with the postmodern theorists and philosophers that dominated the decade.

[3]. For example, to quote Peter Travers's positive review, Sofia Coppola "gives *Somewhere* the hypnotically deliberate pace of a European art film" (2010). Conversely, Tom Long's attack concedes "she manages to make it count for something in a totally oblique, European angst kind of way" and *Reel Review*'s James Berardinelli claims, "Coppola has strayed into an area of pretentiousness that we have rarely seen since the height of the French New Wave" (2010). Similar comments can be found in almost all reviews of the film.

[4]. For detailed examples and discussion of these responses, see both my article "Off with Hollywood's Head: Sofia Coppola as Feminine Auteur" (2010) and Belinda Smaill's "Sofia Coppola: Reading the Director" (2013).

[5]. For an example, see the writings of French immigrant, J. Hector St. John de Crèvecœur, who almost completely defined American identity by the fact that the only common factor to be found in a varied population was that all the inhabitants shared an uprooted history.

[6]. For just a few examples, consider Dos Passos's *Manhattan Transfer* (1925) and *U.S.A.* trilogy (1930, 1932, 1936), Steinbeck's *Travels with Charley* (1962), Faulkner's *Light in August* (1932), and Cather's *The Professor's House* (1925).

[7]. Made nine years after *The Jazz Singer* (1927), *Modern Times* is both a sound film and produced in the sound era. But it follows the aesthetics and structure of a silent film. However, while we do hear diagetic noise, the only spoken voices included in the film stem either from machines or machine-reproduced human voices, such as record players, radios, and a futuristic video/voice monitoring system the factory boss can use to spy on, and communicate with, his workers. The lone exception to this claim comes when Chaplin's character, in the penultamite scene, finds his "voice" as a performer, but what he utters is nonsensical and nontranslatable. In short, he discovers the words do not matter.

[8]. For just a few examples, consider DeLillo's *Underworld* (1997) and *Cosmopolis* (2003), McCarthy's *The Road* (2006), and Auster's *The Music of Chance* (1990).

[9]. Such themes are present in all of Coppola's films, but she returns to them most directly in her fifth feature film, *The Bling Ring* (2013).

[10]. This is particularly true of *Lost in Translation* and *Marie Antoinette*, films that both attempt to make us aware of our complicity in the male gaze. *Lost in Translation* opens with a close-up of Charlotte's (Scarlett Johansson) panty-clad rear end that lasts a full thirty-six seconds —long enough to become completely unnerving and awkward for the spectator. *Marie Antoinette* opens with the young Queen (Kirsten Dunst) reclining in a low-cut bustier and licking cake icing from her finger. At the precise moment she wholly embodies the object of "the gaze", Marie Antoinette breaks the filmic fourth wall and returns the gaze back to the spectator. She then cocks her head and gives him a quizzical look as if to ask "What are you looking at?". As with *Somewhere*'s opening shot, the scene is entirely removed from the rest of the narrative.

[11]. This scene has been the site of attack from critics who repeatedly claim it is too similar to *Lost in Translation*'s famous ending, in which the audience is unable to hear the words that Bob (Bill Murray) whispers in Charlotte's ear. The scene in *Somewhere*, however, works in a very contrary manner. In the former, the spectator is removed from the couple. What is shared between them cannot, the film implies, be translated to the specator/voyeur. It distances the spectator from the screen couple. In *Somewhere*, we hear precisely what Johnny says. It is Cleo, on screen, who cannot understand her father. This has the effect of assuring that the spectator's screen surrogate will remain Johnny, and emphasizes Johnny's lack of ability to connect or communicate.

[12]. The shots of Johnny drifting in the pool are a direct match for, and I would argue direct reference to, *The Graduate* — shot from the same angle and with the same tone. *The Graduate* is a film that is also about a protagonist who is "lost" and must search for identity, rejecting the images of identity with which he has been provided. *Somewhere*'s final scene, in which Johnny's car engine sputters as he runs out of gas, is also highly reminiscent of Benjamin Braddock's car running out of gas as he races to interrupt Elaine's wedding. And it is further worth noting that *The Graduate*'s opening sequence sets Braddock on a moving walkway that, because of the take, makes it seem as if he is not "getting anywhere".

[13]. *Somewhere*'s ending sequence seems a direct allusion to Bob Rafelson's *Five Easy Pieces*. In their final scene together Johnny and Cleo play ping-pong next to the pool reminiscent of multiple scenes in *Five Easy Pieces*, and the final sequence of Rafelson's film, in which Robert Dupea (Jack Nicholson) gives up all earthly possessions before hitchhiking on a logging truck headed toward an undetermined destination, is eerily similar to Coppola's. In fact, *Five Easy Pieces* is a great text for discussion of the ontology of the hobo-hero in its own right.

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BETWEEN A BUTTERFLY AND A CATHEDRAL: THE QUESTION OF ART IN BRIDESHEAD REVISITED BY EVELYN WAUGH

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Before he became a writer, Evelyn Waugh considered a career as a graphic artist. He became seriously interested in graphic design at Lancing and then, during his studies at Oxford, he designed book jackets and contributed prints to various periodicals. At that time, as Martin Stannard points out, "Waugh was committed to the idea of being an artist and was well-read in aesthetic theory" (1986: 88). After leaving Oxford he enrolled in an art school with the aim of becoming a professional artist. However, he eventually realized that his ambitions in this field were bigger than his talent and he reluctantly gave up his dream.[1]

When he finally became a writer, Waugh often drew on his knowledge of art and aesthetic theory, both in his novels and in his non-fiction. Art plays an important role in one of his most important works, *Brideshead Revisited*, whose protagonist, Charles Ryder, is a painter. Waugh used the novel to voice his reflections on aesthetic theory, especially his views concerning the value of art. The aim of this article is to examine these views through a close reading of key fragments of the novel dealing with the question of the meaning and function of art.

At the beginning of the main story told in the novel Charles is a student of history at Oxford and only vaguely thinks of becoming an artist. At Oxford he befriends Sebastian Flyte, who becomes a major driving force behind a change in his aesthetic views. After their first lunch together Sebastian takes Charles to the Botanical Gardens to "see the ivy". On returning to his rooms in college he "found them

exactly as I had left them that morning, I detected a jejune air that had not irked me before. What was wrong? Nothing except the golden daffodils seemed to be real. Was it the screen? I turned it face to the wall. That was better" (Waugh 2000: 35).[2] The gesture is symbolic, for the screen is painted by Roger Fry, who, along with Clive Bell (another of Charles's favourites), was the main champion of modern visual art in Great Britain and was especially associated with the theory of Significant Form, which Charles equates with modern aesthetics. Thus, with this gesture (which is still only instinctive) Charles repudiates not only one painting or one painter but a particular approach to art.

The theory of Significant Form, on which this approach is based, was put forward in Great Britain by Clive Bell in his *Art*. In this book, Bell wonders about the qualities common to several works of visual art, representative of various periods and various kinds of this art. After dismissing several ideas, he eventually comes to the conclusion that what these works have in common is "lines and colours combined in a particular way, certain forms and relations of forms", which have the power to stir "our aesthetic emotion. These relations and combinations of lines and colours, these aesthetically moving forms, I call 'Significant Form'; and 'Significant Form' is the one quality common to all works of visual art" (Bell 1914: Ch. I, para. 4).

Some time after their visit to the Botanical Gardens Sebastian attacks Bell directly. As Charles remembers, "it was not until Sebastian, idly turning the page of Clive Bell's *Art*, read: 'Does anyone feel the same kind of emotion for a butterfly or a flower that he feels for a cathedral or a picture? Yes. *I* do', that my eyes were opened" (30)[3]. This is essentially the reiteration of his first lesson in the Botanical Gardens, which Charles now seems to understand fully.[4] Although Charles does not explain what he saw with his open eyes, the nature of his new insight can be guessed at in the context of Bell's *Art*.

At one point Bell writes in his work: "what I call material beauty (e.g. the wing of a butterfly) does not move most of us in at all the same way as a work of art moves us. It is beautiful form, but it is not significant form. It moves us, but it does not move us aesthetically" (Bell 1914: Ch. III, para. 2). The reason why natural objects do not move us aesthetically is that they are "clogged with unaesthetic matter (e.g. associations)", which makes it difficult for us to enjoy their aesthetic form, whereas real works of art "have been so purified that we can feel them aesthetically" (Bell 1914: Ch. III, para. 7). That is, we can focus solely on their significant form.

With his eye-opening remark Sebastian admits that he appreciates art in the same way that he enjoys nature. Therefore, it could be guessed, unaesthetic matter is —at least— as important for him as the aesthetic form.[5] For Charles such an approach to art is completely different from what he had hitherto believed in, but

he has no difficulty in embracing it, as he has always been highly responsive to the beauty of nature.

First of all, it was his fondness for the gillyflowers under his ground-floor windows that made him refuse his cousin's advice to change his rooms —thanks to this decision he was to meet Sebastian several months later. In *The Life of Evelyn Waugh* D. L. Patey notes that Charles from the outset "possesses not only an intense sensitivity to beauty —to the beauty of fields and flowers, most often described as drenched in scent and rich in the colours white and gold, green and blue— but also an inchoate sense of natural beauty as a kind of gift or bounty" (2001: 234). Although it may be the converted Charles, narrating the story, who is responsible for conveying this transcendental sense of natural beauty, he is "drawing out notions already present, if unformed, in his earlier responses" (2001: 234). Given the fact that, at the beginning of the story, Charles is an agnostic, this transcendental sense of the beauty of nature, as pointing to something else, is not clearly associated by him with God, but he is nevertheless aware that there is something more to natural beauty than the pleasure of the senses.

That this is the case is made clear by an analysis of one change that Waugh made in the revised edition of *Brideshead Revisited*.[6] In the first edition Charles describes the day of his first visit to Brideshead as a time "when leaf and flower and bird and sun-lit stone and shadow seem all to proclaim the glory of God" (1999: 21). As it is difficult to believe that an agnostic would make such a remark, it must be the converted Charles who uses this expression when remembering the visit. But then, at this point of the novel, the agnosticism of the young Charles is not known to the reader, who might therefore assume that he believes in God. To avoid this ambiguity, in the revised edition Waugh changed the sentence. Now the day of his first visit is described as the time "when the ditches were creamy with meadowsweet and the air heavy with all the scents of summer; it was a day of peculiar splendour" (23). The beauty of nature as revealing the glory of God is replaced with the beauty of nature as evoking a peculiar splendour. This is, clearly, a rendering of the feelings of the young Charles —the converted would have referred to the glory of God.

Such a perception of nature —as having a peculiar splendour— is, according to Mircea Eliade, an echo of a religious attitude to nature in a desacralized world, an unclear feeling which is difficult to elucidate, and in which one can discern the memory of a degraded religious experience: "Experience of a radically desacralized nature is a recent discovery; moreover, it is an experience accessible only to a minority in modern societies, especially to scientists. For others, nature still exhibits a charm, a mystery, a majesty in which it is possible to decipher traces of ancient religious values" (1968: 151).

Interestingly, Eliade claims that one of the directions in which this desacralization of nature went was towards its aestheticization. He illustrates this movement with the example of Chinese miniature gardens, which at first had a strictly religious sense but which, in the 17th century, began to be treated as works of art by secular people. And although in China, according to Eliade, the aesthetic feeling always retains a religious dimension, "the example of the miniature gardens shows us in what direction and by what means the desacralization of the world is accomplished. We need only imagine what an aesthetic emotion of this sort could become in a modern society, and we shall understand how the experience of cosmic sanctity can be rarefied and transformed until it becomes a purely human emotion —that, for example, of art for art's sake" (154-155).

Sebastian's teachings are supposed to reverse this process. Although Sebastian is never explicit (evidently because his own knowledge is rather instinctive), and, at first, Charles does not clearly realize the direction in which he is being pushed, the rehabilitation of the beauty of nature makes him impatient with art for art's sake, and thus with modern aesthetics. Being dimly aware that nature owes its beauty to something beyond itself, he begins to look for something in art beyond its form, which could give it meaning.

Thus, already when he returns from the first lunch and the first lesson in the Botanical Gardens with Sebastian, he senses in his rooms a "jejune air" which did not irk him before. After a moment he guesses that it is Fry's screen that is responsible for this atmosphere and when he turns the screen to the wall he knows that he was right. He has realized that the painting is jejune; that is, it lacks substance. What could the substance that the painting lacks be? Paradoxically, the answer to this question may be found in the writings of Roger Fry himself, whose ideas on art were sometimes far closer to Sebastian's teachings than Charles (and Waugh himself) seemed to be aware of.

In *A Roger Fry Reader*, Christopher Reed argues that in Fry's critical texts there are inconsistencies which make "clear how far Fry was from the 'purely technical' and 'rigid doctrine of significant form' now attributed to him" (1996: 126) —for example, what Fry values in Cézanne is "the intensity and the spontaneity of his imaginative reaction to nature" (126). In general, Fry's texts promoting Post-Impressionism "demonstrate the tenaciousness of the old expressionistic vocabulary", while his reactions to competing avant-garde movements "document the overlapping of moral and aesthetic values that reveal Fry's formalism to be neither mechanical nor hermetic" (126). Thus, "it is only through the retrospective filter of formalism's later sway over the arts that Fry's tentative and inconsistent writings have come to seem systematic and rigid" (127). It seems that Charles makes the same mistake when, remembering his aesthetic education, he mentions "the puritanism of Roger Fry" (Waugh 2000: 79).

The fact is that Fry's response to Clive Bell's *Art* could open Charles's eyes as effectively as Sebastian's casual remark. In a review of *Art*, Fry identified a weakness in Bell's theory concerning the purposes of the artist and the expectations of the spectator. In his book, Bell claims that, "in the artist an inclination to play upon the emotions of life is often the sign of a flickering inspiration" (Bell 1914, Ch. I, para. 18), and that, once the artist's interest has been aroused, he should suppress these emotions in favour of provoking an aesthetic emotion, a failure to do which being "a sign of weakness in an artist" (Bell 1914, Ch. I, para. 18). The spectator should always focus only on the aesthetic emotions: "in the spectator the tendency to seek, behind form, the emotions of life is the sign of defective sensibility always" (Bell 1914, Ch. I, para. 18).[7]

In his review, Fry makes it clear that he does not agree with Bell's approach to art, for, according to him, in art there is something else besides Significant Form which gives it meaning: "why must the painter begin by abandoning himself to the love of God or man or Nature unless it is that in all art there is a fusion of something with form in order that form may become significant[?]" Fry claims that "this something, this x in the equation", which sometimes affects the spectator in a far stronger manner than the form, "might be of almost any conceivable nature", and he continues:

> I believe it would be possible, applying Mr. Bell's logical methods of deduction, to restate his answer to the inquiry what is common and peculiar to all works of art in some such way as this: The common quality is significant form, that is to say, forms related to one another in a particular manner, which is always the outcome of their relation to x (where x is anything that is not of itself form). (1996a: 160-161)

Fry believes that in art the end (that is, what motivates the artist and what is finally reflected in art) should be different from the means (the aesthetic form of the work). Obviously, in the case of painting this something to which the painter abandons himself, and which is different from the form, has to be reflected in what is represented in the painting.

When Charles turns Fry's painting face to the wall he no longer behaves like Bell's spectator, who seeks in a work of art only aesthetic emotions. He feels that the painting is responsible for the "jejune air" in the room. Fry's painting lacks substance, for it does not evoke anything outside itself. Using Bell's words, one could say that it is one of those works of art which "have been so purified that we can feel them aesthetically" (Bell 1914: Ch. III, para. 7). Thus Charles apparently sees the painting as a reflection of Bell's theory, an exemplary work of the "Significant Form" variety of art created to suppress in the spectator all feelings apart from the aesthetic emotion.

Sebastian's teachings are supposed to be aimed at making Charles sensitive to the extra-aesthetic qualities of art. He educates Charles not only by means of casual remarks, but also by inviting him to Brideshead, his family house. At Brideshead Charles becomes seriously engaged in the practice of art, and the success of these first attempts are evidently quite important in the forming of his later decision to become a professional painter.

Charles first visits Brideshead with Sebastian at the end of his first year at Oxford. This visit turns out to be very short, but he returns to Brideshead for his summer holidays. As he explores "the enchanted palace", as he calls Brideshead, at a leisurely pace, his aesthetic education continues, the education which Sebastian began by inviting him to see the ivy in the Botanical Gardens.

Although Charles is impressed with the whole house, it is the baroque fountain which is most important in the development of his artistic sensibility. Reflecting on the beauty of the fountain, Charles registers the development of his taste:

> Since the days when, as a schoolboy, I used to bicycle round the neighbouring parishes, rubbing brasses and photographing fonts, I had nursed a love of architecture, but, though in opinion I had made that easy leap, characteristic of my generation, from the puritanism of Ruskin to the puritanism of Roger Fry, my sentiments at heart were insular and medieval.
> This was my conversion to the Baroque. (79)

Thus, before his conversion to the Baroque, instigated by the fountain, there are three stages in the development of Charles's taste. It appears that the insular and medieval sentiments were the first —natural, as it were— stage, replaced later on a theoretical level by the puritanisms of Ruskin and Fry, but still constantly present "at heart". In 1954 Waugh described English taste in architecture, and this description clearly shows what Charles has in mind when he is reflecting on his insular and medieval sentiments: "English taste does not normally run to invention and display. We like, in our dwellings, dignity, repose and elegance. The Adams gave us just what Dr Johnson ordered. In our more fanciful, poetic moods we turn naturally to Gothic" (Waugh 1984: 459). Thus, according to Waugh the English usually like the dignity and elegance of the Adams, which were favoured by Dr Johnson. However, in more fanciful moods, they turn to Gothic, as, one can guess, it is a style which is 'wilder' in a Romantic way. And this is what Charles's sentiments were at heart, in spite of the fact that 'in opinion', that is, on the level of theoretical reasoning, he made this easy leap to the modernist puritanisms, following the fashion of the day.

Although the two aesthetic "puritanisms" represented by John Ruskin (1819-1900) and Roger Fry (1866-1934) were created in different centuries, it was not difficult, Charles claims, to leave Ruskin's for Fry's. In fact, Ruskin's theories anticipate those put forward in the early decades of the following century. In his

Seven Lamps of Architecture, Ruskin defines architecture as the art that "adorns the edifices raised by man for whatsoever uses". According to Ruskin, "the question of greatest external or internal decoration depends entirely on the conditions of probable repose" (Ruskin 1849: 119), because to contemplate beauty one needs time: "Wherever you can rest, there decorate; where rest is forbidden, so is beauty. You must not mix ornament with business, any more than you may mix play. Work first, and then rest" (115). Therefore, like the modernists over half a century later, Ruskin claims that functional buildings —or, in fact, any "things belonging to purposes of active and occupied life"— have no need of useless decoration (115).

The gap in the easy leap between Ruskin and Roger Fry mentioned by Charles seems to come from the fact that Ruskin defended the use of decoration in the case of houses, as they allow time for contemplation of beauty, but was against it in the case of functional buildings like banks and shops. Fry, on the other hand, saw no need for any categories in architecture such as the division into houses and functional buildings. He thought that all modern buildings should reflect the idea of functionalism and thus be free of unnecessary decoration.[8] In an article describing the house which he himself had designed —and which he obviously considered as a model to be imitated— Fry wrote: "The artistic or architectural part of this house was confined, then, merely to the careful choice of proportions within certain fixed limits defined by needs" (1920: 182).[9]

In this context the beauty of the fountain is for Charles "new-found":

> This was my conversion to the Baroque. Here under that high and insolent dome, under those coffered ceilings; here, as I passed through those arches and broken pediments to the pillared shade beyond and sat, hour by hour, before the fountain, probing its shadows, tracing its lingering echoes, rejoicing in all its clustered feats of daring and invention, I felt a whole new system of nerves alive within me, as though the water that spurted and bubbled among its stones, was indeed a life-giving spring. (79-80)

This is art: it represents life and nature, it has "this something" which makes it significant. There is no "jejune air" about the fountain and the contrast with the screen by Fry is obvious. The vitality of the Baroque overshadows even the insular and medieval sentiments that Charles has nurtured from his childhood. This is the style that lessons with Sebastian, beginning in the Botanical Gardens, prepared him for.

Art of the Baroque period was to a great extent a reflection of the spirit of the Counter Reformation, which sought to "brighten up the gloom of militant Catholicism, to enlist the senses in the propagation of the faith" (Hauser 1999: 110). Although austere Mannerism was chronologically closer to the peak of the Counter Reformation represented by the Council of Trent, it was only in the

voluptuous art of the Baroque period, more attractive to the masses, that the artistic programme of the Council was truly accomplished (Hauser 1999: 114). During the period of the Counter Reformation the theory of art also moved in the direction of closer ties with religion. Whereas during the Renaissance, nature was considered to be the source of the artistic form, the Mannerist art theorists introduced the view "that the true forms of things arise in the artist's soul as a result of his direct participation in the divine mind" (117). In other words "God creates an agreement between nature, which produces real things, and man, who brings forth works of art" (117). Giovanni Paolo Lomazzo, the greatest authority in matters of art theory during the period of Mannerism, desired "explicitly that the painter should seek the advice of theologians in the representation of religious subjects" (110). This attitude to art is certainly visible in the life of the Baroque master of the Counter Reformation, Gian Lorenzo Bernini, who "not only communicated twice a week, but, following the counsel of Ignatius, withdrew once a year into the solitude of a monastery, to devote himself to spiritual exercises" (170). And it was Bernini that Waugh had in mind when he was describing the fountain —in 1947 he wrote that he saw it as a combination of three famous works by Bernini (Patey 2001: 236)

In fact, it could be said that in *Brideshead Revisited* Charles's conversion to the Baroque parallels the conversion of Waugh himself, for whom, under the influence of his Oxford friend Harold Acton, the style "came to represent the last great international style in art that could bring rich variety of ornament into satisfying artistic wholeness, uniting integrity of design (as opposed to 'disintegration and diffusion') with fullness of representation" (Patey 2001: 12). But for Waugh the importance of styles went beyond aesthetic considerations: "His discussions with Acton (and Robert Byron) fostered a sense of period styles in the arts as expressions of each age's fundamental moral and intellectual commitments, which would lead in the novels to a dense symbolic shorthand whereby the style of a building becomes a clue to the mind of its owner, artistic taste an index of moral character" (12). This extra-aesthetic significance of the style of the fountain is suggested in *Brideshead Revisited* by Charles's comparison of the effect that the fountain has on him to that of a life-giving spring. For Charles, the beauty of the fountain apparently seems to point even beyond the world of nature which it renders so magnificently.

When Charles contemplates the fountain as a life-giving spring its spiritual significance, although tangible, is still veiled for him. The attentive reader, however, can try at this point to make an educated guess at what is hidden behind the veil. According to Patey, Charles's openness to the Baroque "signals an openness to the values that inform it, his artistic 'conversion' prefiguring his later religious

conversion" (236). For Waugh, the Baroque is the manner of the Catholic Counter-Reformation (236). Waugh underlined this aspect of the style of the fountain, when he admitted that he saw the fountain as modeled on works by Bernini (236). As Patey indicates, in "Converted to Rome" Waugh identifies the age of classicism —the period following the Baroque— "as an age of 'polite and highly attractive scepticism', the time when the erosion of Christian faith really began" (78). Thus, for Waugh, the Baroque clearly indicates the end of a truly Christian epoch in Europe.[10]

However, although Charles feels himself very near heaven during that summer, he is an avowed agnostic and does not seem inclined to connect the style of the fountain with religious issues. Nevertheless, when Sebastian's older brother, Brideshead, and his ten-year-old sister, Cordelia, visit the estate, one of the conversations which starts with religious matters leads on into the sphere of art. During dinner, Bridey reveals to Sebastian that the Bishop wants to close the chapel at Brideshead. And then he surprises Charles with a question about the chapel:

> '[…] You are an artist, Ryder, what do you think of it aesthetically?'
>
> 'I think it's *beautiful*', said Cordelia with tears in her eyes.
>
> 'Is it Good Art?'
>
> 'Well, I don't quite know what you mean', I said warily. 'I think it's a remarkable example of its period. Probably in eighty years it will be greatly admired.'
>
> 'But surely it can't be good twenty years ago and good in eighty years, and not good now?'
>
> 'Well, it may be *good* now. All I mean is that I don't happen to like it much.'
>
> 'But is there a difference between liking a thing and thinking it good?'
>
> 'Bridey, don't be so Jesuitical', said Sebastian, but I knew that this disagreement was not a matter of words only, but expressed a deep and impassable division between us; neither had any understanding of the other, nor ever could.
>
> 'Isn't that just the distinction you made about wine?'
>
> 'No. I like and think good the end to which wine is sometimes the means —the promotion of sympathy between man and man. But in my own case it does not achieve that end, so I neither like it nor think it good for me.'
>
> 'Bridey, do stop.'
>
> 'I'm sorry', he said, 'I thought it rather an interesting point'. (89-90)

The point is interesting indeed. Charles does not like the chapel, built in the art nouveau style, but apparently at first he does not want to disappoint his hosts —particularly Cordelia— so in his first answer he assumes (evasively or cynically) that the value of art is identical with its popularity. In the modern world, styles go

in and out of fashion, and the fact that a style is currently out of fashion does not mean that it is bad. Charles's scorn for such an approach to art is more clearly seen when over a year later he tells Sebastian about his experiences of the art school in Paris which he attends after leaving Oxford: "'They never go near the Louvre', I said, 'or, if they do, it's only because one of their absurd reviews has suddenly "discovered" a master who fits in with that month's aesthetic theory'" (147).

But Bridey is clearly not to be fobbed off with such an answer. With his back to the wall, Charles makes a clean breast of his dislike for the chapel, but simultaneously he concedes that it may be good art. Obviously this "may" means that he himself is not able to evaluate the chapel. His notion of the value of art is clearly different here from that in his first answer —his tentative "may" certainly does not reflect the fact that art nouveau is not popular at the time. So, there must be some other general standard according to which one may evaluate art and clearly Charles is not sure about using this standard. This standard is, of course, what he has learnt from Sebastian. His understanding of it is still based on intuition rather than on a stable conceptual framework, but he is aware that art should point to something else beyond itself. Or, to use Fry's terminology, he is aware that good art should first of all point to this something which motivated the artist. In the case of Fry's painting of the Provençal landscape on the screen, Charles knew what he should expect. Now the situation is different —the chapel is a piece of religious art and Charles, as an agnostic, feels that he may not be in a position to evaluate it.

What puzzles Bridey, however, is the idea that one may dislike a thing, and still think that it may be good. As Charles himself answers his doubts with a question, Bridey clarifies his own point of view using wine as an example. And here the distinction between means and ends is vital. What for Bridey is of greatest importance is the end a thing serves. If he considers this end good, he likes the means; that is, the thing itself. What is significant here is that the quality of the thing itself seems unimportant to him. If wine achieved a good end for him then he would probably like it, regardless of its taste. Thus his dislike for wine does not indicate a dislike for the taste of wine, but for the effect it has on him. Hence he does not see the difference between liking a thing and thinking it good.

Thus, when he asks Charles for his opinion of the chapel, he does not seek an opinion about a means (the chapel as an aesthetic object) to an end which he considers good (the religious function of the chapel). When he thought the chapel was needed, he probably did not think its aesthetic aspect important on its own —it was serving a good end. Now that he is no longer sure about its religious ends, Bridey is at a loss about the means; that is, its aesthetic side.[11] He wonders if, after being closed for religious services, the chapel could be worth anything on its own.

Thus, he asks Charles about the aesthetic side of the chapel as an end in itself, not as a means. The answer that he expects from Charles is the answer of an adherent of the modern approach to art —art for art's sake. Here the aesthetic level of a work of art —the means— is an end in itself. The reason behind Charles's initial hesitation is that Bridey asks two questions that could be interpreted differently. He first asks: What do you think of it aesthetically? And then: Is it good art? For the follower of the art for art's sake theory, the two questions have the same meaning. But for someone who seeks in art something beyond aesthetic impression, these are two different questions. At first, Bridey assumes that Charles is in the former category. It is only when, some time later, he returns to their discussion that he realizes that Charles does not approach art in this way: "'Of course, you are right really', he said. 'You take art as a means not as an end. That is strict theology, but it's unusual to find an agnostic believing it'" (91).

Two things are apparent in this statement. First, that Bridey eventually agrees with Charles that acknowledging good ends does not always imply a liking for the means —and vice versa. This is why he says that Charles is really right. But what is also evident in his words is that Bridey thinks that, in modern times, only religious people do not approach art with the notion of art for art's sake. This is why he says that it is unusual to find an agnostic believing that in art the means are different from the ends. To return to Fry's definition of art, Bridey would think that if an artist is motivated by something other than the aesthetic form of his work itself (the means), that motivation must always be love of God (to use Fry's example), or any other acknowledgement of the spiritual dimension of the world (the ends —that is, what motivates the artist— are always spiritual).

In his later career as a painter, Charles will most often be motivated by his love of architecture —but not as seen in its transcendental dimension. The end of his art —the expression of his love for architecture— will not be spiritual, although it will be different from the means —the aesthetic form of his painting. Thus, Bridey's conclusion will not apply to him. However, although Charles will have problems with realizing it, he will feel inspiration and will be creating truly good art only when he is motivated by the spiritual dimension of architecture and the world —even if perceived only instinctively. Further discussion with Bridey could shed some light on his understanding of art, but Charles is clearly not willing to delve into the problem at that moment.

The next lesson that he has the chance to learn comes again from the Flytes, this time from Cordelia. After the death of Lady Marchmain, Lord Marchmain decides to sell Marchmain House in London to balance the family budget and Bridey asks Charles to paint the house before it is sold. Charles readily agrees —this is to be his first commission.

When he gets down to work, he is surprised by the pace at which he paints: "I was normally a slow and deliberate painter; that afternoon and all next day, and the day after, I worked fast. I could do nothing wrong" (210). The way in which he works is an echo not only of the way in which he drew the fountain during his first summer at Brideshead, when, "by some odd chance, for the thing was far beyond [him, he] brought it off", but also of the way in which he worked during the same summer on his first oil painting, when "the brush seemed somehow to do what was wanted of it" (80). This painting was immediately followed by another, which, in contrast to the first, was a failure. It is in the difference between these two paintings, to which Charles brought the same technical skills, that important hints as to the nature of his occasional mysterious successes may be found.

He paints the two pictures on the empty panels of the rococo decorated walls of one of the rooms opening on the colonnade. The first of these paintings is a romantic landscape: "It was a landscape without figures, a summer scene of white cloud and blue distances, with an ivy-clad ruin in the foreground, rocks and a waterfall affording a rugged introduction to the receding parkland behind" (80). The other is a "fête champêtre with a ribboned swing and a Negro page and a shepherd playing the pipes" (80). The themes seem to be similar, but this similarity is only apparent. The first picture is, in fact, an imaginative rendering of the house at Brideshead and its surroundings, and thus of the enchanted palace in which he lives. The ivy-clad ruin is the house itself (the ivy symbolising Sebastian and his teachings), and the rocky waterfall is evidently the fountain with its life-giving spring. It is his spiritual perception of the place which helps him to paint the picture, which creates this "luck and the happy mood of the moment" (80) to which he attributes his success —in the same way as his spiritual perception created an "odd chance" which helped him to draw the fountain.[12] On the other hand, the second painting, the "fête champêtre", is, as Charles himself admits, an "elaborate pastiche" —its source is not spiritual perception, but an attempt to imitate a particular type of painting. Left with his meagre technical skills, he inevitably fails.

When he paints the Marchmain House several years later his work again seems better than he expected. Thus, again, it must be the spiritual dimension of the house which he senses —this is, after all, the second home of Sebastian— and which influences his work. Unfortunately, Charles once more misinterprets the sources of his mysterious achievement. This time it is not an odd chance or luck which he deems responsible for the infallibility of his work but his own improving technique. And he revels in his skill —when on the last day of his work Cordelia says: "It must be lovely to be able to do that", he simply answers: "It is" (210).

But during his subsequent conversation with Cordelia he is given another hint of the real source of his success. Cordelia tells him about the closing of the chapel at Brideshead after her mother's Requiem, which was the last mass said there:

> After she was buried the priest came in —I was there alone. I don't think he saw me— and took out the altar stone and put it in his bag; then he burned the wads of wool with the holy oil on them and threw the ash outside; he emptied the holy-water stoop and blew out the lamp in the sanctuary, and left the tabernacle open and empty, as though from now on it was always to be Good Friday. I suppose none of this makes any sense to you, Charles, poor agnostic. I stayed there till he was gone, and then, suddenly, there wasn't any chapel there any more, just an oddly decorated room. (211-212)

In *The Production of Space*, Henri Lefebvre points out the complex character of what he calls absolute space —that is, social space invested with spiritual meaning. Such space, according to Lefebvre, is simultaneously mental and real:

> There is thus a sense in which the existence of absolute space is purely mental, and hence "imaginary". In another sense, however, it also has a social existence, and hence a specific and powerful "reality". The "mental" is "realized" in a chain of "social" activities because, in the temple, in the city, in monuments and palaces, the imaginary is transformed into the real. (1991: 251)[13]

If the imaginary can be "realized" in a chain of "social" activities, it can also be "de-realized". This is why Cordelia is so acutely aware of the difference after observing the priest deconsecrating the chapel. The space is no longer invested by her with symbolic meaning and it becomes an oddly decorated room.

> The experience is important to her, and she wants to convey its nature to Charles:
>
> 'I can't tell you what it felt like. You've never been to Tenebrae, I suppose?'
>
> 'Never.'
>
> 'Well, if you had you'd know what the Jews felt about their temple. "Quomodo sedet sola civitas" […] it's a beautiful chant. You ought to go once, just to hear it'. (212)

The chant *Quomodo sedet sola civitas* sung at matins on Maundy Thursday is in fact Jeremiah's lament for the destruction of the Temple: "How the city sits empty, that once was full of people", and it refers to situations in which space has been suddenly deprived of the spiritual dimension, and so is an ideal illustration of Cordelia's feelings about the contrast between the chapel and the oddly decorated room. If he understood this contrast Charles would understand the imaginary/spiritual dimension of space, and would thus understand that all his mysterious successes originated in his ability to sense this dimension.

But intoxicated with what he believes to be his growing mastery of art, Charles dismisses what Cordelia says as another attempt to convert him. And when she begins to talk about vocation he thinks:

> But I had no patience with this convent chatter. I had felt the brush take life in my hand that afternoon; I had had my finger in the great, succulent pie of creation. I was a man of the Renaissance that evening —of Browning's renaissance. I, who had walked the streets of Rome in Genoa velvet and had seen the stars through Galileo's tube, spurned the friars, with their dusty tomes and their sunken, jealous eyes and their crabbed hair-splitting speech. (213)

This is clearly the reiteration of his wish to live in the world of three dimensions, expressed a few years earlier, when he was leaving Brideshead in disgrace with Lady Marchmain. Then he thought that to live in such a world was a sign of maturity. Now he also believes that the three-dimensional world is best suited to an artist.

The next ten years of his professional life show him how wrong he was. Encouraged by the success of his paintings of Marchmain House, he becomes an architectural painter. He loves architecture, but it is a love of the building seen in three dimensions, a love of its aesthetic qualities. Such an approach to architecture is most common in the modern world, and Charles becomes a prosperous painter. He himself, however, slowly begins to realize that there is nothing to distinguish him as an artist, except his growing skill and enthusiasm for his subject: "as the years passed, I began to mourn the loss of something I had known in the drawing-room of Marchmain House and once or twice since, the intensity and singleness and the belief that it was not all done by hand —in a word, the inspiration" (216). At last he understands that the ease with which he painted Marchmain House was not the result of his growing skill but of inspiration. But the source of this inspiration still remains a mystery to him.

Charles eventually returns to Brideshead, but even here, at first, he cannot break from the routine of seeing everything from a purely aesthetic perspective. During his sea voyage home from America, where he vainly sought inspiration, Charles meets Sebastian's sister Julia and falls in love with her. Both Charles and Julia are married at the time, but are no longer in love with their unfaithful spouses, Celia and Rex, both of whom are firmly anchored in the world of three dimensions. After their return Julia and Charles settle at Brideshead and try to find happiness in their life, ignoring Rex, who also lives there, and the parties he throws with his war-minded friends.

Charles soon realizes that Julia makes a graceful subject for painting: "I never tired of painting her, forever finding in her new wealth and delicacy" (263). One evening, when he learns that Charles is painting his sister, Bridey notes that it is "a change from architecture and much more difficult" (268). The point is, however, that Charles's pictures of Julia do not reflect such a difficult change as Bridey has in mind. A moment later Bridey says that if he himself were a painter, he would

paint "subjects with plenty of action in them like…" Waiting for him to finish the sentence, Charles summarily reviews various clichéd subjects: "What, I wondered was coming? The Flying Scotsman? The Charge of the Light Brigade? Henley Regatta? Then surprisingly he said: '[…] like Macbeth'". The contrast between what Charles expects and what Bridey has in mind is surprising, for it seems that for Bridey action refers more to what happens in the human soul than to what happens on a battlefield. And Charles is no longer condescending, as he reflects about Bridey: "Though we often laughed at him, he was never wholly ridiculous; at times he was even formidable" (269).

Charles is impressed with Bridey's subject matter because he himself does not use art to penetrate the human soul —the wealth and delicacy that he finds painting Julia is rather that of her physical appearance. Although there is no description of any of his paintings of Julia, his approach to her as his subject matter may be guessed from the way he looks at her on the terrace, an hour or so before talking to Bridey:

> I had carried two garden cushions from the shelter of the colonnade and put them on the rim of the fountain. There Julia sat, in a tight little gold tunic and a white gown, one hand in the water idly turning an emerald ring to catch the fire of the sunset; the carved animals mounted over her dark head in a cumulus of green moss and glowing stone and dense shadow, and the waters round them flashed and bubbled and broke into scattered flames. (264)

The passage reads almost as a description of a painting which Charles might paint. And here Julia, or rather her physical beauty, clearly fuses with the beauty of the fountain. She seems to be a detail in an architectural composition. Significantly, this is again the fountain, but there is no sign of a life-giving spring this time, only glittering impressions. While once his artistic sensitivity allowed him to glimpse life beyond art, now, after ten dead years of routine, it seems to reduce life to an aesthetic object.

Even when Julia breaks down after Bridey has accused her of living in sin, Charles, confused, tries to reduce what she is going through to an aesthetic experience —he tells her that she reminds him of a Pre-Raphaelite picture "The Awakened Conscience".[14] And when she accuses him of equating her conscience with a picture, he simply answers "It's a way I have" (277). This declaration indicates clearly that reducing life to aesthetic dimensions has become his routine.

When mortally ill Lord Marchmain returns to Brideshead after many years of self-imposed exile in Italy, Charles's three-dimensional, aesthetic vision of the world finds an unexpected and powerful ally. Immediately after his arrival, the marquess arranges his bedroom in a truly grandiose way. When the room is ready he calls Charles and tells him "You might paint it, eh —and call it the *Death Bed?*" (303).

Like Charles, the Marquess tries to reduce things which escape his understanding to an aesthetic experience. But he also seems to deal in this way with more down-to-earth problems. His idea of leaving Brideshead to Julia —who, according to him is "so beautiful always; much, much more suitable" (306)— and not to the self-righteous Bridey and his unattractive wife, also appears to be based on an aesthetic principle.

But if Lord Marchmain is his ally in the three-dimensional world, his death finally makes Charles acknowledge the spiritual dimension of the world. When Marchmain's condition deteriorates, Charles consistently opposes the idea of calling in a priest for someone who rejected religion a long time ago. It is once again the agnostic who speaks through him, but he also senses a danger for his relationship with Julia. However, when, after one unsuccessful attempt, the priest is sent for once more, Charles follows him and Julia to Lord Marchmain's room. There, "moving from the double conditionals of his first, agnostic prayer to the desire for an answer to another's prayer to a direct and unconditional petition from his own need" (Davis 1990: 129), Charles undergoes a miraculous change. When Lord Marchmain makes the sign of the cross, acknowledging God's grace, a phrase comes back to Charles from his childhood "of the veil of the temple being rent from top to bottom" (322). He is finally able to see clearly the spiritual dimension of the world.

Waugh does not reveal the influence of Charles's conversion on his artistic career. He just makes it clear that Charles's final understanding of the existence of the spiritual dimension of the world has not been reached through art. In this way, the whole novel seems to suggest that art may point to the existence of this dimension, but in the modern world it is extremely difficult to interpret the hints correctly. Art —even if it is helpful— is not essential for this understanding, which is ultimately attained through the workings of providence. And it should not be essential, for in the modern world, as the novel indicates in the epilogue, the kinds of art which are conducive to the awareness of the existence of the spiritual in the world are doomed to obliteration.

Notes

[1]. Using Waugh's diaries, Stannard describes the moment of decision in the following way: "he came 'to the conclusion that it is not possible to lead a gay life and draw well'. Accepting painfully that he would never draw well, he chose the gay life" (1986: 102).

[2]. All references in the text are to this edition, unless specified otherwise.

[3]. Bell's idea of an essential difference between the appreciation of nature and the appreciation of art is not revolutionary, as it closely resembles reflections of Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten, who in 1735 repudiated in his dissertation "the claim that the pleasure we take in a poem or a painting is not so very different from our enjoyment of the smell of a rose or the taste of a good glass of wine" (Harries 1997: 21).

[4]. In the novel, because of the disrupted time sequence, it is the eye-opening remark that appears first, without any comment, and only some time later does Charles return to his first lesson in the Botanical Gardens, which now seems to be an illustration for Sebastian's eye-opening claim.

[5]. The eye-opening remark could be interpreted in a different way. In this interpretation Sebastian would be one of those rare people who, according to Bell, are able to see in natural things their pure formal significance —in spite of all this clogging with unaesthetic matter. However, further analysis of the novel makes it clear that such an interpretation would be incorrect.

[6]. The revised edition was published in 1960 in Great Britain. In the United States the original version is still the basis for new editions of the novel.

[7]. In the Epilogue to "The Origin of the Work of Art" Heidegger writes about such an attitude to art: "Aesthetics takes the work of art as an object, the object of *aisthesis*, of sensuous apprehension in the wild sense. Today we call this apprehension experience. The way in which man experiences art is supposed to give information about its nature. Experience is the source that is standard not only for art appreciation and enjoyment, but also for artistic creation. Everything is an experience. Yet perhaps experience is the element in which art dies. The dying occurs so slowly that it takes a few centuries" (Heidegger 2001: 77).

[8]. There is a difference between Ruskin and Fry concerning the idea of beauty: for the latter beauty does not have its source in decoration, but in a clear expression of function and the right proportions of buildings (Fry 1996b: 218-221). Therefore, for Fry, even a building deprived of decoration can be beautiful.

[9]. In the context of Fry's review of Bell's *Art* one could say that this relationship between proportions and needs, between form and function, would be responsible for the impact of the building as a work of art. Waugh, however, did not like such an approach to architecture, which he associated primarily with Le Corbusier, the most extreme advocate of the idea of functionalism, who notoriously claimed that "the house is a machine for living in" (Le Corbusier 2008: 160). Otto Silenus, modelled on Le Corbusier, says in Waugh's *Decline and Fall*: "The only perfect building must be the factory, because that is built to house machines, not men. I do not think it is possible for domestic architecture to be beautiful, but I am doing my best" (Waugh 1937: 120).

[10]. In fact, it could be said that in his work Waugh himself was following in the footsteps of the Baroque masters. As Michael Brennan notices, Waugh "genuinely regarded his career as an author as a Christian vocation and with missionary zeal viewed his pen as a means of asserting Divine authority over a world which had descended into the hands of barbarian hordes" (Brennan 2013: 96). In one of his magazine articles written in late 1940s he also "explained how the blended integrity of his art and religious belief in his post-*Brideshead* writing would provide the foundations of his literary creativity" (96).

[11]. Almost the same situation appears when Marchmain House is to be sold. When Bridey tells Charles that the house is going to be pulled down to make place for a block of flats, Charles remarks:

> 'What a sad thing.'
>
> 'Well, I'm sorry of course. But you think it good architecturally?'
>
> 'One of the most beautiful houses I know.'
>
> 'Can't see it. I've always thought it rather ugly. Perhaps your pictures will make me see it differently.' (209)

For the two of them the destruction of the house is a sad thing, but for different reasons. For Charles it would be the destruction of one of the most beautiful houses he knows. For Bridey, the destruction of one of his two homes. Bridey liked the house, but again because it served a good end —it was his home. The means —the architectural side— were not important to him. And again, when the end ceases to exist, Bridey begins to wonder about the quality of the means. The fact that he has always considered the house rather ugly indicates Bridey's complete lack of sensitivity to worldly beauty. This is why during their conversation about the chapel Charles reflected that neither of them had any understanding of the other nor ever could reach such an understanding.

[12]. That the experience of Brideshead by the young Charles should be seen on spiritual level is suggested also by the converted Charles, who narrates the story, when he describes this experience in the following way: "Perhaps in the mansions of Limbo the heroes enjoy some such compensation for their loss of the Beatific Vision; perhaps the Beatific Vision itself has some remote kinship with this lowly experience". And the young Charles, although far from literalness, sees the experience in similar terms: "I, at any rate, believed myself very near heaven, during those languid days at Brideshead" (77).

[13]. There is also, of course, the third sense of absolute space —the physical place.

[14]. The picture is, according to R. M. Davis, "an example of Victorian camp without spiritual dimension" (Davis 1990: 117).

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THE PATRIARCH'S BALLS: CLASS CONSCIOUSNESS,VIOLENCE, AND DYSTOPIA IN GEORGE SAUNDERS' VISION OF CONTEMPORARY AMERICA

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> Every day I understand more deeply how violent we are.
> Violent to others and violent to ourselves.
>
> (Olmstead 2013)

In late 19th Century America, the Patriarch's Balls united the wealthy New York elite. The Society of the Patriarch organized lavish balls to foster a sense of self-satisfaction at belonging to the society of "The Four Hundred", namely those who mattered as against the rest who plainly did not. In 21st Century America, the tables have been turned and the class-conscious are less able to enjoy the fruits of their labor sans guilt (or the realization of a nasty pun). As Slavoj Žižek asserts in *Violence: Six Sideways Reflections*, contemporary America's "culture of capital" is marked by the systemic violence that allows the West to maintain its First World status and North American writer George Saunders, for one, knows it. This paper will look at how Saunders returns to those East Coast, greater New York communities in the 21st Century, communities that are now more egalitarian and "open" yet just as concerned about keeping up with the Joneses. Writing their stories with a dystopic twist, he intimately explores the anxieties that plague their communities, while also maintaining a sense of the universal in his work that allows for its wider interpretation and relevance to the American national identity in general. Saunders writes as the moral compass of a community that while successful

according to American standards cannot help but feel all the dirtier after "the help" have cleaned the kitchen. In this paper we will discuss some of the techniques Saunders uses to explain the violence at the heart of American life, from the most obvious —the image of the Semplica Girl— to his more subtle use of analogy, co-opted discourse, and embedded narrative. Drawing on Slavoj Žižek's tripartite notion of violence, this paper reveals how the Saunders short story "The Semplica Girl Diaries" engages with the latent violence inherent in America's post-colonial capitalist system. The paper aims to show that Saunders' figure of the Semplica Girl metonymically embodies the violence of outsourced slave labor while invoking colonialist America; whereas, Saunders' protagonist is the fruit of a moronic confluence of modern-day liberal guilt and historical colonialist desire.

"The Semplica Girl Diaries" tells the story of a few unusual weeks in the life of a petit-bourgeois American family whose class anxiety leads them to fear not meeting the expectations of their community. That is until they win "TEN GRAND" from a scratch-off lottery ticket and can join the Establishment in their dystopic admiration of the Semplica Girls. Narrating the story in his diaries is the naïve, but caring family guy who "having just turned forty […] embark[s] on grand project of writing every day in this new black book just got at OfficeMax" (Saunders 2013: 109). After this characteristically satirical yet realistic point of departure Saunders reveals the budding writer's motives: a desire to share with future generations, family and otherwise, what life "was really like" (2013: 109). However, just two pages later the unnamed narrator hides the discovery of a "dead large mouse or small squirrel crawling with maggots" in his family garage (2013: 111). Hiding certain ugly truths is merely another chore that is necessary to maintain the discourse of optimism, a discourse essential to the American psyche and its uncanny ability to normalize the absurd. Shortly after, the narrator also hides a subsequent moment of sadness looking at his house, feeling it inadequate (2013: 112). This feeling of inadequacy will persist and become essential to the conflict as it provides impetus for the family's hegemonic aspirations, or social striving. In fact, it is the confluence of the protagonist's feelings of inadequacy (as a father) and a familial urge to "keep up with the Jones" that leads him to the Semplica Girls. In the book *Violence and the Sacred*, René Girard unpacks the mimetic nature of desire, which he claims is always "directed toward an object desired by [a] model" (1972: 147). The lavish and over-the-top birthday party of their daughter's classmate becomes the scene of the narrator's initial identification with a model worthy of his desire. Finding the family, their home, and their garden enviable the narrator adopts the patriarch of the wealthier family of "refined taste" as the center of his own mimetic desire. The scene also becomes the location for the initial encounter with the Semplica Girls (though Saunders does not initially reveal what they are) which the narrator then incorporates as the object to be

mimetically desired. Recounting the party, the protagonist writes, "Very depressing birthday party today at home of Lilly's friend Leslie Torrini. House is mansion where Lafayette once stayed: now their 'Fun Den'" (2013: 113). Soon after, he sums up the experience feeling pathetic: "Do not really like rich people, as they make us poor people feel dopey and inadequate. Not that we are poor. I would say that we are middle. We are very very lucky. I know that. But still…" (2013: 119). In this way readers are introduced to an unreliable narrator inhabiting an ominously recognizable world of bourgeoisie America, concerned with maintaining appearances and feeling the ravenous pull of mimetic desire, the urge to "keep up with the Joneses".

As a point of departure and for the sake of clarity it is necessary to further discuss Saunders and class representation. It is important to note that while the affluence of the families represented in the Saunders short story "The Semplica Girl Diaries" is moderate compared to the families of the Patriarch's Balls: the comparison of the naivety with which prior generations of Americans enjoyed their wealth to today's sense of self-aware guilt is telling as it marks a critical change in American culture (and perhaps in Western culture in general). Most critics categorize Saunders as essentially a writer of working class Middle America, or, pursuing that line of thought, the direct descendent of Ray Carver or better yet, Kurt Vonnegut —inheriting their literary project. However, that would be a gross simplification of what Saunders does. As did Toni Morrison, Thomas Pynchon, Don DeLillo, and Cormac McCarthy, Saunders continues to grapple with America's violent imagination, a mythology astutely articulated by American intellectual Richard Slotkin when he pronounced, "that the myth of regeneration through violence [was] the structuring metaphor of the American experience" (1973: 5). As critics David Rando and Sarah Pogell have pointed out, aesthetically, Saunders borrows and assembles techniques from both high and low art, from both realism and postmodernism. Thematically, he is able to encompass the sliding scale that is class in First World countries, as well. So that even though one might argue that "The Semplica Girl Diaries" is another story representing the middle class, that would be an error, as the story in great measure problematizes class in America and in the First World in so far as Saunders endeavors to establish the relativity of socioeconomic standing not only within America's boundaries, contrasting one family's expectations to another's, but also peripherally by making comparisons with the others who populate and work at the margins.

To speak meaningfully about those who 'work at the margins,' it is helpful to have a term with which to synthesize the presence of the Semplica Girls in the story. In sociology as well as in conflict and peace studies, we often find the term 'structural violence' cropping up in the research papers. As used by peace studies scholar

Johan Galtung, it signifies the presence of violence arbitrated without a clear actor and thus may also include or refer to institutional violence, cultural violence, or social injustice. While this term is certainly useful and has since its penning promoted the burgeoning of various fields of study in the Humanities and Social Sciences focused on structural violence as pertaining to gender, class, and race, it will not be the preferred term for the current paper. We will be using a term that takes as its point of departure structural violence but is more astute when it comes to naming the author of this violence. Like 'structural violence', Slavoj Žižek's "systemic violence" refers to forms of 'objective violence'[1] that while not necessarily visible, hold sway over society to a large extent through its systems and institutions. Nevertheless, Žižek moves quickly to specify the actor of this violence as Capitalism. Žižek explains systemic violence as: "the often catastrophic consequences of the smooth functioning of our economic and political systems" (2008: 2). A few pages later Žižek clarifies, "[it is] the violence inherent in a system: not only direct physical violence, but also the more subtle forms of coercion that sustain relations of domination and exploitation, including the threat of violence" (2008: 8). While both Žižek and Galtung go far towards identifying the insidious presence of a supposedly invisible violence, it is Saunders' story that provides a more tangible representation of systemic violence. His Semplica Girls (SGs) are a clear and palpable embodiment of systemic violence in short story form. This point of departure implies a certain kind of reading; and our particular take on the story is that it can be best read through the guise of a "cultural artifact" or "socially symbolic act" in the sense that Fredric Jameson so infamously upholds in *The Political Unconscious*, claiming that "there is nothing that is not social and historical —indeed, that everything is 'in the last analysis political'" (1981: 5). Clearly, Saunders' story is neither the first nor the last analysis of its kind and many narratives have related the exploits of colonialism, exploitation, and the domination of one culture or worldview over another. Nevertheless, Saunders joins the ranks of the few who have undertaken such an analysis from a locus within the dominant country and with such a touching and profoundly prosaic simplicity. He has already spawned look-alikes, e.g. Charles Yu. The SGs are literally the metonymic representation of the commodification of life and living beings by and through capitalism. The girls strewn on the line are a part alluding to the whole of the history and actuality of migrant/illegal/slave labor and the subjugation of marginal bodies for the use and benefit of the dominant classes —a part of what Foucault refers to as "the asymmetries of power" (1975: 223). Later on in the analysis the implications of the girls' status as beings quite literally "strewn on a line" will be unpacked. For now, as in the story structure developed by Saunders himself, a sense of their looming and mysterious presence here will have to suffice. The family, on the other hand, is at times victim of and at other times beneficiary of Pierre

Bourdieu's "symbolic violence". That is, the power and honor mistakenly ascribed to status when its real source is economic and cultural capital and it authorizes the perpetuation of its practices and resulting stratification of the social space (Weininger 2002: 145). They are victims and perpetuators of what critic Ana Manzanas calls "the society of sameness and accumulation" in which the SGs represent the "dominant model of life" as much as, if not more than, their predecessor, "the assembly line of the early decades of the twentieth century" (2014: 5-6).

Aesthetically, "The Semplica Girl Diaries" works on readers in ways subtle and yet jolting. Saunders employs a variety of techniques to reveal the violent 'heart of darkness' at the opaque center of affluent American life. This opacity shows as in a glass darkly a narcissistic America that finds itself embarrassingly impotent to adjust or deflect the reflection away from its unwanted margins. Similarly, the narrator in the story is unable to maintain the discourse of optimism however hard he tries. Although obfuscated this mirror represents a growing postmodern sense of self-awareness about inequality and violence in the North Atlantic societies, a subject we return to later in this paper. To make matters worse, this violence is accepted, though considered deplorable, because it is the very system upon which America was and is constructed. This appears in "The Semplica Girl Diaries" via the threatening presence of a sub-textual narrative —a doppelganger narrative of violence and fear— juxtaposed with the story being told, lurking just below the surface at the level of the subconscious like a nightmare, or at a subterranean level, like the basement of a suburban home. In particular, Saunders builds an extended analogy between the Semplica Girl diary and historical slave-owner diaries. This similarity rises to the surface in poignant moments offering semantic clues. When the Semplica Girls escape, they are described as "connected via microline like chain gang" (2013: 155). In another example, during oldest daughter Lilly's birthday party —what should be the happy, domestic scene of a family celebration— the children play a game of "crack the whip" (2013: 134). Although a real children's game, in the context of the story and seen against the backdrop of the line of Semplica Girls swaying in unison as did punished slaves, the name can only be read as a satirical allusion to the flogging of slaves. This analogous story of slavery from the "naïve" colonialist perspective is arguably more disturbing than when told from the slave perspective. The family's indifference, and, moreover, pride in the SGs agonizing existence marks the party with violence. This extended analogy with colonialist slave owner narratives is also present in the characters' obsession with their yards. Their overabundant admiration for their lawns is not unlike the colonialist's pruning of the plantation. In fact, the SGs' presence can be equated to the mandatory spectacle of human property working on the horizon of the colonialist estate. Saunders acknowledges having read slave owner and abolitionist diaries during the writing of "The Semplica Girl Diaries" (2013a). One can

imagine that Saunders' story imitates the tone of quotidian normalcy with which the slave owners went about their daily habits on the plantation: at nine in the morning, breakfast, at ten, study Latin, and, at noon, a slave lashing.

In his book on violence previously mentioned, Slavoj Žižek takes as a point of departure a childhood story about the Russian philosopher Nikolai Lossky (2008: 9). Lossky and his family were members of the Russian bourgeoisie exiled during the Bolshevik revolution. As a boy Lossky could not understand why he was the object of scathing remarks at school or why the others seemingly wanted to destroy his comfortable and normal way of life. What problem was there with the family's servants, nannies, and love of the arts? Žižek argues that the boy was blind to the systemic violence latent in the social arrangement beneficial to him —like those slave owners that had normalized even the subjective violence of life on the plantation mentioned above. Similarly, in "The Semplica Girl Diaries" the latent violence beneficial to wealthy American families is realized and played out through the Semplica Girls. While most of the family feigns naivety in order to legitimate their middle class desires, the Semplica Girls are a constant reminder of the violence used to maintain and secure their position. The Semplica Girls are a specter, an embodiment of the modern-day version of the historical structures of systemic violence that loom over the postcolonial world as sustained after-effects. The Semplica Girls bring to the fore those mechanisms Foucault describes as being "on the underside of the law, a machinery that is both immense and minute, which supports, reinforces, multiplies the asymmetry of power" (Foucault 1975: 223) as well as "those 'sciences' that give it a respectable face" (1975: 223). The Semplica Girls remind us of the proximity of a bloody past and an equally troubling present; one that relegates the violence at its center to its margins in an incredible exercise of prestidigitation whereby a profit is made thanks to the illusion of distance and peripherality.

The ghost-like apparition of the SGs in their white, flowing garb over the yards of American middle class families might well suggest a kind of modern-day Dickensian Ghost of Christmas Past that similarly brings this out-sourced guilt back to center:

> There in the dark, fifteen (I counted) SGs hanging silently, white smocks in moonlight. Breathtaking. Wind picks up, they go off at a slight angle, smocks and hair (long, flowing, black) assuming same angle. Incredible flowers (tulips, roses, something bright orange, long stalky things of white clusters) shaking in wind with paper-on-paper sound. From inside, flute music. Makes one think of ancient times and affluent men of those times building great gardens, roaming through while holding forth on philosophy, bounty of earth having been lassoed for the pleasure of etc. (Saunders 2013: 121)

This comparison, of course, would brand our narrator (and his peers) as a kind of Scrooge. However, while an exaggeration, this is not wholly surprising when the identity of the Semplica Girl is later revealed as girls from developing countries employed as garden streamers in the yards of affluent American families. What could more powerfully symbolize the love of power above the love of fellow human beings? And what better reminder of that anniversary than young girls strewn around the yard as decoration. Here the Ghost of Christmas Past would be redundant. The dehumanization of the Semplica Girls as products and docile bodies that can be bought, sold, and strung out on a line as an adornment is mirrored by their place in the narrative —they are not even characters in their own right. In our diarist's account they are purely background, never really stepping into the foreground and speaking only in indecipherable whispers.

Here we pick up the loose end in our comparison of the modern sense of guilty self-awareness in the face of affluence with historical naivety. In the continuation of the description provided by the narrator of his initial sighting of the SGs in the quotation above, he writes, "Wind stops, everything returns to vertical. From across lawn: soft sighing, smattering of mumbled phrases. Perhaps saying goodnight? Perhaps saying in own lingo, gosh that was some strong wind" (Saunders 2013: 121). Here we can see the difference between our modern day narrator and the slave owners in their diaries. The modern day narrator seems to know the SGs are people even if dehumanized and serving as lawn ornaments. In trying to interpret their signs, he displays an at least minimal comprehension and awareness of their humanity and possibly their subjugation. Yet his perspective is limited showing little or no understanding of causality as the story progresses. He seems incapable of —or positions his narration in such a way as to avoid— offering meaning to his readers, especially concerning the reality of the SG trade. The construction of this limited perspective adds another layer of intertextuality to the already layered scene, one in which the narration displays commonalities with the slave narrative form: "To varying degrees all slave narratives are conditioned by the narrator's partial understanding of his situation [...] He is a blind receiver whose perspective on the motive behind all the demands and actions which govern his life have been short circuited" (Willis 1985: 202). Unlike the slave owners whose stance on why the slaves were only 3/5 human was justified by law, Saunders' narrator simply avoids providing a realistic frame for the SGs subhuman conditions. It is common knowledge that in the past, wealthy planter aristocracy effectively conceptualized slaves as property or animal livestock in the same way as they would a pig or a cow. Again, this is not to say that the slave owners somehow occupied moral high ground on account of this belief. Both groups, the modern and the historical, had their delusions that allowed them to sustain a sense of morality in the face of the unethical. Rather, the point here is similar to the one made by the

anecdote about the Patriarch's Balls; part of modernity is a sense of self-aware guilt about perpetuating inequality and benefiting from it. There are no more Nikolai Losskys. The modern day affluent class is aware that they benefit from the domination of the poor and working classes of the world and that they live at arm's length from its margins, even if, as in the case of Saunders' narrator, they simply try to avoid it. Let us return for a moment to Saunders' use of a limited, or naïve, narrative voice for his main speaker in the story. We have compared it with both the intentionally limited perspective of the historical slave owners (shored up as it were with support from the law) as well as with the ostensibly avoidant gaze of the modern-day affluent class (trying to divert their attention from unsightly realities). This wide-ranging comparison makes it even more important to clarify that *the literary use* of a similarly restrictive point of view in actual, historical slave diaries had quite different motives; specifically, the authors of the slave narratives we have today wrote in a limited point-of-view to dodge allegations that the white abolitionists were truly the ones writing the diaries (even if they were on occasion). Also, the limited narrative lens was used at times to defamiliarize images of the slave trade to which contemporaries would have been desensitized (Benito and Manzanas 1994: 40).

Saunders' stories can often appear at first glance comical and absurd, yet their messages require audiences to reexamine cultural notions that they may feel as intimately as their "second skin". Saunders compels readers to confront the realities of their societies while urging them to continue onwards towards individual responsibility and purpose given that current, prevalent methods of confronting those same realities can echo the absurdity of the condition itself. To illustrate Saunders' use of the absurd as rhetorical strategy, one has only to look at the accuracy of his formulations with regard to the absurd (and manipulative) rhetoric emerging in the American linguistic landscape of today. Saunders' playful revisiting of these linguistic realities involves using them as the basis for absurd themes and situations in the fictional worlds he creates. Ultimately, their 'absurdity' serves a function, inciting readers to question the logic underpinning the supposed values and ethics of contemporary consumer culture. Warranting Saunders' caustic humor, inequality in the United States already has a meme, a twitter hashtag, a name in popular culture: "#First World Problems". Referring to a problem that is relevant to the First World but admittedly irrelevant and gloating when contextualized globally, the phrase seems to get to the heart of America's digitally enhanced self-awareness and American pop culture's peculiar way of addressing it. Furthermore, as in the curt, jumpy, almost journalistic language of Saunders' narrative, the hashtag points towards the violent severing of language necessary to rationalize the irrational. If there is, as well, some kind of perverted ethics implicit in the hashtag, the character most representative of this ethical sense in the story

—if in a more genuine and less farcical way— would be the narrator's youngest daughter Eva. However, she does express her honest concern with an almost anachronistic sincerity only capable of a child, or, of Saunders himself. Literary critic Sarah Pogell has pointed out that Saunders' reverent treatment of human conflict and emotion could easily garner him accusations of maudlin triteness (2011: 475). I would have to agree that his desire to address real world problems demonstrates an optimism the majority of postmodern writers and theorists may not share with him, but which may be exactly what Literature with a capital "L" needs. Saunders' attention to real-world problems and his Eva character, rather, link the story generally to the realist tradition of anti-slavery literature and specifically to *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. The seminal American text features a prominent character —little Eva— that is also a depiction of the innocent girl-child vehemently against slavery. In *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, as we know, Eva befriends Uncle Tom after he saves her life and she begs her father to buy him. Towards the end of the story Eva once again pleads with her father this time to free his slaves and specifically to free Uncle Tom. The resonances with "The Semplica Girl Diaries" are quite clear, again pointing towards the story's intricate and intentional connections with slave literature. In a kind of sad, happy and ironic ending, "Eva" of "The Semplica Girl Diaries" eventually frees the SGs out of sympathy for their pain, this time leaving her parents with loads of debt to pay —modernity's brand of indentured servitude.

The intuition that the story is set in our own contemporary world —Saunders' brand of realism— is joltingly suspended when the mechanism of the Semplica Girls' acquiescence is revealed. In a postmodern, sci-fi twist characteristic of the writer, we are asked to observe the apparatus of the semplica girls' pain but also to ontologically question the proximity of this world to our own: "[A] microline though brain that does no damage, causes no pain. Technique uses lasers to make pilot route. Microline threaded through w/silk leader" (Saunders 2013: 142) explains the father to the story's most conscientious objector, aforementioned Eva. Saunders writes the SG girls as literally having a hole burned through their skulls for easy hanging in the yards of yuppie Americans. Nevertheless, this invention approaches reality when the narrator assures Eva that the mechanism does not hurt as doctor "Lawrence Semplica" ingeniously designed it (2013: 142). This is Saunders' nod towards a world not only entrenched in corporate discourse, but also as Foucault diagnosed in the 1960s and 70s (Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*), hegemonically invested in the rhetoric of science and medicine to a fault. Consider that many people are willing to undergo potentially lethal and expensive cosmetic surgery based on the promise of comfort and ease doled out by doctors (and, of course, those mimetic desire machines called "style magazines" aid the process). The establishment of science as the official discourse of knowledge —"an indefinite discourse that observes, describes and establishes

the 'facts'" (Foucault 1975: 226)— endowed the medical/scientific community with alarming power (as during slavery). In short, the violent mechanism used to hang the SGs is disturbing but so is the narrators willed belief that it could be as innocuous as a simple haircut, again revealing the violent subtext underlying the characters' daily lives which surfaces at key points in the story.

But the SGs' acquiescence, we are told, is not only a byproduct of the subjective violence that literally holds them in place. Short bios on the girls called "microstories" comically gesture towards the saturation of "societal marketing programs[2]" in modern media while also realistically providing a backstory to the SGs forced immigration to the US. Saunders employs the postmodern aesthetic of embedded narrative and discourse to remind readers of the similitude between the world of the short story, however absurd, and their own. At the same time, Saunders also sardonically points towards how "#First World" guilt is co-opted and managed by the capitalist system. By now, most people are quite aware of the methods of "societal marketing" and can immediately identify the sort disseminated by the Semplica Girl Company and reified by the family themselves:

> Pam: Sweetie, sweetie, what is it?
> Eva: I don't like it. It's not nice.
> Thomas: They want to, Eva. They like applied for it.
> Pam: Don't say like
> Thomas: They applied for it.
> Pam: Where they're from, the opportunities are not so good.
> Me: It helps them take care of the people they love.
> Then I get idea: Go to kitchen, page through Personal Statements. Yikes. Worse than I thought: Laotian (Tami) applied due to two sisters already in brothels. Moldovan (Gwen) has cousin who thought was becoming window washer in Germany, but no. sex slave in Kuwait (!). Somali (Lisa) watched father + little sister die of AIDS, same tiny thatch hut, same year. Filipina (Betty) has little brother "very skilled for computer", parents cannot afford high school, have lived in tiny lean-to with three other families since their own tiny lean-to slid down hillside in earthquake. (Saunders 2013: 134-135)

Saunders' family portrays postmodern American culture's concepts of responsibility and idealism, as well as its political, economic, and social superiority and personal identity. In his aforementioned book on violence, Žižek critiques the tendency of modern-day capitalists like Bill Gates to refer to themselves as 'liberal communists' and with fanfare laud their latest donation to charity in front of the media. Žižek asserts that it re-establishes the balance essential to the capitalist system's ability to perpetuate itself and the objective and systemic violence at its heart (2008: 23). "The same structure —the thing itself is the remedy against the threat it poses— is widely visible in today's ideological

landscape" writes Žižek (2008: 21). Like the nuclear family version of Bill Gates, the American family are "good people who worry [...] the catch, of course, is that in order to give, first you have to take" (Žižek 2008: 20). The societal marketing method of packaging the human element via story for consumers is used to accommodate the family's sense of the charitable. Their profiles, and the family's bourgeois sense of philanthropic righteousness, are consequently bought and consumed along with the girls in all their physicality legitimating their violent and painful existence on the lawn. For the speaker the embedded semplica girl narratives undoubtedly re-invoke his latent sense of guilt —but their true function is to evoke a sense of relief and complacency. As a father, he is also able to or at least hopes to transform the microstories into manageable tales of hope for daughter Eva. Žižek analyzes this function of ideology in *The Sublime Object of Ideology* concluding that "the function of ideology is not to offer us a point of escape from our reality but to offer us the social reality itself as an escape from some traumatic, real kernel" (1989: 45). Hence, the "microstories" engender that false sense of knowledge that Žižek alleges exists in today's ideological landscape; the father escapes the real of his guilt into the social reality of the girls' awful conditions on the lawn —finding a solace in them that is in equal parts utterly believable and preposterously offensive. Furthermore we see ideology at work in the family's paradoxical belief that the exchange of money for power over human beings, however marginal, is the morally correct action to take in order to combat the very issue of modern slavery: "Only violence can put an end to violence, and that is why violence is self-propagating" (Girard 1972: 26).

On another level, these prepackaged narratives of the lives of each Semplica Girl are a form of symbolic violence themselves —just like the narrative, another "line" to assuage the pain. Symbolic violence, a term used by Bourdieu and later by Žižek, can describe the violence enacted by a symbolic community via its rites and rituals of stratification, or, by its use of language and representation. Here language's capacity for violent "essencing" (Žižek 2008: 67-68) is used to strip the girls of humanity reducing their entire lives into nothing more than a sterilized pair of compressed sentences. Furthermore, this is yet another form of the linguistic distancing that the narrator practices throughout his archiving of the girls' story. He consistently uses semantics to deceive himself, as in his refusal to acknowledge the girls' utterances as "language" instead calling it "lingo" or in his wilful belief that the microline "does no damage, causes no pain". Across the story, this symbolic violence enacted through language and discourse is generally evident in the pervasiveness of the curt, reduced syntax the narrator uses to write the diaries —more reminiscent of journalistic briefs than of the diary form in which he claims to write. As some would argue about modern news media, the narrator's focus on 'the now' and on his own desire blinds him to the importance of history and more

importantly to the particular history behind the Semplica Girls and their seemingly immaculate and estheticized presence on the lawn.

Saunders writes an all too familiar America with a sardonic twist, but does so for the purpose of revealing an urgent need for readers to see through beliefs made popular by modern times, chiefly the grass root tendencies that cultivate and protect systemic violence at all levels. Saunders' incisive criticism of the capitalistic ways of the USA is at its best when unpacking (or ridiculing) the sense of class-consciousness that informs the hopes, desires, and decisions of its households. As we noted at the beginning of the paper, the speaker's impetus to buy the Semplica Girls derives from his feeling of inadequacy and ineptitude at not being able to "keep up" with his affluent peers. In a critique of capitalist dogma, Saunders helps us to understand that class-consciousness today simply comes down to acquiring the same or better products as the others in our imagined community. Our narrator buys the SGs in order to "keep up with the Joneses":

> We step out. SGs up now, approx. three feet off ground, smiling, swaying in slight breeze [...] Effect amazing. Having so often seen similar configuration in yards of others more affluent, makes own yard seem suddenly affluent, you feel different about self, as if you are in step with peers and time in which living. (2013: 133)

Saunders could just as easily have written that the family had "stepped up" a rung on the invisible ladder that is social mobility and class (at least conceptually) in the USA. He includes the narrator "stepping out" and reports finally feeling "in step with peers and in time". This is what class-consciousness translates into in contemporary America, warns Saunders. An invitation to The Patriarch's Balls would signify less today than the size of one's house and its contents. The systemic and subjective violence implicit in the seemingly miraculous apparition of the objects that populate our domestic lives is of little importance. Nevertheless, by the end of the story the family no longer owns the Semplica Girls, who having escaped with the aid of the narrator's youngest daughter, Eva, are now labeled illegal immigrants "on the loose". The loss of the SGs results in the Greenway Company suing the family for some $8000 dollars for back-charges. This, of course, plunges the family into debt. And so the family's precious social status falls to the level it was at the beginning of the story, or even lower. Debt in modern-day America is clearly the primary capital of the working classes, if not of the petit bourgeoisie, as well.

"The Semplica Girl Diaries" is an attempt to narrate the violence we inflict on ourselves and on others in the mindless and irresponsible pursuit of happiness. Saunders' rendition of the modern American family designates power as a byproduct of colonization or at least globalization as it is understood contemporarily. He offers a critique of the coloniality of power and those ways of gathering

information that often complement and uphold its systems, which are also constitutive of modernity. This critique, or Saunders's message, appeals to readers to free themselves from social and political definitions of success, instead embracing individualized concepts of ethical responsibility towards others. It is this sense of responsibility that child character Eva seems to represent, suggesting that we are born with a capacity for empathy that society and its funny games quickly takes from us. Furthermore, Saunders reveals discourse as one of the mechanisms used to rationalize the irrational and humanize the profoundly inhumane. As a result we contemporaries may suffer a guilty awareness, more so than our historical counterparts, but as in the wealthy estates of the past there is always a trapdoor, a manner in which to ask to be excused from the table, to leave early from the ball. Nevertheless, by bringing the First World's exploitation and dehumanization of third world bodies to the center of American family life, Saunders also performs an act of magic allowing the Semplica Girl to be in two places at once: at the center of his story and sweating in the factories of the Global South.

Notes

[1]. In *Six Sideways Reflections on Violence* Žižek differentiates between three types of violence: (1) subjective forms of violence, the most obvious being the abuse of force, (2) objective violence being the standard level of violence to which we compare the subjective forms in order to perceive them, and, (3) systemic violence explained further above (Žižek 2008: 1-2).

[2]. "We define *societal marketing programs* as company initiatives involving the provision of money, resources and/or publicity to socially beneficial causes in a way that seeks to create an association in the minds of consumers between the cause and the company or one of its brands" (Bloom et al. 2006).

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DECALIBRATING THE LANGUAGE. J. H. PRYNNE'S *BITING THE AIR*

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J.H. Prynne's poetry is famed for being so "impenetrably opaque" as to come close to "neo-Modernist hermetic impasse" (Corcoran 1993: 177), and yet, his work continues to excite, speaking of modernity, of our here and now: the intricate space of the Western World. Given their involvement in the contemporary moment, why are his poems so resistant, indeed, so difficult? Perhaps, T. S. Eliot's explanation of why contemporary poets must be difficult pertains to Prynne for the same reason it did to Eliot, Pound, and other High Modernists.

> Our civilization comprehends great variety and complexity, and this variety and complexity, playing upon a refined sensibility, must produce various and complex results. The poet must become more and more comprehensive, more allusive, more indirect, in order to force, to dislocate if necessary, language into his meaning. (Eliot 1960: 248)

Eliot suggests that common language cannot unveil the nature of reality because it cannot amalgamate the variety of the world. Thus in order for the poem to depict reality, the poet needs to play the idiom against itself in order to flex more expressiveness from it.

It is the distinction between allusive poetic language and ordinary idiom that is explored in depth by Prynne throughout his work. On the one hand he shows an ordinary idiom to be an agent of people's enslavement in certain modes of discourse; and on the other, through the lyrical "dislocation of language into

meaning", he probes incisively into the modes of such linguistic enslavement, or "calibration", as the last section of *Biting the Air* (2003) calls it:

> […] Don't you yet notice
> a shimmer on bad zero, won't you walk there
> and be the shadow unendurably now calibrated. (Prynne 2005: 564)

Calibration is here connected with becoming a shadow, a spectral being that is neither dead nor alive, as it has turned into a property of space, a "bad zero" dimension, as algebraic geometry would have it. Calibrated, people become elements of material reality: measurable and definable, bereft of all free thinking and critical faculty.[1] In the present article, I seek to unpack the idea of man's calibration in Prynne's *Biting the Air*, setting the analysis in the broader context of international criticism of modernity as shown in Don DeLillo's *Cosmopolis* (2003) and Zbigniew Herbert's "Report from the Besieged City" (1983).

In a seminal essay "Huts", Prynne observes that language is not an innocent means of communication. By tracing various connotations of the word "hut", he reveals it as simultaneously comprising both the innocuous aspect of language and its rather frightening undercurrents: "All this in huts, with dual aspect of benign and hostile shelter, human life simple and serene or under ominous threat" (Prynne 2008: 629). On the one hand, huts are shown to be people's haven, protecting them from the natural world, the last outpost of a civilization in which they can feel at home, with ominous howls coming from the outside; huts are also the thinker's refuge, like the one in Todnauberg, or possibly suburban tree-houses for kids. On the other hand, however, such structures dominate a less benign side of "the mental imagery of modern life":

> Raised up on wooden gantry supports, these are the watchtowers of divisive and punitive regimes which for instance separated the two Germanies and patrolled the perimeters of the final-solution camps during the Third Reich […]. These are also the huts of our recent era, of the Stalag and the Stalinist deportation and death-camps […]. The hut-configuration is everywhere, in temporary prisons and internment camps and militarised frontier posts. On Thursday 20 December 2007 the London *Times* published an already familiar photograph in stark black-on-white profile of an armed surveillance post, raised up against the wired perimeter fencing at the entry to Camp Delta of the detention facility at Guantánamo Bay; and this is unmistakably another prototype hut-structure, not unlike the raised watchtowers at the Birkenau death-camp. (Prynne 2008: 629–630)

So seemingly innocent a word as "hut" evokes irreconcilable strains of associations. Prynne suggests that this tension between hospitality and hostility informs all language; words and the images they create, despite their explicitly benign connotations, may be underlain with implications of tyranny and ill-will. In the

light of this fact Prynne asserts that poets, whose craft is words, cannot delude themselves into assuming that their work has little traffic with the material reality. If "ruin and part-ruin lie about us on all sides", then Prynne emphasizes that the "poets are how we know this, are how we may dwell not somewhere else but where we are" (Prynne 2008: 631–632). A clear division into material and linguistic reality —with the implication that the former lies hidden beneath an infinite number of intertwining layers of simulacra, signs "which dissimulate that there is nothing" (Baudrillard 1983: 12)— appears untenable. Any change in the world triggers landslides in languages, and conversely an alteration in linguistic praxis affects the material world. This premise is in itself nothing new.

Adorno observed that it is the power of art to "to let those things be heard which ideology conceals. Whether intended or not, success [of works of art] transcends false consciousness" (Adorno 2006: 214). Since according to Adorno, language tends to be reified into a cliché-infused common speech, it is the indomitable experimentalism of art that subverts the accepted idioms. The process of language appropriating reality and making it a product of the prevalent discourses is pertinently described by Foucault.

> Truth is a thing of this world —says Foucault— it is produced only by virtue of multiple forms of constraints. And it induces regular effects of power. Each society has its regime of truth, its "general politics" of truth: that is, the types of discourse which it accepts and makes function as true; the mechanisms and instances which enable one to distinguish true and false statements, the means by which each is sanctioned; the techniques and procedures accorded value in the acquisition of truth; the status of those who are charged with saying what counts as true. (Foucault 2001: 1668)

The notion of truth not only engenders but also helps to maintain certain discourses, which with time become self-sustaining. As Foucault explains, "truth" is "linked in a circular relation with systems of power which produce and sustain it, and to effects of power which it induces and which extend it" (Foucault 2001: 1669). In order to assure its continuation, any system of power proffers a discourse that validates the regime, just as the regime in turn validates the discourse. As mutually supportive, the system of power and its discourse establish what they wish to see as the final truth. To this end, it is claimed that only by adhering to the "true" model can people's survival and happiness be ensured. It is against such a seemingly innocuous language that Prynne speaks in "Huts". Never is a hut an innocent shed or a tree-house —he argues— for at the same time it connotes a sentry tower. Whenever used, the word engages all these possible strains of associations that have come to "motivate" its meaning in the course of history (Prynne 1993: 14). Thus Prynne indicates that if one pays close attention to language, no sentence will be univocal, and no word innocent, but they will always reflect on and challenge the prevalent linguistic face of a particular reality.

For Prynne, smoothly organized and transparent language is an agent of implicit reification, a servant of a regime of incontrovertible truth; a lucid argument will show a hut as a simple building many of us have in our gardens. It is therefore the act of testing this language, breaking its seemingly unshakeable structures, that shocks us into awareness that our mode of using words is permeated with ready-made clichés that prevent the realisation that language may be a vehicle of enslavement: a calibration of one's thinking. As Prynne explains in his essay "Poetic Thought",

> The extreme density of the unresolved, which maintains the high energy levels of language in poetic movement, its surreptitious buzz, may resemble unclarity which it partly is; but strong poetic thought frequently originates here, in the tension about and across line-endings, even in functional self-damage or sacrifice as the predicament of an emerging poem determined not to weaken or give way. Thought in this matrix is not unitary (unlike ideas), but is self-disputing and intrinsically dialectical. (Prynne 2010: 599)

The poet's task, among other things, is then to rupture "meaning habits" to counter the "facile acceptance of the commonplace" (Prynne 2010: 598) that, as Foucault claims, is always a product of a "regime of truth". In the case of *Biting the Air*, the "commonplace" discourse is that of reckless capitalism that has run free of any control, validating itself as a universal law. It is Don DeLillo who, in *Cosmopolis*, captures the moment when this capitalist vernacular has won ostensibly unquestionable hegemony.

At the beginning of the novel, as the capitalist prodigy, Eric Packer, cruises across New York in his custom-made limousine to get a haircut, he sees various employees about his recent stock market bid. Among them there is his currency analyst Michael Chin. At one point, the two men engage in an exchange of opinions that obliquely addresses the notion of language determining capitalist reality:

> "There's a poem I read in which a rat becomes the unit of currency".
> "Yes. That would be interesting", Chin said.
> "Yes. That would impact the world economy".
> "The name alone. Better than the dong or the kwacha".
> "The name says everything".
> "Yes. The rat", Chin said.
> "Yes. The rat closed lower today against the euro".
> "Yes. There is growing concern that the Russian rat will be devalued".
> "White rats. Think about that".
> "Yes. Pregnant rats".
> "Yes. Major sell-off of pregnant Russian rats".
> "Britain converts to the rat", Chin said.
> "Yes. Joins trend to universal currency".
> "Yes. U.S. establishes rat standard".

"Yes. Every U.S. dollar redeemable for rat".
"Yes. Stockpiling dead rats called global health menace". (DeLillo 2003: 23–24)

Both Packer and Chin are genuinely entertained by the idea of making rat the unit of currency, and it is one of the few moments in the novel when Packer does seem to be enjoying himself. What transpires from this isolated dialogue —dropped as sharply as it was begun, as is usual in DeLillo— is the indication that money in fact poses a lethal threat to humanity. Were all the world's currencies to be converted to rats, it would mean a global health crisis, a plague. Though partly unwittingly, Chin hints at the peril intrinsic to money, noting that "the name says everything". If that name were turned to rat, it would become clear that the stockpiling of capital proves lethal. Switching from one arbitrary name, say the dollar, to another, in this case the rat, shows that a change in lexical item used may uncover an unacknowledged aspect of the nature of material reality. When Packer earns millions of dollars, it is a reason to rejoice at the accrual of purchasing power, but were he to accumulate millions of rats, his life would clearly be in jeopardy.

In this episode, it is implied that the grim reality of the present times results from the fact that nobody realizes that not only Packer's New York but also the entire Western World are "under the siege of the Wall Street wildcat deregulated capitalism of the late 1990s and early 21st century. Eric Packer's viewpoint is just as much that of a victim as that of a perpetrator" (Giaimo 2011: 109). He is a victim of the "wildcat", or "ratted capitalism" insomuch as he does not see that money has infested the world, it can neither be controlled nor its flow or impact on individuals predicted. Without anyone realising it, capital-obsessed language has become the Foucaultian "discourse of truth", supported by and supporting tycoons like Packer. Although he persistently claims his massive buy-out of the yen is a good investment despite all the evidence to the contrary: "Nothing applies. But it's there. It charts. You'll see it" (DeLillo 2003: 37), Packer eventually goes bankrupt because evidently everything does not any longer chart. As in Albert Camus, the rats carry plague that not only destroys lives but also the individual's humaneness. Also, as in *La Peste*, the plague of money has percolated into human nature and will now elude every attempt at comprehending its structure. As a result, everything solid that the rat touches turns into miasmatic air. *Cosmopolis* demonstrates the dark side of modernity in which the capital, the spectre haunting the world, has transformed all the former givens into "the great rapacious flow" (DeLillo 2003: 41). It is this world that Packer has contributed to creating in no small measure. He is thus among the perpetrators of the crime of letting the plague loose in the city and all over the world. Packer fails to realise this because, as Prynne has implied in "Poetic Thought", "a discourse practice defaults in a wink to […] bending compliantly under commercial or political distortions, to

accommodate by self-corruption" (Prynne 2010: 598). In the reality of Cosmopolis, the rat can raise a laugh but not awareness of its threat.

The idea of rat becoming the unit of currency Packer takes from Herbert's "Report from the Besieged City". The poem, one of Herbert's best-known, is spoken by a chronicler of an unknown city's struggle against various invaders, endlessly besieging the city. The context of Poland's fight for independence and autonomy[2] is manifestly alluded to in the poem, but in broader terms the lyric may be located in the tradition of anti-war poetry. In an ironic gesture, Herbert forestalls any attempt at glorification of war and shows the atrocious consequences of the siege. However, he never gives up on the belief in the society's surviving the conflagration.

Apart from the fact that a line of the poem is quoted in the novel, another aspect of "Report from the Besieged City" that strikingly invokes the digit-obsessed tycoon of *Cosmopolis* is that the speaker, in the manner of a diligent analyst, will "avoid any commentary" and "keep a tight hold on my emotions I write about facts" (Herbert 2000: 149). In a typically Herbertian way, "expressing quotidian truths by indirection or allusion and, thereby creating the savvy voice of a sort of poetic antihero for the times" (Arana 2008: 210), the speaker focuses on facts as the only certainty in a world where nothing is certain. Yet, there is pronouncedly little on which to base his account, and so he makes do with whatever sureties he has:

> I write as I can in the rhythm of interminable weeks
> monday: empty storehouses a rat became the unit of currency
> tuesday: the mayor murdered by unknown assailants
> wednesday: negotiations for a cease-fire the enemy has imprisoned our messengers
> […]. (Herbert 2000: 149)

The long lines, punctuated with regular stresses that add to the monotony of the heinous bloodshed, conjure up the inevitability and endlessness of the atrocities. The speaker realizes in his detached, matter-of-fact tone that "all of this is monotonous I know it can't move anyone" (Herbert 2000: 149). No emotional appeal can bring empathy from the possible allies of the city, for what excites the international attention are facts, "only they it seems are appreciated in foreign markets". Already in 1982 Herbert seems to have anticipated the market's obsession with facts that is later to mar Eric Packer's life. What is hinted at in the poem is that the more minute the coverage of facts the more likely it is that the planned ventures will yield maximum profit. Herbert's speaker does present some facts for us, mockingly alluding to Communist addresses to the nation's labourers:

> yet with certain pride I would like to inform the world
> that thanks to the war we have raised a new species of children
> our children don't like fairy tales they play at killing
> awake and asleep they dream of soup of bread and bones
> just like dogs and cats […]. (Herbert 2000: 149)

In the horrifying reality of Herbert's poem, the war has finally caused a complete dehumanization. The children, born during the siege, know only the world that is steeped in betrayal and murder. Nevertheless, in a flight of perverse logic, it is given as a reason to rejoice, since the loss of humanity and innocence precipitates the mastery of survival skills. Like the "dogs and cats", the children, emaciated and ill though they are, linger on, able to inure themselves to whatever circumstances. This is the world "In peril by abatement/ subsisting", which is also dominated by the injunction, "want a scrap don't take it" (Prynne 2005: 561). Here, the rat has become the unit of currency.

However, Herbert does envision a path beyond this horror. In spite of the fact that the war has lasted as long as anyone can remember, the speaker looks forward to a time after the siege has ended in the most likely defeat of the defenders: "and if the City falls but a single man escapes/ he will carry the City within himself on the roads of exile/ he will be the City" (Herbert 2000: 151). Herbert uses a familiar high modernist image of the present state of chaos that is bound to lead to a total annihilation in the future. Yet, for the time being "we still rule over the ruins of temples spectres of gardens and houses/ if we lose the ruins nothing will be left". Eliot's "These fragments I have shored against my ruins" sounds an underlying note in Herbert's lyric. "Report from the Besieged City" implies that in view of the deepening chaos and raging war, men must turn their backs on the future, into which the current of history carries them inexorably[3], and their faces to the past when temples and gardens stood in their glory. This is as much an aesthetic dictum as a moral imperative because Herbert notes that only (Roman-Catholic, Western) culture and tradition are the source of human values: "Ethics, aesthetics, epistemology, and ontology are intimately interconnected by casting out the moral imperative, by stepping out of his self-created form, humankind becomes obscure and unbearable to itself and eventually dissolves into nothingness" (Shallcross 2002: 107–108). In "Report from the Besieged City", the survivor can only hope to ensure that the defenders' deaths were not in vain if he retains the image of an untarnished legacy of the city in his heart.

Interestingly, Herbert hints that the future is to be the time of the feral children and "ratted currencies", and it is that kind of future that DeLillo depicts in *Cosmopolis*. Eric Packer, merrily toying with the possibility of converting to the rat, says that he was always "younger than anyone around" and Michael Chin is only twenty-two; both may thus be taken as representing Herbert's new species of children in that they thrive in the capitalist world thanks to their exceptional instinct that allows them to survive in the hostile reality. Moreover, Packer is by no means a simpleton, for he collects art and shows keen interest in natural science and foreign languages; he is also given to occasional meditations on beauty and transcendence. However,

he cannot be counted among Herbert's inheritors of the City's glory as none of the things that he dabbles in prove of durable value to him, except making money. It is only his odyssey across the city, a descent from his luxurious Manhattan penthouse into "the squalor of Hell's Kitchen", that leads him to the realization of the pernicious effects of his capital-obsession and "marks the authentic ascent of the soul" (Dewey 2006: 142). However, what this journey of self-discovery allows him to understand is that his long-cherished, essentially modernist idea that the world is "knowable and whole" is an illusion. Thus DeLillo suggests that Herbert's temples and gardens have been commoditized and are no longer a valid legacy of man's undaunted dignity and moral autonomy. At the same time, it becomes clear that Packer has underestimated the rat which eventually defeats his financial genius. This is because the "ratted capitalism" proves to be an uncontainable epidemic whose presence goes undetected even by the ingenious Eric Packer.

Packer is beguiled by money, of which he thinks he is the master, because he fails to understand that it has already become a "global health menace". Neither is Herbert's legacy of high modernist trust in the temples and gardens of the bygone age of any avail in late modernity. In the novel, it is the artist Mark Rothko's Chapel that represents the Herbertian idea of art as the conveyor of past glory. Packer wants to buy it all, and completely disregards Didi Fancher's assertion that it "belongs to the world", responding shortly that "It's mine if I buy it" (DeLillo 2003: 28). Thus art becomes a chattel and Packer will not accept that purchase does not mean the Chapel is his. In his vocabulary, buying is a synonym to absorbing, art being no exception. This, we are being led to believe, is a universal law. The carrier of this idea is discourse, the "ratted language" that is no longer under man's control. One must accept it and begin accumulating capital in all its forms: financial, cultural, and social, thereby inevitably becoming calibrated. Every attempt at escaping this hegemony comes at the cost of life, as Packer discovers in his confrontation with Beno Levin.

Thus we come to Prynne's *Biting the Air*. In this volume, Prynne offers a diagnosis of the crisis and repeatedly seeks to dislocate, and thus challenge, the "ratted discourse" of calibration that has come to dominate late modernity. Eliot's idea that poets must "dislocate the language into meaning" becomes the necessary step to poetic composition and expression. As Prynne argues, "the focus of poetic composition […] projects into the textual arena an intense energy of conception and differentiation, pressed up against the limits which are discovered and invented by composition itself" (2010: 596). By attempting to tax language to the limits of expressiveness, in *Biting the Air* Prynne continues his life-long project of forcing the reading process, in fact the process of human comprehension of a language, to acknowledge the elusive undercurrents of the meanings of words. Nigel Wheale, writing of Prynne's earlier book *Red D Gypsum* (1998), makes an important point:

> The ways in which we read these poems are the strategies that we have to develop to move through language; they are also the ways in which language acquires us, in the sense that the word hoard bestows so many options for meanings, a virtually infinite array of possible connectives within which we play, as if in a game. (2009: 182)

The idea that language acquires us leads back to the "ratted discourse" as the source of calibration —the process of turning people into unreflective and fact-focused consumers of goods as well as ready-made ideas. An attempt at challenging this language results in (at best sublime) auto-destruction, as in Packer's case, or commodification of what was considered aesthetic resistance. In the network of languages, material reality, as Prynne implies in "Huts", becomes what the dominant vocabulary turns it into. Perhaps Camp Delta is an outpost of the defenders against a tidal wave of violence, or maybe it is a political prison. One can obtain no tangible data that could contradict either claim, so the choice of which description to accept is predicated on a purely arbitrary basis: whose discourse of persuasion waxes more convincing?

In *Biting the Air*, Prynne demonstrates throughout that the ways we make sense of words are not finite and do not depend on a set of given rules. Indeed, the sentence structure that the speakers of English adhere to in order to understand one another's sentences is by no means innocent. Syntactic order and lexical systematization are acquired subliminally, leaving the speaker unaware that they exist at all. Shake the fundamentals of language as we use it and the result will show new ways of creating sense, which may demand more attention (or perhaps a different kind of attention) from the reader or listener but offer richer and more nuanced expressiveness.[4] After all, language "is a pluralised system, invested with contradictions which are themselves the diagram of its energetic over-determination" (Prynne 2000: 146). Prynne invites us to appreciate those contradictions inherent in language, knowing that in his poems far fewer meaningful associations stand to be lost than in the modes of transmission following the prescribed rules. In this way, poetry, as Thurston and Alderman have optimistically put it, "can hope to evade and resist the instrumentalization of language, precisely because it seeks to give abstract nomenclature the slip" (Thurston and Alderman 2013: 292). It may be noted that Prynne both challenges and supports Wittgenstein's assertion that "what can be said at all can be said clearly" (Wittgenstein 2009: 27). On the one hand, Prynne does not believe in saying it "clearly", that is, by following the established linguistic routines, since that would immediately bring about exposure to the ubiquitous force of calibration. On the other hand, the message that he sends in *Biting the Air* is arguably couched in precisely the most apt manner for it.

The book comprises a series of conflicts. To put the matter broadly, the strife is played out between the centre and the margins. Moreover, what proves vital to the volume is that the conflict, whatever form it takes, sets linguistic innovation, always teetering on the brink of non-meaning, against the routine discourse of the ubiquitous rat.

> […] all price diluted
> and fuming over nil-paid: it is easy to make
> a country prosperous and blue and bright over
> and blindness forever in hand on hand proverb. (Prynne 2005: 553)

The stanza might be spoken by a representative of some company, who describes the workers' rage at being "nil-paid". The workforce, or "rag hands" as they are referred to in the opening of the poem, cannot accept the dilution of prices and the "offer some, give, none" strategy (with the comma as a cunning indicator of a merely formal and illusory boundary between the verb "give" and its complementation "none"). The representative concludes that "it is easy to make a country prosperous" by keeping "blindness forever in hand on hand proverb". Thus the proverbiality of language, the means to maintaining the individual's calibration, is directly connected to deception. It is necessary to keep the masses in the dark so as to delude them into thinking that everything is "blue and bright over". This point is stated earlier in the poem, "glinted horizons so/ blue and bright forever we say, pinching the/ promised drip […]" (Prynne 2005: 553). Here, the setting is metonymically shown to be a hospital where a patient is administered a "promised drip". As he is taking the artificial sustenance, the patient is being convinced that everything will be fine, and that his horizon, the prospects for recovery, is bright.

The repetition of the message of solace, like the "hand on hand proverb", is to "pacify rag hands". Such proverbial phrases recur throughout the poem always to show that big business is not to blame for whatever dire straits the "rag hands" are in.

> […] Matter
> boiling or livid hand-grip resumes instant release
> panoply catchment and swells infected to barter
>
> refit clauses, bitten all over. Don't make sores if
> you can't pay to dress their origin, a globe toll
> spoiling for animus. Step to the bar. Be a credit
> witness. Speak real slow and with pauses […]. (Prynne 2005: 557)

The stanza, one of the more direct in the sequence, is constructed around several metonymies. The "refit clauses" may refer to the central powers that command the "proper idiom". As the language has been "bitten all over" it must now be refitted.

The "clauses" also connotes the legal aspect of the central control that must be phrased so that there is no risk of liability. Once refitted, the "clauses" show that whatever discontent or legal trouble has come on the people, it is their fault because they have "made sores" that they cannot afford to "dress". Literally, the "sores" denote physical wounds that may result from the people's physical clash with one another; figuratively, the fragment suggests an association of "sores" with any kind of challenge (for example legal) to the central powers. In both cases the people are found to be unable to pay either for the treatment or to accept reconciliation. As a result, the "globe toll", an ingenious metonym for what may refer to the central power's universal taxation, is "spoiling for animus". That phrase invites several possible readings.

Firstly, it suggests a bellicose attitude of the "globe toll" towards those on whom it was imposed. Secondly, it implies that the company are deliberately stirring up ill feeling among people in order to further their own business. Another point is that "animus" may also refer to the male aspect of the soul, which would emphasise the fact that what is at stake in this power play is a person's soul. Immediately following the phrase, the instances of legal jargon indicate that the trial has already started and it takes place in the "correct grammar" of the "refitted clauses". In this context, the workers are dumbfounded; to be understood, they need to "speak real slow and with pauses" as though their language was not clear enough for the judge to understand. In addition, like the Herbertian chronicler, what the defendants must supply is facts —not emotions or speculations, and certainly not conjectures— that must conform to the centre's proverbial "word order", in which they are immediately put at a disadvantage.

In his sequence, Prynne topples the hegemony of the "correct grammar" in favour of a language "self-disputing and intrinsically dialectical" (Prynne 2010: 599). No line in *Biting the Air*, or indeed in any of Prynne's poems, stands as a separate assertion. Ming Xie points out this aspect of Prynne's language, observing in relation to a poem from *Pearls that Were* (1999) that Prynnean verbs are "'transitional' and interactive in function" (Xie 2012: 190). Thus the difficulty of Prynne's poetry lies in the multiplicity of often contradictory meanings that the "interactive words" in a poem summon and keep up with no dialectical resolution. It is such a negative dialectic that it is bound to destabilize the simple logic of calibration. Signification is not only the product of a grammatically proper arrangement of lexis, but a result of complex associative correlations of various meanings that hover about each succeeding line. That process of meaning-formation is captured by Nicholas Royle in his idea of "veering", "there is exercise *and* loss of control, exercise *and* loss of self" (2011: 23; emphasis in the original). It is between these two irreconcilable poles that a

poem happens, calling into question "the very notion of possibility of state, of stability or stabilization" (Royle 2011: 7).

This, however, is not to say that as a result of decalibrating the language, no meaning can be gleaned from the poem. Decalibration is inextricably linked to recalibration that demands a different attention to meaning-formation. As has been shown throughout the present reading, *Biting the Air* returns to a series of stories of conflict between the hegemonic discourse of logic and various means to dismantle that discourse. The dismantling consists in creating meaning by assembling images of qualitative similarity as in this important stanza:

> Assert parallel imports under licence at baseline
> emergency exits turnstile one-way. Within protected
> gray markets to get what's coming is patent
> wrist flexure daunted, prosthetic flavine […]. (Prynne 2005: 562)

On the one hand the stanza deploys images of fixing: legally asserting the right and ensuring that an exit leads one way only. On the other, however, this fixity is set against suggestions that what appear to be acts of order-maintenance prove dangerous to health: the word "patent" in the penultimate line plays on two meanings, depending on whether it is seen in the context of the line alone or whether it is carried over to the next line. Thus it may refer to "a licence from a government to an individual or organization conferring for a set period the sole right to make, use or sell some process or invention" ("Patent" *NSOED*) if read solely in the penultimate line; or, as adjective, it may be used to mean "open to view, exposed, manifest, evident obvious". It can also denote "a stage in a parasitic infection: characterised by detectable parasitic organisms or cysts in the tissues or faeces of the host" ("Patent" *NSOED*) if viewed in the context of "wrist flexure daunted" that in itself is ambiguous, suggesting both that the wrist has been injured in the act of flexing or, as "flexure daunted", an act of overtaxing the process of brain development in a vertebrate embryo. Both meanings indicate a peril to one's health, and so suggest that seeking to "assert parallel import under licence" of a "patent" is an act of violation. Thus the stanza yields images that thematise a conflict but does so through dense deployment of interrelated images that challenge the proverbiality of language.

The pervasive irony in *Biting the Air* is that the "proper language" of the centre, urging the hegemony of simplified and clichéd discourse, has already been "ratted". The infestation of our vocabulary with phrases such as "speak slow and with pauses" or "horizons are blue and bright forever" forces on us a certain mode of thinking that is conducive to stimulating an increase in the deadly capital. Just as Eric Packer eventually turns out to be a prisoner of his charts that

follow a logic of their own, so the capital owners in *Biting the Air*, playing out the logic of truth regime described by Foucault, are imprisoned in the discourse they came to propound in the first place; as a result "There's time and not much to say". People become passers-by in a de-individualized and emotionally barren world where strained silence or clichéd exchanges of phatic expressions prove dominant.

One of the sections of the poem opens with an unexpected and rather incongruous affirmation, "Yes, why is it like this not even hand-set like/ a headline reduction […]" (Prynne 2005: 558). The first line invokes the "Yeses" which started each sentence in the exchange between Packer and Chin. In the stanza, a suggestion is made that the current state of affairs, "not even hand-set like", must be accepted. Little is "hand-set" because "The data best/ muddy enforce their source" (Prynne 2005: 559). The proximity between "best" and "muddy" may imply that the best data is muddy data. However, the two adjectives are separated by a line ending. The line break strikes one as rather arbitrary, which seems to underline the strained cover-up of the plain fact that nobody controls the flow of data that now "enforce their source". The jarring and intrusive rhyme of "enforce" and "source" on the one hand indicates the inanity of the fact that the data themselves assert their own source rather than being gleaned from that source by the human agent; on the other hand it seeks to beguile us into believing that only by force can the source be known. After a comma we learn that the data would at best "attribute wouldn't they" (Prynne 2005: 559), but what they ought to attribute remains obscure. It may be their source, but what would it be attributed to? Possibly, the emphasis is laid on lessening the strained effect of "enforcing their source". If that were the case, the data would still furtively aim at their own self-preservation, but instead of "enforcing their source", they only obliquely, albeit no less insistently, attribute it to what cannot be pinned down. With the indirect suggestion of "tribute" lurking inside "attribute", such elusiveness of the data is implied to be their strength.

Towards the end of the sequence, it becomes ever more evident that the data —the discourse that feeds itself to the users, who are too struck with "delusion and incompetence" to understand that emphasis has shifted from them as individual holders of power to the language that binds them— constitute the source of oppression. "Frame your hand deal it/ nothing curative beyond oppression" (Prynne 2005: 562). The hand must be framed before it can "deal it" because the deal can only be clinched provided it is negotiated within the limits of a given discourse by which everyone must abide. A "hand" that "deals" also evokes also gambling, with its implications of greed and hopes of easy money. However, this path can only lead to being "framed" and eventually

"oppressed". It is a painful irony that pursuit of wealth causes the "hand" to submit to "the cure of oppression" in order to survive.

Moreover, the singular "framed hand" is directly opposed to the above-mentioned many "rag hands" that are to be pacified, which further underscores the idea that the centre is simultaneously the agent and the product of framing that suggests calibration in the proverbial, "ratted discourse". In response to this "ratted", capital-biased singularity, *Biting the Air* offers what has been called "veering", which resists final apprehension and stabilisation. Between individual words meanings proliferate. Therefore trying to decide on a single reading of *Biting the Air* would lead, as the title suggests, to forcing a frame on a limitless ethereal potential of language to disseminate often contradictory meanings. The "ratted disourse" thrives on such impositions, turning people into well-adjusted cogs in the machinery of modernity. It is against this infestation that Prynne's sequence of poems speaks. Each section of *Biting the Air* becomes an outpost of an idiom that seeks to rupture its stability, to decalibrate itself, thereby offering a challenge to the singularity of the "ratted discourse", and showing the inanity of all frames.

Prynne's sequence figures a language by no means in ruins, in which one can cling to spectral memories of Herbertian temples and gardens, but rather an energetic space of meaning dispersal and reconfiguration that can resist the idea of a singular centre that, as Eric Packer believes, will always "chart". Rather than seek spiritual redemption that must inevitably bring catastrophe, Prynne destabilizes what he understands to be the source of modern plight: the calcified idioms of the market that have come to dominate the world. In lieu of replicating the accepted discourse, Prynne posits constant poetic composition and decomposition, "new poetic thought" in the process of becoming.

Notes

[1]. The idea that the modern man is entangled in the discourses of modernity has been present in Prynne's books from the beginning, although with time the poet's response to this entanglement has changed. Rod Mengham, analysing "L'Extase de M. Poher", shows that by colliding poetry with specialised discourses such as biology or law the poem effects "the displacement of the subject of anthropological humanism", which is intricated, or embroiled, in those discourse (Mengham 2009: 72–73). Furthermore, Reeve and Kerridge note that "in order to survive, poetry has to 'collide' with the powerful instrumental discourses of the culture (smashing them into pieces), rather than dodging into alley-ways while they pass, or lingering in safe places like gardens" (Reeve and Kerridge 1995: 9).

[2]. The poem was written partly in response to the imposition of Martial Law on Poland on 13 December 1981.

[3]. Like other poems of his from the 70s and 80s, Herbert's lyric echoes Walter Benjamin's perception of history as catastrophe that is expressed in Benjamin's interpretation of Paul Klee's painting "Angelus Novus" that, "his face […] turned toward the past" and back turned to the future, "sees one single catastrophe" which is irresistible (Benjamin 1969: 257–258).

[4]. In this respect Prynne's critical project runs along the rebellious path of feminism as phrased by Hélène Cixous, who argued that the new woman "un-thinks the unifying, regulating history that homogenizes and channels forces, herding contradictions into a single battlefield". Later, she adds that women "take pleasure in jumbling the order of space, in disorienting it, in changing around the furniture, dislocating things and values, breaking them all up, emptying structures, and turning propriety upside down" (Cixous 2001: 2046, 2051). Although Prynne may be as enthusiastic about the engagement of feminism as Eagleton was in his Afterword to *Literary Theory*, he would be reluctant to acknowledge the subjectivism and the desire for freedom that Cixous and many other theoreticians of the movement have espoused.

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Reviews

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As a comprehensive overview of Toni Morrison's oeuvre from *The Bluest Eye* through her latest novel *Home*, Justine Baillie's new volume, *Toni Morrison and Literary Tradition: The Invention of an Aesthetic*, is the most mature, erudite overview of the work of the Nobel-prizewinner to date. In fact, even without any discussion of the author's incursions into stage productions, Baillie's critique comes closest to providing what I would call an "intellectual biography", i.e., an understanding of Morrison's aesthetic "in relation to the historical, political and cultural contexts in which it, and the traditions upon which she draws, have been created and developed" (1). Not only examining the author's work "within the framework of the vernacular and of her literary and political heritage" but also recurring to the "critical tools of western literary and philosophical enquiry", Baillie argues that Morrison's texts "constitute a radical incursion into American literature and politics" (7). Given the scope of what she sets out to do, it is commendable that for the most part Baillie has managed to produce consistently solid, well-researched analyses, distilled with commensurate background knowledge and understanding, and substantiated with extensive bibliography, all presented in a highly readable prose.

The focus on the philosophical tradition in which Morrison is grounded is expressly set out in the first chapter. Yet Baillie does not neglect the influence of minstrelsy on contemporary black authors, pausing to reflect on the notion of "transgression"

and its "ambivalent relationship with African-American art and culture" (24). This strong theoretical chapter, which provides the underpinnings for the later discussions of Morrison's work, should be required reading for students of American literature who unfortunately are usually only introduced to a "white-washed" version of literary modernism in the US. Baillie examines the creation of a literary aesthetic that "exposes hegemonic and ideological uses of language and knowledge in the construction and obfuscation of American history" (1) through strategies that incorporate myth, folk culture, the oral tradition and black music.

Though Baillie is adept at incorporating a plethora of literary theorists (from Franz Fanon to Bakhtin, from Gates to Baker, from Kristeva to Butler, from Haraway to Gilroy, etc.) for this reader perhaps the most innovative analysis is the one based on the work of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari. She recurs repeatedly to aspects of their "materialist psychiatry" beginning with their understanding of a "minor literature" ("the collective enunciation of the margin" [5]), as one that subverts, challenges or undermines the dominant discourse through linguistic strategies, in much the same vein as Bakhtin's use of "heteroglossia" or the "carnivalesque" or the language of the marketplace. Eschewing the traditional metaphor of the tree to describe relationships —linguistic, relational and political—, Deleuze and Guattari propose the "rhizome", a concept which Baillie finds useful in interrogating Morrison's subversive "deterritorialization" of the dominant language.

After the initial discussion of the "Historical and Literary Context", the following four chapters, consistently undergirded with pertinent critical theory, examine two or three of Morrison's novels in chronological order, emphasizing both their grounding in contemporary politics and philosophy as well the author's own developments in narrative technique. Hence *The Bluest Eye* (1970) is read against the Black Arts Movement of the 1960s while *Sula* explores the possibilities of self-creation/expression as a female within the limits of the black community, contesting both the stereotypes of Black Power politics and the color-blindness of the re-emerging Women's Movement of the early 70s. Turning to questions of masculinity, *Song of Solomon* "is inflected with the complexities of African-American gender relations in the mid-1970s" (97), a time of increased and vocal acrimony between black male and female writers and critics. Together with Milkman's quest for his heritage, his "frienemy" Guitar also complicates the vision of male fury in a time of difficult politics that gave rise to Black Power. *Tar Baby* builds on the feminist critique of machismo by both incorporating and then clouding the folk myth; in this novel it is "primarily class that problematizes the return to the ancestor and its sustaining properties" (128). Though Jadine may be a "cultural orphan", life with Son offers no viable path for a well-educated (though Westernized) independent woman.

Chapter 4 sets out to consider Morrison's next three novels (*Beloved* [1987], *Jazz* [1992] and *Paradise* [1998]) as a trilogy, and while I certainly applaud the intent I was disappointed in the end result. "Repetition, Memory and the End of Race" winds up referring individually to each of the three novels, which are discussed more or less in isolation except for a rather feeble attempt to link the three via the "ghost" in each text as "a repository for trauma, memory and recovery" (138). While it is true that Beloved can be seen in psychoanalytical terms as a literary embodiment of Freud's *return of the repressed*, in *Jazz* the picture of Dorcas on the mantel may serve as a "ghostly presence", but she is not a "corporeal menace" (138). Nor are Consolata's male counterpart or Dovey's "friend" more than apparitions or dreams who, rather than menace the women with the past, attempt to liberate them for their future, successfully with respect to Consolata, but not for Dovey. As an individual section though, the discussion of *Beloved* is well-developed and fruitful despite a few errors.

The same cannot be said, unfortunately, for the scant five pages on *Jazz*, in which Baillie first allege that jazz is a metaphor not a narrative strategy, yet ends by speaking of "[Morrison's] evocations of the rhythms and repetitions of jazz…" (156). Jazz is certainly a metaphor, but I missed any engagement with the music as a metaphor for language and storytelling. I also found myself fundamentally disagreeing with the focus in *Paradise*; while the explorations of the novel within discussions of the diaspora are intriguing, to state that in this novel "deep, historical trauma has dissipated" (168) is simplistic. Moreover, Morrison's rewrite of the American obsession with the one-drop definition of "blackness" certainly does not herald "the end of race" politically but rather insists upon its absurdity. To my mind there are still lines of inquiry that could be explored in dealing with these novels as a trilogy. Morrison's emphasis on the significance of language, for example, goes unexplored: the sound before words in *Beloved*, the sound that begins *Jazz* and its relationship to the sign in the Nag Hammadi citation, and the acrimonious debate over the inscription on the Oven in *Paradise*.

Though "Reading and Writing" might be a productive approach to the latest three Morrison novels, this promising beginning seems to peter out in the subsequent analyses. For *Love*, also dispatched in just over four pages, rather than concentrating on the equivocal narration of the story, too much of its limited space is spent either relating the storyline or worrying about L and Celestial as "ancestor" figures. Although many critics have followed this line of argument, I cannot but believe that the author may well be playing with her readers: L, by her own account, poisons Cosey and forges his will. In Morrison's world, that poses a serious question: Who gave you the authority to murder a man and change his express desire to leave his inheritance to Celestial? What if Cosey *did* have a "sweet Cosey

child" with his lover? What if L is acting on selfish motives fired by her own jealousy? There are murky signs in the text that definitely cloud L's intentions and her relationship with her former boss. The (also brief) section on *A Mercy* lacks the sophisticated interrogation we come to expect from the first two thirds of this volume. Though again making good use of Deleuze and Guattari concept of "smooth space" as opposed to "striated space", Baillie curiously does not mention the opening "un-map" of the eastern seaboard, precisely an excellent example of a pre-striated America. Another limitation is that while the theoretical possibilities of postcolonialist and ecological theory are suggested, the relationship with the socio-political context is muted. With its emphasis on Old Testament names which throw us back into the ancient rupture between the Palestinians and the Israeli, the dispute over land and future heirs certainly qualify this novel as a post-9/11text, not only in its evocation of the fiery ash falling from the sky, but also in its critique of the "economic meltdown" in the Age of Greed.

While the question of "home" and "homelessness" is linked more firmly to earlier texts, this discussion of *Home*, although more extensive, does not live up to the critic's earlier and very talented analyses. Why Baillie considers this "novella" to be "written in allegorical form" is not elaborated upon, and the supposed lack of "intricate structural devices" ignores the creative dialogue established between the main character and the narrator. The slave narrative is mentioned but goes unquestioned as a strategy: how much "truth" can be contained even in a first-person narrative (of the mentally enslaved) when the "speaker" is *a priori* less that "Frank"?

For the most part Baillie uses Morrison's interviews judiciously, although sometimes there is a tendency to take the author's words at face value. Far too often in her interviews Morrison diverts attention from important undercurrents in her work, not wishing, like Bakhtin, to foreclose subsequent literary analyses. And unfortunately this volume ends rather abruptly: I miss concluding remarks both on the last chapter and even more particularly on the entire project. Nevertheless, this addition to the "Morrisonia" is extremely valuable, and rather than closing down the scholarly discussion among critics in some kind of "definitive" work, it opens up more pathways and strategies for further analyses, particularly with regard to the latest novels. A worthy addition to any library, personal and public, and a must-read for all Morrison scholars.

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TRAUMA AND ROMANCE IN CONTEMPORARY BRITISH LITERATURE

Jean-Michel Ganteau and Susana Onega, eds.
New York: Routledge, 2013.

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At the beginning of his article, "Trauma and Temporality", Robet D. Stolorow reflects current psychoanalytical understanding, in stating that "an essential dimension of psychological trauma is the breaking up of the unifying thread of temporality". As a consequence "the clinical features usually described as dissociation and multiplicity", seen so often in trauma sufferers, "can be understood in terms of the trauma's impact in disrupting the sense of being-in-time" (158). The literary expression of trauma narratives in the form of the novel must therefore face the tension implicit between the form's customary need to establish the identity of its characters in time, within the narrative's chronology, and the same characters' inability to experience their own "sense of being-in-time", due to their being traumatized. Recent scholarship, including contributions by the editors of the volume under consideration, has identified a tendency among writers of trauma narratives towards introducing elements of Romance as a way of overcoming this essential contradiction.

Ganteau and Onega's excellent introduction to *Trauma and Romance in Contemporary British Fiction* (in the *Routledge Studies in Contemporary Literature* collection) presents a series of convincing arguments that make the pairing of Trauma literature and Romance seem obvious, even though this study is the first to analyze this pairing in depth in relation to contemporary British writers. By emphasizing Romance as a literary mode rather than a genre, the editors neatly

sidestep issues of hybridity, and problems with genre terminology, in order to focus on the elements of Romance that are frequently brought into play in works which address traumatic events, whether collective or individual. Contemporary trauma fiction has often employed a fragmentary, dispersed, non-linear narrative style. This corresponds to what authors since Freud have pointed out as the very nature of trauma, which is to remain, in part at least, unrepresentable to the conscious mind, as it is beyond that mind's comprehension. Given trauma's atemporal quality, Romance narrative can offer an anachronistic style of story-telling which allows it to be recounted or 'acted out', in a mode that readily accommodates intensification, dilation, contradiction and the presence of the spectral. Unlike historical events, the experience of which may be traumatizing for some participants but not for others, traumas themselves, by their very nature, are never fully experienced as they occur and reoccur. Trauma, in the words of Dominick LaCapra (in Ganteau and Onega 2013: 10), "does not simply serve as record of the past but precisely registers the force of an experience *that is not yet fully owned*" (original emphasis 110). It is in Romance's ability to offer a mode of discourse that allows some form of representation of the trauma to take place, in order to disrupt or disarticulate the traumatic structure, that the fictionalizing narrative can achieve a therapeutic value. It is here, the editors argue, that romance's "intrinsic ethical power" (11) resides.

The book's division into four parts, with three or four essays in each part, groups contemporary British novelists into studies of ghosts and spectral revenants, of distress and individual trauma, of traumas set in more pronounced historical and ethical frameworks, and finally, trauma narrations and their therapeutic potential.

The impressive opening essay of part one is Ganteau's own, on Pat Barker's *Another World*, a work which other critics of trauma fiction have taken as a key example. By focussing on the presence of elements of Romance in the novel, the author shows convincingly how the novel goes beyond a realist treatment of its traumatized characters. Ganteau cites instances of descriptions where, in Romance fashion, time is warped, either fast-forwarding or rewinding rather than following the linear temporal requirements of the realist novel, of aspects of the novel for which there is a hermeneutic failure, in the sense that possible traumas are left unresolved. The essay argues that Barker uses these Romance strategies not just to relate the intertwining traumas of the plot but to perform them, frustrating a satisfying literary closure in the same way that trauma's resolution is never fully attained.

Georges Letissier's "Hauntology as Compromise" contextualizes Sarah Water's *The Little Stranger* (2009) within her oeuvre of novels with historical settings, but singles it out for its use of the phantom tale. While discussion of characters such as

a WW2 pilot suffering from PTSD and his equally traumatized family links easily to the main theme of this book, the author goes on to discuss the family house as not just a setting but as an 'actor' in the story. Through intertextual references to *Great Expectations* and *Jane Eyre*, he demonstrates how the *unheimlich* mode permeates the novel's texture on all levels. In Letissier's words, Waters "deliberately sets her fiction in the uneventful, historical vacuum of 1947-48, singularly devoid of 'Here and Now', in order to address the spectrality of an unhinged time period, totally emptied of the plenitude and substances of the Now" (49).

Rosario Arias' discussion of Picardie's *Daphne* brings together insights of other critics, particularly into the relationship between sexuality and writing in Daphne Du Maurier's case and in Picardie's too. Picardie's multilayered work of biofiction covers Du Maurier's writing of a biography on Branwell Brontë with the help of Brontë curator Alexander Symington, and interpolates these two voices with a third, that of Jane, a PhD student writing a thesis on Branwell. Arias deftly points out how the Romance motif of the quest runs through all the narratives, as well as through the author's own biographical investigations into Du Maurier and the Brontës. As well as the quest motif, Arias provides a thorough discussion of how the act of writing about the elements of incest and ghostly traces becomes a means through which the subject searches for their identity, and comes to terms with the haunting presence of the traumatic past.

The second section of the book on 'Narratives of Distress and Individual Trauma' opens with Lynne Pearce's piece concerning a central contradiction in Romance, that of love's unrepeatability set against the lover's experience after the moment of *ravissement*, which tends to become something closely akin to the post-traumatic repetition described elsewhere in this book. Pearce uses Annie Proulx's *Brokeback Mountain,* Jackie Kay's *Wish I Was Here* and Sarah Waters' *The Night Watch* as representative of contemporary fiction to propose that perhaps the 'tragic-redemptive' model of love traced by De Rougement is showing signs of having run its 900 year-long course.

As one might expect from such a highly reputed critic, J. Hillis Miller's chapter, on Ian McEwan's *Atonement*, is a star turn. As other contributors do with their respective authors, he analyzes how trauma and romance interweave in the lives of McEwan's characters. But he goes a step further than the rest of his co-authors, by considering the reader's experience as traumatic. Of McEwan's protagonist, he writes,

> If Briony [...] misreads events because she expected them to fall into a preconceived narrative pattern, which of us readers can deny doing the same, for example, when we make certain assumptions about *Atonement* during a first reading? These assumptions turn out to be grotesquely mistaken, as the reader discovers at the end.

> The reader, I as reader at least, is led to become like Catherine Morland or like Briony Tallis. Our error also triggers trauma by deferred action when we are disillusioned. This might be called 'Reader's Trauma'. (96)

Such an argument is clever, but it encapsulates a concern this reviewer has in reading through these essays, with the question of scale. Trauma narratives initially emerged in the aftermath of large-scale historical catastrophes of the twentieth century, such as the Holocaust, in the form of testimonial writing. While critics have insisted on the essential difference between such autobiographical writing on the one hand and trauma fiction on the other, the two genres share narrative techniques and strategies which are not miles apart, as they tend to set individual experience against the context of a larger collective one. The essays in the current volume work hard to negotiate the tension between the collective and (yet) individual experience of trauma, calling on a range of terms in order to do so. Andrés Romero-Jódar rehearses some of these, "political trauma", "structural trauma", "punctual trauma", "historical trauma", "cultural trauma", "collective trauma", etc., (181) in his welcome essay on *Watchmen*, Alan Moore and Dave Gibbons' series for DC comics, which he argues convincingly deserves to be taken as a graphic novel, and thus merits inclusion in this collection. And yet, to apply the same term, trauma, to the reader's experience of narrative doubling and lack of closure, as in Hillis Miller's Reader's Trauma, implies a loss of sense of scale, arising from postmodern criticism's tendency towards, perhaps playful, over-relativization. I would add, thankfully, that the final part of this volume, on the therapeutic possibilities of such narratives, grounds the collection firmly on the ethical purpose that the authors proposed in their introduction.

In reviewing this collection as a whole, one ends with the feeling that some of the essays here do not quite grasp the distinction between Romance as genre and as mode as firmly as the introduction does, and therefore sometimes fail to show how that distinction plays out in practice. However, by bringing together Trauma and Romance, two fields of study till now largely dealt with separately, Ganteau and Onega have undoubtedly opened up a whole new area for research.

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EARLY VISIONS AND REPRESENTATIONS OF AMERICA: ÁLVAR NÚÑEZ CABEZA DE VACA'S 'NAUFRAGIOS' AND WILLIAM BRADFORD'S 'OF PLYMOUTH PLANTATION'

M. Carmen Gómez-Galisteo
New York/London/New Delhi/Sydney: Bloomsbury, 2013.
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This book intrigues from the start. The varying ways in which early European explorers and colonizers have viewed and portrayed what was to them a New World have fascinated scholars and general readers ever since Columbus wrote his first reports. A multitude of historians, historical geographers, anthropologists and literary analysts have studied the circumstances, motives, aims, and forms in which generations of Europeans from 1492 onwards expressed their experiences in, and impressions of, American lands and peoples.[1] The general fascination with human 'otherness' is as old as humankind itself, but in scholarly circles the representation of alterity as a mirror revealing self and self-image is of special interest. In this book, Carmen Gómez Galisteo's main focus is on the cultural contexts of two early sources, one Spanish and one English, and on the different historiographical values placed on them by their contemporaries and by later scholars. Her overall aim is to offer a comparative case study of two very different but equally compelling first-hand narratives of early North America. Her starting point is clearly stated: "My hypothesis upon tackling these two works is that, despite the perceived abysm between the Spanish and English colonization of the Americas, Cabeza de Vaca and Bradford participated of a common repository of ideas" (ix).

It immediately strikes one that the author has made an odd choice for a comparative study. It is true that Cabeza de Vaca and Bradford were both Europeans, and therefore, in very broad terms, shared a common cultural background. They both

went to North America in the early modern era, spent a good number of years there, and wrote substantial narratives about their experiences. These commonalities afford some scope to feed into wide-ranging studies of early modern European expansion in the Americas, and of the literature pertaining to both physical and cultural trans-Atlantic crossings. This study, however, finds few similarities between the two writers and their works, actually underscoring many deeply significant differences of time, country of origin, religion, language, education and other cultural specificities, motives for going to America, places of destination, aims, means, activities and results, as well as the multiple differences regarding their respective narratives, such as genre and style, their authors' purposes in writing, and the reception of those narratives by their contemporaries and later historians.

Álvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca (c.1488-c.1559) was the treasurer of the early sixteenth-century expedition led by Pánfilo de Narváez to Florida and southeastern North America. Of the 300 men that Narváez assigned to the land expedition in 1528, all died or disappeared except Cabeza de Vaca, Andrés Dorantes de Carranza, Alonso del Castillo Maldonado, and a black man called Estebanico. The four men managed to survive as slaves, traders and shamanic healers, encountering many different native peoples in the course of an epic eight-year journey to the Pacific coast of New Spain. Cabeza de Vaca, who was not a cultivated man, doubtless had several reasons for writing his story (which was published in 1542), but uppermost in his mind seems to have been his hope that it would gain him royal favour and an appointment as leader of another expedition which might bring him greater success than Narváez's ill-fated 'entrada'. Needing to give an explanation for Narváez's massive failure and for his own suffering and survival, Cabeza de Vaca offers divine intervention and providence as the vital key to understanding and giving special value to his personal story.

William Bradford (c.1590-c.1657), by contrast, was an educated man. He was a political and religious leader of the Separatist Puritan community that founded Plymouth in New England in 1620. He wrote the story of that community's experiences between 1621 and 1646 from the perspective of a historian rather than that of a protagonist and eye-witness. By all accounts, he minimized, indeed almost concealed his own role in the story, in order to explain, for the benefit of future generations, the ways in which he thought divine providence guided the Pilgrims' venture. Perhaps he also wanted to establish Plymouth's place in history, in view of the Great Puritan migration of the 1630s to Massachusetts and neighbouring New England colonies, and possibly too, to assuage a certain personal disappointment at his community's fast-fading religious fervour. Bradford wrote his history of Plymouth Plantation between 1630 and 1651. It was known to his contemporaries, who apparently consulted it in manuscript form, but it was

lost some time during the US war of independence and not published until 1856.

Early Visions and Representations of America is divided into six chapters. An introductory survey of the historical background of European expansion and the literary problems involved in writing about the New World sets the stage. In addition to underscoring the importance of the different roles of divine providence, the author's main focus here revolves around the idea that the exploration and colonization of America contributed greatly to the formation of both Spanish and English national identities. Gómez Galisteo repeatedly affirms this link but does not fully clarify her theory of how it worked. She does offer a selection of interesting quotations from early modern sources as examples of Spanish or English opinions and sentiments concerning America, but the discussion is muddied by her tendency to move from exemplification to generalization about "national" attitudes. New England Puritan writers were Englishmen, to be sure, but not all Englishmen were New England Puritans.

This is followed by a description of the "competing visions of America" given, on the one hand, by eyewitnesses, that is, individuals who had first-hand knowledge and experience of North America, and on the other, by historians who wrote accounts based on a variety of sources that might include protagonists' letters, reports and narrations. The author does offer some evidence and explanation of a coetaneous sense of the difference between the two kinds of accounts, but, by setting these two categories in opposition, this chapter oversimplifies the deeper issues involved in ascertaining truth and credibility in primary and secondary sources. Professional historians today understand that both primary and secondary sources reflect their author's motives, aims and sources, and that all texts require careful evaluation, irrespective of whether they were penned by protagonists and eyewitnesses or by historians. Gómez-Galisteo's affirmation that early modern contemporaries viewed narratives written by historians as being more highly regarded or more authoritative than eyewitness versions is not substantiated well enough for such a broad generalization, but it is provocative and might feed into the existing debate about the historical credibility of texts shaping early European perceptions of America.

The third chapter, entitled "Describing an Unknown Land", does a good job of explaining the multiple difficulties found by European writers who faced the task of trying to describe American lands and peoples to their contemporaries. Chapters four and five discuss in some detail the images of America created by Álvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca in *Naufragios* and by William Bradford in his work, *Of Plymouth Plantation*, respectively. In chapter six, Gómez-Galisteo revisits aspects of chapter two in her analysis of Cabeza de Vaca and Bradford as both eyewitnesses and

historians. The discussion offers a useful description of the reactions of a few contemporaries and later historians, but is marred by the author's seemingly unquestioning acceptance of favourable evaluations of Bradford and negative evaluations of Cabeza de Vaca, without actually analyzing the sources or explaining her own reasons. The study repeatedly asserts that Bradford's veracity and prestige are not questioned and that Cabeza de Vaca is not considered serious, reliable or authoritative as a historical source (153, 155, 157-158, 169).

The overwhelming majority of US sources cited in the bibliography reflects the fact that American historiography far outstrips Spanish scholarship on these subjects, at least in quantity, and shows due diligence on Gómez-Galisteo's part. Nonetheless, Spanish-language sources are underrepresented, and of those cited only a handful of contributions are by Spanish scholars.[2] This seems especially disappointing in a work by a Spanish author who decries the fact that Spanish texts about North American history have long been marginalized or even ignored by US scholars. The notes are not particularly helpful. The publisher may have imposed their annoying placement at the end of each chapter, but the main problem lies in the composite lists of sources for entire paragraphs that make it almost impossible for readers to evaluate the relation between content and sources cited. At the very least, specific textual quotations should have their own individual notes identifying the precise source. There is no quibble with second-hand quotes, as long as they are properly credited, but examples like the one on page 162, note 4: "Barrera, quoted in James C. Murray" are unacceptable because "Barrera" is nowhere to be found in the alphabetical listing of the end bibliography. Trinidad Barrera's edition of *Naufragios* is included in the bibliography under Cabeza de Vaca, while other editions are cited under the names of the editors and/or in the list of secondary sources; but then again, Murray might have been citing another piece by Barrera not cited in this book.[3]

Gómez-Galisteo concludes with a call for more multinational perspectives in order to correct excessively nationalistic approaches to "colonial studies" (171). Unfortunately, her comparison of Cabeza de Vaca and Bradford points out many more differences than similarities, losing sight of the common cultural roots and circumstances of European geographical exploration and colonial expansion across the Atlantic and in the Americas.

Notes

[1]. See for example Chiappelli (1976), Elliott (1992), Bushnell (1995), Kupperman (1995), Abellán (2009).

[2]. Among the most notable absences are Piqueras Céspedes (1990 and 1998).

[3]. For example, Barrera López. (1986).

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TERRORISM AND TEMPORALITY IN THE WORKS OF THOMAS PYNCHON AND DON DELILLO

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Terrorism and Temporality in the Works of Thomas Pynchon and Don DeLillo offers a series of thought-provoking readings on the recent novels by these two American authors. In the eight chapters that constitute this book, James Gourley analyzes representations of temporality in four of DeLillo's novels —*Mao II* (1991), *Cosmopolis* (2003), *Falling Man* (2007), *Point Omega* (2010)— and three of Pynchon's —*Gravity's Rainbow* (1973), *Against the Day* (2006), *Inherent Vice* (2009). The author had already explored the "renewed awareness of time, and indeed, a renewed focus on the politicization of time" in some of these works in the essay "'The 9/11 Novel': Eternal Return in Pynchon and DeLillo" (2012: 166).

Although the texts are analyzed separately, and not on a comparative basis, Gourley devotes a good half of the brief Introduction to justify the rationale of his corpus selection. This seems to be a bit unnecessary, on account of the already existing body of critical work on these two authors. Even before David Cowart famously baptized them as "the mythic cousins of American postmodernism" (2002: 7) more than a decade ago, Pynchon and DeLillo were being brought together in monographs and essay collections, and continue to be frequently (Allen 2000; Tanner 2000; Conte 2002; Parrish 2002; Orbán 2005; Fitzpatrick 2006; McClure 2007).

Gourley chooses to bring them together again under the umbrella of two theoretical *foci*: the concepts of temporality and terrorism. The results are

uneven, and they weaken the theoretical basis of the book, which offers an otherwise excellent collection of essays on the two American novelists. For Gourley, the connection between these authors is justified on the basis of their common concern with American contemporaneity, and the fact that they were both residents of New York City when the September 11 attacks took place (2). Anecdotic as it may seem, the second of these aspects is the one on which the book's theoretical premise is grounded: the change in the authors' conceptualization of time is hypothesized as being causally conditioned by the cultural and historical impact of 9/11 on their work.

Gourley's identification of these authors' concern with time, with human perception and artistic representation of temporality, and the manipulation of time through technological mediation, is the book's strongest thesis. From this perspective, Gourley offers insightful narratological analyses of represented time in the novels, arguing that both authors play with narrative technique in order to articulate a postmodern perception of time. His attempt to join Pynchon and DeLillo in a common concern with terrorism is another matter. True, both novelists have written about terror and terrorists. Yet, as the author himself is forced to admit, "terrorism is, for Pynchon, a different beast" (8). Gourley rightly perceives Pynchon's representation of terrorism as a libertarian force as contradictory with the more conventional understanding of terror as an attack on freedom and social order that has permeated the so-called "September 11 novel" (2).

Another problematic aspect of the book's theoretical premise is the causal logic Gourley imposes on his two *foci*: the belief that the 9/11 terrorist attacks, as a traumatic and culturally defining event, have changed in a radical manner the authors' perception of time. Leaving aside the debate about the extent to which 9/11 has actually constituted such a breaking point in American literary history (see Duvall & Marzec 2011 for an overview of this debate), the causal link is undermined by Gourley's own corpus of texts. Three of the novels he analyzes in the book were written long before 9/11 —*Gravity's Rainbow, Mao II, Cosmopolis*— thus leaving him no other choice but to justify their presence on the basis of their "prophetic" potential. This seems an unnecessary detour, for their common concern with postmodern temporalities would have been a sufficient justification for their inclusion in the corpus of analyzed texts.

Considered individually, many of the chapters offer innovative and insightful readings of these novels, in most cases connected to representations of temporality. Chapter 2 reads *Cosmopolis* along with Paul Virilio's theorizations about the acceleration of time in postmodernism. The reference to Virilio comes from DeLillo's own reading of his texts while preparing for the writing of this novel, as

Gourley convincingly shows through his management of archive material stored at the Harry Ransom Center in Austin, Texas. Chapter 3, devoted to *Falling Man*, convincingly analyzes the protagonist's devotion to poker as a habit intended to cope with involuntary memory and the attempt to create an automatic mental activity to substitute for the intensity of feeling 'now' all the time after 9/11. Chapter 4, focused on DeLillo's most recent novel to date, *Point Omega*, suggests that the desert works in this novel as a distorting element, altering characters' perception of time.[1] Chapter 5 sees *Gravity's Rainbow* as a precedent for the discussion of terror that was to take place in the aftermath of 9/11. Chapter 6, one of the two chapters of the book devoted to *Against the Day*, reads the use of conceptualizations about time travel, bilocation or counter-worlds in the novel as illustration of "what the world would be like if different theories and concepts had been accepted by the scientific world" (135). Chapter 7 links artistic representations in *Against the Day* to Futurism. Finally, Chapter 8 analyzes Doc Sportello's dope habit as the main device used by Pynchon for the creation of a distorted perception of time in *Inherent Vice*.

It is curious to note, nevertheless, that whereas the book tries to identify a postmodern perception of time as distinct from those of earlier ages or cultural movements, many of the referents used as theoretical support in the different chapters originated in the cultural framework of modernism. Proust and Beckett, Friedrich Nietzsche, Henri Bergson, George Steiner, Georg Lukács, Mikhail Bakhtin, Albert Einstein…[2] They definitely contributed to a radical shift in the human perception of time and temporality, but it was one which had little to do with the specific historical impact of September 11. If Gourley had been aware of this irony, his argument about the connection between terrorism and temporality might have benefited from the diachronic perspective on the complexities of 20th century history.

The book, more than the Introduction itself, which suffers from a certain theoretical vagueness, illustrates in a convincing and engaging way the multifaceted nature of Pynchon's and DeLillo's representations of temporality in their recent work. Although his attempt to causally link this renewed awareness of time to recent historical events may seem a bit off target in some of the chapters, Gourley bears witness to the crucial role that these two American novelists have played in shaping contemporary Western consciousness. His is, all in all, a relevant contribution to the scholarly field of postmodernist studies, and to the critical analysis of the two American masters.

Notes

[1]. It should be noted, nevertheless, that this is a recurrent issue in DeLillo's pre-9/11 fiction, discussed in several of his early novels like The Names (1982), Running Dog (1978) and End Zone (1972).

[2]. Actually, the only truly postmodern thinker mentioned in the book is Paul Virilio, whose work is used as the theoretical basis for chapter 2, as has already been mentioned.

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A/B: AUTO/BIOGRAPHY STUDIES 27(1). SPECIAL ISSUE ON AFRICAN AMERICAN LIFE WRITING

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In her review of *African American Autobiography: A Collection of Critical Essays*, edited by William L. Andrews in 1993, Maureen T. Reddy pointed out the two most important limitations of the collection: its lack of focus on the lesser known works, and the little attention devoted to contemporary African American autobiography, given that the most recent work analysed had been published in 1973 (179). Two decades later, the special issue of the journal *a/b: Auto/Biography Studies* devoted to African American life writing in the summer of 2012 shows quite a different picture, even when it evidences the still neglected areas in critical studies on African American autobiographies.

Looking back on the earlier issue the journal devoted to African American life writing, published in the fall of 1986, guest editor Eric D. Lamore's introduction to this special issue echoes Reddy's own misgivings about the type of scholarly articles published in the eighties and nineties, which displayed an excessive concentration on eighteenth- and nineteenth-century autobiographies. In contrast, the issue being reviewed here focuses mostly on previously neglected works, coming from a variety of African American backgrounds and reaching up to the early years of the twenty-first century. Even in the case of the only canonical author included in this collection –the late Maya Angelou– the novelty resides in the approach chosen to analyse her culinary memoirs *Hallelujah! The Welcome Table: A Lifetime of Memories with Recipes* (2004) and *Great Food, All Day Long: Cook*

Splendidly, Eat Smart (2010). Lamore also underlines something all the essays in this special issue have in common: a preference for textual "acts of self-presentation performed by an Arctic explorer, a famous performer and public intellectual, multilingual African Muslims, transracial adoptees, and even a savvy, technologically literate entrepreneur/blogger/Hollywood producer" (3).

Arranged chronologically, the contributions bear witness to the many shapes life narratives can take, not only as regards formal aspects –from classical memoirs to blogs– but also concerning the chosen focus of each autobiography, which allows for a multiplicity of possible sub-classifications. Thus, together with the more classical autobiographical accounts of racial progress, such as Matthew Henson's *A Negro Explorer at the North Pole*, the reader finds narratives of social syncretism in the autobiographies by African-Muslim slaves dealt with in Patrick E. Horn's essay, hegemonic notions of manhood questioned in the accounts studied in the contributions by Daniel A. Holder and Jocelyn Moody, or the fascinating and troubling matter of hybridism, explored in the articles by Linda Furgeson Selzer and Marina Fedosia.

Anthony S. Foy's essay on Matthew Henson's *A Negro Explorer at the North Pole* (1912) looks at the Arctic explorer's memoir as a site of competing discourses of race and citizenship. On the one hand, he had been hailed as "the pride of black America" (21), while, on the other, he was prevented from being included in official narratives of the Pole's discovery by, most effectively, "anti-black discourses of climate determinism" (23). Contrasting the somewhat dismissive answers Henson gave to reporters upon returning from Peary's 1909 expedition to the North Pole with the self-fashioning he later displayed in his memoir, Foy places Henson's work within the discourse of racial progress celebrated by Booker T. Washington, who wrote the foreword to the memoir. The chosen genre to vindicate his achievements allowed Henson to make use of the tradition of work, merit and recognition that Washington had championed as essential in autobiographical narratives of racial progress.

Challenging the extended practice of focusing on the Christian elements in African American slave narratives, Patrick E. Horn chooses to look at the accounts by African-Muslim writers Omar ibn Said, Mahommad Gardo Baquaqua and Nicholas Said, and debunk the frequent connecting of the movement from southern slavery to northern freedom with the slaves' conversion to Christianity, in an attempt to link physical and spiritual liberations. Accepting that his chosen autobiographies comply to a certain extent with the convention of contemporary African American slave narratives, Horn sees enough points of departure to explain why they had failed to receive a much needed attention, namely their presentation of a the less-than-voluntary conversion to Christianity, revealing the interplay between the

"coercion and subversion" included in the essay's title. Discarding the labels of "African Muslim narratives" or even "Christian conversion narratives", Horn's preferred term for autobiographies by enslaved Muslims –and, indeed, other non-Christian– is "narratives of social syncretism" (48). Tracy Curtis also looks into the role played by other spiritual creeds in his study on the use of Buddhism in the autobiographical narratives of Faith Adiele, Jan Willis and Angel Kyodo Williams, which becomes not only a spiritual path, but also a tool to make a political statement.

In his brilliant study of Paul Robeson's *Here I Stand* (1958), Daniel A. Holder regards Robeson's stigmatisation during McCarthyism as the main reason why his autobiography has not yet received the close, scholarly attention it merits (69); that is, before Holder's contribution which, at least for this reviewer, is the *pièce de resistance* of this issue. Holder explores Robeson's careful decision to construct his book as a resistance to McCarthyism by focusing on the materiality of his body as a site of contention; a body that is black, heteronormatively male and, since it embodies none of the threats posed by the "communist man" conceptualized by J. Edgar Hoover (70), a body that is also American.

Robeson's is not the only case in which hegemonic notions of manhood have been used to counteract anti-black discourses. This is, indeed, the main argument in Jocelyn Moody's analysis of early black men's Christian narratives. Looking into the autobiographies of preachers John Jea and William J. Brown, together with a series of interviews of some African American Civil War veterans by graduate student Andrew P. Watson, Moody observes a construction of black masculinity that perpetuates male domination over black women even when it presents an overt rejection of violence. In the case studies, this masculinist protection of women stems from the Scripture-based perception of women as a sacred responsibility for the hierarchically superior men.

The materiality of autobiographical narratives is also central to the study of canonical author Maya Angelou's culinary memoirs in the remarkable contribution by Nicole M. Stamant. Her point of departure is that Angelou is often misinterpreted as avoiding a political position in her works, arguing that most of this criticism stems from an insistence on comparing her memoirs with those by writers such as Malcolm X or Martin Luther King. Given Angelou's commitment "to deconstructing traditional forms of autobiographical texts" (111), and seeing the necessary connection of the material aspect of food preparation and consumption to collectivity, Stamant magisterially locates in Angelou's *Hallelujah! The Welcome Table: A Lifetime of Memories with Recipes* and *Great Food, All Day Long: Cook Splendidly, Eat Smar*t the presence of the radical politics normally found in the life narratives of the men Angelou is frequently compared to.

Hybridism is the thread running through the contributions by Linda Furgeson Selzer and Marina Fedosia. Selzer explores the particularly hybrid nature of the digital sphere and the way it affects self-fashioning in her analysis of the life narratives of African American blogger turned Hollywod writer and producer Angela Nissel, observing the differences in tone between *The Broke Diaries*, which was first published as a blog, and *Mixed: My Life in Black and White*, in which she addressed her growing up as a child of a biracial couple. On her part, Marina Fedosia addresses the issue of transracial adoption in her comparison of two life narratives written by adult African Americans who were adopted by Caucasian parents: Jaiya John and Catherine McKinley. Despite the common elements in their adoption memoirs, the different solutions given to their identity problems –an essentialist search for the "authentic" self in the case of John vs. McKinley's celebration of her "diasporic" nature leads to Fidosia's conclusion that "transracial adoptees cannot be understood as a homogenous group any more than transracial adoption can be understood as an unequivocally beneficial or tragic experience" (226).

A cursory glance at the table of contents –and, indeed, at this review– may give a first impression that this collection of essays has been somewhat randomly put together, given the miscellaneous nature of the texts subject to scrutiny. Far from it; the interdisciplinary nature of this volume reveals the long and fruitful road travelled in the areas of African American autobiography and literary criticism since the eighties. Nevertheless, there are gaping absences, issues that some readers would most likely expect to find addressed in a contribution of this nature (this reviewer misses, for instance, a contribution on any LGBT autobiography or memoir). This is, obviously, not a criticism of either the editors or the resulting volume, just a reflection of the many avenues still open to exploration for scholars working in the field of African American autobiographies.

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ESTIMATING EMERSON: AN ANTHOLOGY OF CRITICISM FROM CARLYLE TO CAVELL

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> The stars awaken a certain reverence, because though always present, they are inaccessible; but all natural objects make a kindred impression, when the mind is open to their influence —Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Nature* (in Simon and Parsons 1966: 13).

Resembling the stars he "awakened a certain reverence", and like "all natural objects" he made "a kindred impression" upon the minds of those who were open to his influence. The American essayist, poet and admirable lecturer, Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803-1882), helped shape and define American identity and is often considered to be "America's Plato".[1] As his contemporary and fellow Transcendentalist Orestes Brownson[2] once wrote, it was "as the advocate of the rights of the mind" and "as the defender of personal independence in the spiritual world", that Emerson caught the attention of "many young, ardent, and yet noble minds" (in Gura 2007: 95). Emerson not only blazed a significant path for his contemporaries, but also left a legacy which —almost two centuries later— is still being studied, questioned, evaluated, criticized and analyzed. An internationally acclaimed author and thinker, he still excites influence and provokes admiration among intellectuals, writers and scholars. The widespread interest in Emerson's work and persona persists, possibly because, as Walt Whitman states in his essay "The Superiority of Emerson's Writing", "he has what none else has; he does what none else does. He pierces the crusts that envelope the secrets of life. He joins on

equal terms the few great sages and original seers. He represents the freeman, America, the individual" (LaRocca 2013: 177).

Estimating Emerson: an Anthology of Criticism from Carlyle to Cavell edited by David LaRocca, brings together classic and contemporary critical miscellaneous texts on Emerson, written by a range of renowned critics and observers of literary history. *Estimating Emerson* is the first anthology of criticism which, on the one hand, compiles so many articles written over a period of 174 years, and on the other hand, gathers the various comments, interpretations and analyses written on Emerson by 67 of the world's most celebrated authors. From Thomas Carlyle to Stanley Cavell, and including Edgar Allan Poe, Charles Dickens, Herman Melville, Charles Baudelaire, Walt Whitman, Henry James, Friedrich Nietzsche, Marcel Proust, Virginia Woolf, T.S. Eliot, Jorge Luis Borges, Harold Bloom and Charles Bernstein, to mention only a few of the authors who come together across time in *Estimating Emerson*. Although the texts and authors that make up this critical anthology are brought together as a result of having Emerson as the focus of attention, the book not only proves interesting and necessary for scholars interested in Emerson, but is also of interest to scholars and readers of the literary periods covered in general, due to the outstanding quality of its articles.

Given that so many memorable classic and contemporary authors have paid attention to Emerson, LaRocca is led to wonder in his introduction to the book: "Why have so many notable writers taken their interest in Ralph Waldo Emerson's work beyond private admiration –or irritation– and chosen to write essays, critical remarks, and other forms of prose as well as poetry that name, engage, correct and clarify, and often celebrate his writing?" (1). *Estimating Emerson* may perhaps not fully answer this question. Nonetheless, this volume does shed light upon Emerson's long-lasting significance and helps illuminate and simplify the pathway to a better understanding of Emerson's heritage and the reasons why he has been so widely celebrated. As LaRocca explains:

> The present volume may form a partial reply, or by the sheer extent and diversity of comments on Emerson it may create a deeper mystery, a more pressing desire to understand how Emerson's writing provoked and persuaded so many exceptional writers to single out his work for approbation and critique, to fathom the pleasure and difficulty of inheriting his work, and more generally to estimate Emerson's singular contribution. (1)

The editing and formatting of an anthology as large and complex as *Estimating Emerson* is beset with decision-making and LaRocca broadly explains in the introduction his criterion for selecting authors and texts: "a criterion that blends an author's prominence-at-the-time-of-composition with the impression his criticism made on the forms and features of criticism that followed his work" (3).

The volume is divided thus into eight periods that cover 174 years altogether, starting with the year 1834 —the date of the text which opens the anthology, Thomas Carlyle's "Preface by the Editor to *Essays, First Series*"— and ending in the year 2008. LaRocca's short biography for each of the authors that make up the anthology performs a useful service for readers by contextualizing the range of texts on display.

The three periods that cover the nineteenth century —1834-1860; 1861-1880 and 1881-1900— are inaugurated by Thomas Carlyle's texts "Preface by the Editor to *Essays, First Series*" and "Letters to Emerson" and conclude with three texts by Friedrich Nietzsche taken from "Schopenhauer as Educator in *Untimely Meditations*", from *The Gay Science* and from "Raids of an Untimely Man in *Twilight of the Idols*", respectively. In these different periods belonging to the nineteenth century one finds texts by some of Emerson's contemporaries: Henry David Thoreau (1817-1862), Nathaniel Hawthorne (1804-1864), Edgar Allan Poe (1809-1849), Charles Dickens (1812-1870), Margaret Fuller (1810-1850), Herman Melville (1819-1891), Charles Baudelaire (1821-1867), Walt Whitman (1819-1892), Matthew Arnold (1822-1888) and Henry James senior (1843-1916), among others. One can find texts as diverse as these short examples: in Hawthorne's "Letter to Emerson" one reads, "My dear Emerson, I thank you for your book, which reached me a week or two ago […]. Undoubtedly, these are the truest pages that have yet been written, about this country" (44). In Melville's "Letter to Lemuel Shaw", one reads: "Nay, I do not oscillate in Emerson's rainbow, but prefer rather to hang myself in my own halter that swing in any other man's swing" (103).

The twentieth century is divided into five different periods and the last period includes the first eight years of the twenty-first century, starting in 1901 and ending in 2008 with three texts by Stanley Cavell. The twentieth century combines texts from John Dewey (1859-1952), George Santayana (1863-1952), Marcel Proust (1871-1922), Virginia Woolf (1882-1941), T.S. Eliot (1888-1965), D.H. Lawrence (1885-1930), F.O. Matthiessen (1902-1950), Robert Frost (1874-1963), Jorge Luis Borges (1899-1986), Harold Bloom (1930-) and Cornel West (1953-), to name a few. Among the miscellaneous texts –both prose and poetry– included in this period, one can find the poem 'Emerson', dedicated to Emerson by the Argentinean writer Jorge Luis Borges (478):

> Closing the heavy volume of Montaigne,
> The tall New Englander goes out
> Into an evening which exalts the fields.
> It is a pleasure worth no less than reading.
> He walks towards the final sloping of the sun,
> Towards the landscape's gilded edge;

> He moves through darkening fields as he moves now
> Through the memory of the one who writes this down.
> […]

Estimating Emerson is to be highly recommended for all scholars from different fields of the Humanities. A close look at the book's content list will show that the volume is not just useful as a tool for studying Emerson, but that it may well serve to illuminate American society and identities throughout this period. While the table of contents is well organized considering the book's extension, the incorporation of an index —organized by names and subjects— would have proven useful for readers. Ralph Waldo Emerson may stand in the center of the kaleidoscope in *Estimating Emerson*, but the many and varied authors included in the book bestow on it a much wider relevance and interest than the title indicates.

Notes

[1]. Matthiessen affirms, "The representative man whom he most revered was Plato. For Plato had been able to bridge the gap between the two poles of thought, to reconcile fact and abstraction, the many and the One, society and solitude. Emerson wanted a like method for himself […]". (1962: 3)

[2]. Although Orestes Brownson was part of the Transcendentalist movement, he renounced both Transcendentalism and Liberalism when he converted to Catholicism around 1840.

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TALKING DIRTY ON SEX AND THE CITY: ROMANCE, INTIMACY, FRIENDSHIP

Beatriz Oria

Lanham, New York, Plymouth: Rowman & Littlefield, 2014.

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Sex and the City was first broadcast on HBO in 1998 and it became not only an immediate mainstream success but also the object of many academic studies of the popular media. More than ten years after the series ended, Beatriz Oria has made a brilliant, thought-provoking study of this cultural phenomenon that eventually made its way onto the big screen in two film sequels in her monograph *Talking Dirty On Sex and the City: Romance, Intimacy, Friendship*, a valuable addition to recent postfeminist criticism on romantic comedy by film scholars such as Hilary Radner, Diane Negra, Ana Moya and Michele Schreiber, all of them deeply concerned with exploring the position of the neoliberal female subject in today's examples of romantic comedy. This genre, according to Oria, provides the essential structural and narrative context for *Sex and the City* (*SATC*), and as a generic framework, it has continued to hold its appeal for mass audiences not just in film but also on television. Frequently dismissed by critics as a popular product of low artistic interest, romantic comedy has nevertheless proved successful in eliciting from audiences a variety of intense emotions ranging from laughter to tears, deep responses that account for the genuine narrative tone characteristic of the genre (Deleyto 2009). In Oria's view, it is precisely through the generic conventions of romantic comedy articulated by *SATC* that this cultural text can be said to have contributed to contemporary debates on intimacy, sexuality and subjectivity from a fresh perspective that benefits from its crossing of media boundaries.

The specific core themes selected by Oria for her analysis of the cultural relevance and ideological scope of *SATC*, including the notion of performativity applied to the contemporary concept of love, the definition of emotions as constructed by cultural and economic conditions and the contradictory nature of (female) subjectivity in the postfeminist era, allow her to present her insights on the series in a well-structured episodic fashion that resembles the very structural model of the series itself, characterised by controversial questions or topics which are summarised in the very titles of individual episodes. Starting with a thoroughly documented introduction on the US television context in the 1990s known as the "second golden age of quality TV", followed by a panoramic view of the genre of romantic comedy from the 'nervous romances' cycle of the seventies up to the emerging trends of the present time, Oria's book might be seen as standing at an intersection between media and film studies, on the one hand, and sociological and cultural debates, on the other.

Divided into five chapters in which a limited number of episodes are analysed in further detail, Oria's thesis of how *SATC* deals with intimate matters both in narrative and generic terms starts by focusing on the connections between romance and consumption and on the duality of democratic love versus romantic love before the representation of female sexuality in the media and the definitions of new family models are explored in the two final chapters of the book. All these topics are simultaneously theorised and discussed by the author against the fictional background of the intimate vicissitudes of *SATC*'s independent, neoliberal, glamorous female protagonists. Oria's textual approach to the popular HBO television series may, in fact, be considered one of the major achievements of her research because of its originality and attention to detail. In this sense, Oria's reading of the series as an interdisciplinary, hybrid cultural product drawing on the alluring visual universe of the fashion world, on the cinematic tradition of romantic comedy as well as on the rhetoric of women's magazines and literary texts like the so-called *chick-lit* fiction cycle and, finally, on the narrative patterns of the familiar television sitcoms, renders particularly appropriate her choice of a methodology and theoretical framework. This allows her to integrate her research on television and film within a range of debates belonging to the scope of sociology, psychology and gender studies. The potential difficulties of engaging with knowledge and insights from scientific fields *a priori* unfamiliar to a film studies scholar have not prevented the author from bringing into her discussion of *SATC* a remarkable sociological corpus together with a comprehensive updated selection of scholarship which can be classified under the label of television and film studies.

Specifically regarding the book's contribution to film studies, Oria's generic approach to *SATC* is certainly original and hints at interesting unexplored interdisciplinary territory in genre theory, even though the generic territory she

deals with might well have been expanded. For instance, her focus on the interaction between the serial structure of the series and the film genre of romantic comedy would have also benefited, in my view, from a consideration of the relevance of the genre of melodrama as an additional relevant intertext of the series. In this respect, it might be argued that the interest of *SATC* in emphasising the difficulty, almost the impossibility of keeping romantic relationships at the turn of the millennium seems to be very much in tune with the uncertainty and mixed feelings of desire and frustration, expectations and deception typical of the melodramatic plot lines and endings. By focusing on the relevance of the conventions of melodrama in the series, the notion of generic hybridity that Oria briefly discusses mostly in connection with other television genres such as soap opera and talk shows might have been better supported and illustrated.

Melodrama is not the only intertextual reference that I have missed in an otherwise well-articulated study of the generic context underlying the series. Oria's identification of the cycle of nervous romances produced in the seventies and the recent 'confessional comedy' genre as the main filmic tradition on which *SATC* is grounded is convincingly explained. Nevertheless, her insights into the connections between the HBO series and romantic comedy could have included a dialogue with film texts from the classical period which had explicitly meditated on the same issues as *SATC* would do a few decades later. Well-known Hollywood fifties comedies like *How to Marry a Millionaire* (1953), *Pillow Talk* (1959) or *That Touch of Mink* (1962) and their discourses on the contradictions in the definition of female identity and the meanings attached to female sexual codes, courtship protocols and intimate matters might easily have been listed in Oria's corpus of specific generic predecessors of the successful television series under consideration. The potential time and space limitations of any academic work notwithstanding, it seems to me that the connections that might have been established between these classical comedies and *SATC* on the matters posed by these texts concerning female subjectivity and women's dilemmas in western societies are so relevant that it would have been worth referring to this cycle as yet one more layer in the generic context on which *SATC* is said to be grounded.

This having been said, I share Oria's central tenets concerning the resilience and flexibility of romantic comedy and, in her own terms, "its innate capability to evolve with the times and establish a rich, complex dialogue with its social context" (12). The role that successful cultural products such as *SATC* have actually played in the generic evolution of romantic comedy, as Oria has argued, cannot be denied even if the diversification of topics she refers to was already in progress in filmic examples of the genre (Deleyto 2009). Already present in the agenda of romantic comedy, this array of cultural issues that the genre is likely to explore in the future

was certainly brought to the foreground by *SATC*, which, Oria claims, has thereby helped to "rewrite the scripts of romantic comedy for the twenty-first century in a significant way" (18). The list of emerging topics increasingly congenial to romantic comedy would include "friendship as a viable alternative to heterosexual love", "the difficulty of sustaining a satisfying relationship nowadays", "the problems of adaptation both sexes experience as a consequence of the postfeminist ethos" and the increasing social and cultural relevance of interracial, interethnic and transnational romance (18).

In a clear, fluid style, Beatriz Oria engages readers in a lively debate on the connections between visual culture and the construction of identity, and the performative nature of gender and its impact on romantic protocols, friendship patterns and family issues. How the sphere of intimacy may be transformed by the contemporary mobile, global, consumerist society we live in, as Oria suggests, is only ambiguously defined by *SATC* from beginning to end, just as it is also humorously reflected by the multiprotagonist storylines of the series. Even if the intimate matters agenda of the new millennium still remains unpredictable and open to discussion both in Oria's object of study and in real life, *Talking Dirty on Sex and The City* certainly allows readers to catch a provisional glimpse of the array of possibilities they might be faced with in the vast territory of interpersonal relationships, which is what the cultural product analysed seems to have intended in the first place. Regardless of our potential interest in the series itself, Oria's monograph, I would conclude, proves to be stimulating reading not only for its scholarly rigour and diversity of approaches to its object of study but also because it leads us to reflect on the same controversial issues as the protagonists of *Sex and the City*, —Carrie, Samantha, Miranda and Charlotte— endlessly do and from an equally ambivalent perspective.

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TONI MORRISON, MEMORY AND MEANING

Adrienne Lanier Seward and Justine Tally, eds.
Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2014.
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Toni Morrison's body of work has turned her into an imposing presence in US literature. Her ten novels (to date) have proved to be decisive in the attempt to reshape the African American experience and to facilitate its way from the margins to the center of the American literary canon. In so doing, Morrison's oeuvre has fostered new understandings of the black self, bringing it to the fore and reimagining its representation as "a central symbol in the psychological, cultural, and political systems of the West as a whole" (Gilroy 1993: 158). Thus, as a commemorative and celebratory output that acknowledges "the fortieth anniversary of her first novel, the twentieth anniversary of the awarding of the Nobel Prize for Literature (1993), and the twentieth anniversary of the founding of the Toni Morrison Society" (Seward and Tally 2014: xvi), the timing of the publication of *Toni Morrison, Memory and Meaning* could not be more propitious. The volume, edited by Adrienne Lanier Seward and Justine Tally, brings together an array of essays by distinguished Morrison scholars from Europe and the US engaging multidirectional perspectives that put forward innovative interpretations of Morrison's work as well as brand new readings of her two latest publications to date, the novel *Home* (2012), and the play *Desdemona* (2012).

The book is divided into five parts, each of which is headed by a quote from Morrison's latest novel, as the essays grapple with themes that are also prevalent in

Home, and framed by a couple of poems that belong to acclaimed poets Rita Dove and Sonia Sanchez.

Carolyn C. Denard, founder of The Toni Morrison Society, opens the volume with an enlightening foreword in which she honors Morrison's literary status as a writer of the first order. Taking their cue from this, both editors remind us that reading Morrison is to read beyond the page (Seward and Tally 2014: xv) and present her tenth novel in which the nature of love and its musings, once more, lie at the core of the story.

Part one is made up of four essays that explore the concept of belonging and lay bare the literary framework taking into account the humanist and modernist approach that Morrison's work encompasses. In the first chapter Philip Weinstein reviews the concept of the 'Africanist presence' that Morrison developed in her 1992 study *Playing in the Dark*. Weinstein contends that the author tries to counteract a depiction of romanticized blackness in her work by delving into raw concepts such as belonging and unbelonging that ultimately signal the pitfalls of innocence and commit the reader to read at great risk. Unbelonging is precisely the key concept of Marc C. Conner's contribution in which he highlights the figure of the outcast in several of Morrison's novels and winds up stating that by understanding the world as an ontological space such sense of homelessness, as portrayed in Toni Morrison's work, reflects the "crisis of modernity" (Seward and Tally 2014: 20). In her essay dealing with Morrison's trilogy (*Beloved, Jazz* and *Paradise*) Ann Hostetler focuses on the trope of the dead girl –common to the three novels– offering the author's version of a feminized history, or *her*story, in which the trope of the dead girl opens out towards a larger cultural narrative that voices the ongoing sufferings of black women. Dana A. Williams closes this first part linking the concept of belonging to Morrison's professional work as an editor and thus agent and curator of the African American cultural identity.

Part two is devoted to the crucial role of memory in Morrison's work. With an emphasis on *The Bluest Eye* and *Paradise* Cheryl Wall shows how blackness has historically been fetishized in spite of the black self. Morrison's novels, Wall submits, offer spiritual cartographies that show the way towards acknowledging the completion of black subjectivity. Claudine Raynaud and Evelyn Jaffe Schreiber analyze *Beloved* and *A Mercy* respectively and draw on memory as the tenet for the return of the repressed that can reconfigure a black self, for both scholars argue that creation is memory work. On the other hand, Lucille Fults reads *Love* as a meaningful depiction of the outcomes of the racist zeitgeist of the Civil Rights era as the novel, Fults argues, offers a nuanced reexamination of the multifarious choices that the black community had to put up with in such tumultuous times.

Part three is entirely dedicated to Morrison's indebtedness to the Bible as a ur-text central to each end every single one of her novels. Toni Morrison herself once admitted that the "Bible wasn't part of my reading, it was part of my life" (in Brown 1999: 157). Shirle A. Stave traces Morrison's position on Christianity in her study of the author's acclaimed trilogy and points how misogynistic violence impinged on black women and how Morrison eventually came to disregard a theology that privileges spirit over flesh. Katherine Clay Bassard's essay feeds on black women's biblicism from the nineteenth century to the present to ponder black women's religious agency in Morrison's rendition of Christianity. The exploration of John Winthrop's sermon "A Model for Christian Charity" serves Justine Tally to propose a typological reading of Morrison's trilogy in which The Law of Nature and The Law of Gospel intermesh to offer the healing of the black community. To finish this third part, David Carrasco continues to surmount a religious vision of the magical and biblical flight through his reading of *Song of Solomon*. In it Carrasco asserts that the flight encodes a spiritual meaning and acts as a religious strategy to fight racial sufferings.

Part four is a palimpsest of identity-building and search for an African American integrity. Through her reading of *Beloved* Lovalerie King discusses the concepts of identity and property under the slavery system to highlight, mirroring Sethe's whereabouts, black slaves' refusal to be defined as subhuman. Tessa Roynon selects *Song of Solomon, Beloved, Jazz* and *Love* to suggest that such novels bring about fresh readings of black integrity as they eschew the American legal system by presenting alternative means of social atonement. Alma Jean Billingslea Brown contends that *Song of Solomon* traces back Milkman's identity through folklore and the African legacy and, drawing on *Home*, Valerie Thomas studies the process of the decolonization of the black psyche as the perfect means to achieve a balance that can allow for the representation of African American subjectivity.

The last part of the volume praises the representation of the aesthetics of several of Morrison's novels. Claudia Brodsky blends the political and the cultural in Morrison to challenge Walter Benjamin's assumption of the conflicting nature that fuses aesthetics and politics. In tune with Brodsky's essay, Herman Beavers presents *Tar Baby* and *Paradise* as an exploration of alternative forms of female representation in which black aesthetics takes central part. Jan Furman centers on *Home* to pinpoint Frank Money's geographical and psychological journey, in which trauma arises to facilitate self-acceptance and a healthier version of masculinity. Mar Gallego-Durán's chapter also focuses on male identity with special interest in the representation of white masculinity as it is conjured up in *A Mercy*. The white patriarchy that Morrison presents plunges into the difficulties that ethnic epistemologies had to endure from the outset in the nation that was to be known

as the United States of America. In the last essay *Desdemona* is the object of Lenor Kitts' study in which she affirms that, through Morrison's rewriting of *Othello*, Shakespearean characters can be understood in new and the same time the playwright's vision of Africa can be remodeled.

The book attests to Morrison's literary legacy in (African) American literature but since much of it has been devoted to the acclaimed trilogy –as Justine Tally's *Toni Morrison's 'Beloved': Origins: Possible Worlds* and *Paradise Reconsidered* alongside her edition of *The Cambridge Companion to Toni Morrison* confirms, it would have been of greater interest to bring to the fore more insights on and readings of the latest contributions that Morrison has added to the literary scenario.

On the whole, *Toni Morrison, Memory and Meaning* argues for new understandings of Morrison's whole work and attempts to extend a tradition of literary discussion about her reputation as a major figure in North American letters in an attempt to elicit new responses, bearing in mind the forthcoming publication of her eleventh novel *God Help the Child*, due to be launched in April 2015.

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Abstracts

KNOWABLE CONSPIRACIES: A REASSESSMENT OF FORMAL AND IDEOLOGICAL ASPECTS IN JONATHAN FRANZEN'S THE TWENTY-SEVENTH CITY

Jesús Blanco Hidalga

The narrative work of American novelist Jonathan Franzen has undeniably been neglected by academic criticism, a circumstance which is even more evident as regards his early fiction. It is the case that a significant part of such (scarce) critical attention as there is has focused on political questions and has generally dismissed Franzen's professedly progressive engagement as unsound and counter-productive. This article departs from that reception —to which it acknowledges a point— and seeks to complement it by providing a wider ideological analysis of Franzen's first novel. With this aim, we relate the novel to its specific historical and cultural context and we explore its Utopian content in the light of Jameson's theory of narrative. In addition, we address the political import inherent in the particular novelistic form used by Franzen, a process which involves questioning the generally accepted accounts of Franzen's stylistic evolution from postmodernism to realism.

Keywords: Jonathan Franzen, critical reception, postmodernist novel, realism, ideology.

Parece claro que la obra narrativa del novelista norteamericano Jonathan Franzen no ha recibido la atención debida por parte de la crítica académica, una circunstancia que se hace más evidente aún en el caso de sus dos primeras novelas. Una parte importante de esa crítica académica se ha centrado en aspectos políticos y en su mayor parte ha desdeñado el compromiso progresista de Franzen

por considerarlo endeble y contraproducente. Este artículo parte de esa recepción crítica —a la cual reconoce ciertas razones— pero intenta complementarla proporcionando un análisis ideológico de la primera novela de Franzen más amplio que los existentes hasta ahora. Con este objetivo, estudiamos la relación de *The Twenty-Seventh City* con su contexto histórico y cultural y analizamos su contenido utópico a la luz de las teorías de Fredric Jameson sobre la narrativa. Además, examinamos la carga política inherente a la forma narrativa específica utilizada por Franzen. Nuestro análisis también nos lleva a cuestionar la versión comúnmente aceptada de la evolución estilística de la narrativa de Franzen del postmodernismo al realismo.

Palabras clave: Jonathan Franzen, recepción crítica, novela postmodernista, realismo, ideología.

NEITHER CHUCKWAGONS, NOR SASKATOONS, AND A MISSING MARLBORO MAN: POSTCOLONIALISM, REGIONALISM AND THE INEFFABLE CANADIAN WEST

Pedro Miguel Carmona-Rodríguez

Contemporary transnational and transcontinental trends of theory enable a mandatory analysis of how region and regionalism have been fundamental in the solidification of the Canadian national ethos, making locality and globality go hand in hand. Negotiating the meaning of regional identities is therefore a consequence of the processes of globalisation, which have been affecting how we (de)construct the nation. This paper addresses how a vested representation in fiction from the Canadian west and the prairies helped keep at bay the spectrum of fragmentation that threatened the hermetic body of a national literature and culture. Whereas traditional patterns of history and fiction have constructed the west under a recurrent attention to ossified issues of landscape, the west and the plains were more recently conceptualized in attention to a different tackling of time/space: one that unified the former prairies and the west in just one single experience. Anticipating much of the theoretical approach to the global through locality launched in the early 21st century, while also being inheritors of previous theoretical and fictional attempts at renewing regional myths, Guy Vanderhaege's *The Englishman's Boy* (1996) and Thomas Wharton's *Icefields* (1997) make the structuring potential of their times and spaces lose their hegemony, thus favouring the rooting of postmodern myths and ineffability to unmark the borders of region, and destabilize those of the national discourse.

Keywords: postcolonialism, regionalism, Canadian west, Canadian fiction, postcolonial theory.

Las tendencias teóricas contemporáneas transnacionales y transcontinentales permiten un análisis obligatorio de cómo la región y el regionalismo han sido fundamentales para la solidificación del *ethos* nacional canadiense, logrando de esta manera que lo global y lo local vayan de la mano. La negociación del significado de las identidades regionales es por tanto una consecuencia de los procesos de globalización, los cuales han venido determinando cómo (de)construimos la nación. Este artículo analiza cómo una representación mediada en la ficción del oeste canadiense y las praderas ayudó a mantener bajo control el espectro de fragmentación que amenazaba habitualmente el corpus hermético de la literatura y la cultura nacionales. Mientras los patrones tradicionales de la historia y la ficción han construido el oeste por medio de una atención recurrente a temas paisajísticos anquilosados, la pradera y el oeste se han conceptualizado más recientemente sobre una percepción distinta de tiempo/espacio, y en ella las antiguas praderas y el oeste se han unificado en una misma experiencia. Mientras avanzan mucho del enfoque teórico de lo global a través de lo local inaugurado a comienzos del siglo XXI, y se erigen además herederas de previos intentos teóricos y ficticios de renovar los mitos regionales, *The Englishman's Boy* (1996), de Guy Vanderhaege, y *Icefields* (1997), de Thomas Wharton, hacen que el potencial estructural de sus tiempos y espacios pierda su hegemonía, favoreciendo así el enraizamiento de mitos posmodernos y de inefabilidad con el fin de desmarcar los límites de la región y de desestabilizar los del discurso nacional.

Palabras clave: postcolonialismo, regionalismo, Oeste canadiense, ficción canadiense, teoría postcolonial.

ON THE ROAD TO "SOME" PLACE: SOFIA COPPOLA'S DISSIDENT MODERNISM AGAINST A POSTMODERN LANDSCAPE

Todd Kennedy

Sofia Coppola's enigmatic film, *Somewhere*, has met with conflicting responses from critics who attempt to label it a "European" film. Yet, as I argue, the film may be best understood not in its relationship to European cinema, but, rather, its relation to philosophical debates between modernism and postmodernism, to American film history, and, even more importantly, to one of the oldest and most dominant tropes in US culture —that of the hobo-hero. I begin by explaining the background of the figure of the hobo-hero, and its relationship to modernism, and then return to look at the manner in which Coppola draws upon this image in order to invoke (and comment upon) American identity, the postmodern culture of Los Angeles/Hollywood, and questions that are central to the discourse of

philosophical modernism. Towards the end of the article, I draw upon the work of Marshall Berman in order to question whether there is a way in which the hobo-hero can allow modernism to openly defy postmodernism itself, even while expressing and exploring a postmodern landscape, a postmodern world. Perhaps surprisingly, I argue that such a question may be best answered by Sofia Coppola's fourth feature film.

Keywords: Sofia Coppola, *Somewhere*, modernism, hobo-hero, Marshall Berman.

La enigmática película de Sofia Coppola, *Somewhere*, ha suscitado reacciones diversas entre los críticos que intentan clasificarla como "europea". Sin embargo, en este ensayo me propongo analizar la película sin poner el foco en esta supuesta influencia. Por el contrario, intento mostrar la relación de la película con los debates filosóficos entre modernismo y posmodernismo, con la historia del cine estadounidense y, en mayor medida, con uno de los arquetipos más antiguos y dominantes en la cultura de los Estados Unidos —el del vagabundo-héroe. Inicio el ensayo con una exploración del vagabundo-héroe y su relación con el modernismo para elucidar cómo Coppola utiliza esta imagen para invocar (y comentar) la identidad estadounidense, la cultura posmoderna de Los Ángeles/ Hollywood, y aquellas cuestiones que son centrales en el discurso del modernismo filosófico. En la parte final del artículo, utilizo las ideas de Marshall Berman para explorar si hay alguna forma en la que el vagabundo-héroe pueda permitir que el modernismo desafíe abiertamente al postmodernismo, a pesar de que al mismo tiempo exprese y se mueva en un paisaje y mundo posmoderno. Aunque pueda parecer sorprendente, defiendo que esa pregunta puede responderse a través de la cuarta película de Sofia Coppola.

Palabras clave: Sofia Coppola, *Somewhere*, modernismo, caminante-héroe, Marshall Berman.

BETWEEN A BUTTERFLY AND A CATHEDRAL: THE QUESTION OF ART IN BRIDESHEAD REVISITED BY EVELYN WAUGH

Slawomir Koziol

The article explores Evelyn Waugh's views on art, especially his criticism of modernism, expressed in his novel *Brideshead Revisited*. Drawing on the works of aesthetic theory alluded to or directly mentioned in the novel, as well as on the existing literary criticism on the work, the article examines Waugh's idea of the function and value of art through a close reading of key fragments of the novel dealing with the question of art. The article argues that Waugh's criticism of the modernist aesthetics finds its closest ally and its best theoretical elucidation in one of the less known —and most probably unknown to Waugh himself— texts of Roger Fry, who is generally considered to be an icon for practitioners

and theorists of modernist art Britain and who plays such a role in Waugh's novel.

Keywords: *Brideshead Revisited*, Evelyn Waugh, art, modernism, Roger Fry.

Este artículo explora las opiniones de Evelyn Waugh sobre el arte, especialmente su crítica al modernismo expresado en su novela *Brideshead Revisited*. Utilizando como base las obras de teoría estética aludidas o mencionadas directamente en la novela, además de la crítica literaria existente sobre la misma, el artículo examina la idea de Waugh sobre la función y valor del arte a través de una lectura detallada de fragmentos clave de la novela que tratan la cuestión del arte. El artículo defiende que la crítica de Waugh a la estética modernista encuentra a su aliado más cercano y su mejor elucidación teórica en uno de los textos menos conocidos de Roger Fry —y probablemente desconocido para el propio Waugh— que es considerado generalmente un icono del arte y la teoría modernista en el Reino Unido y que desempeña un papel tan importante en la novela de Waugh.

Palabras clave: *Brideshead Revisited*, Evelyn Waugh, arte, modernismo, Roger Fry.

THE PATRIARCH'S BALLS: CLASS-CONSCIOUSNESS, VIOLENCE, AND DYSTOPIA IN GEORGE SAUNDERS' VISION OF CONTEMPORARY AMERICA

Juliana Nalerio

In late 19th Century America, the elite of wealthy New York families were united by the Patriarch's Balls. The Society of the Patriarch organized lavish balls to foster a content class-consciousness among the society of "The Four Hundred" who mattered, in contrast to the rest who did not. In 21st Century America, the tables have been turned and the class conscious are less able to enjoy the fruits of their labor sans guilt (or the realization of a nasty pun). As Slavoj Zizek asserts in *Six Sideways Glances on Violence*, contemporary America's "culture of capital" is marked by the systemic violence that allows the West to maintain its First World status and North American writer George Saunders, for one, knows it. This paper will look at how Saunders returns to those East Coast, greater New York communities in the 21st Century, communities that are now more egalitarian and "open" yet just as worried about keeping up with the Joneses. Writing their stories with a dystopic twist, he intimately explores the anxieties that plague their communities, while also maintaining a sense of the universal in his work that allows for its wider interpretation and relevance to the American national identity in general. Saunders writes as the moral conscience of a community that while "successful" according to American standards, cannot help but feel all the dirtier after the help have cleaned the kitchen.

Keywords: Contemporary US literature, systemic violence, class, critical theory, George Saunders.

En los Estados Unidos de final del siglo XIX, las familias de clase alta de Nueva York se reunían en *The Patriarch's Balls* (El Baile del Patriarca). La Sociedad del Patriarca organizó lujosos bailes con el fin de fomentar una conciencia de clase satisfecha en la sociedad de *The Four Hundred* (Los Cuatrocientos), que eran personas de gran influencia y que parecían importar más que el resto. En los EE. UU. del siglo XXI, las cosas han cambiado, y las personas con aquélla conciencia de clase son menos capaces de disfrutar del fruto de su "labor" sin generar sentimiento de culpabilidad (o de darse cuenta del feo juego de palabras). Como sostiene Slavoj Zizek en su libro *Violence: Six Sideways Reflections* (2008) "la cultura del capital" de los EE.UU en la actualidad está marcada por la violencia sistémica que permite a Occidente mantener su posición como "primer mundo" —como bien sabe el escritor norteamericano George Saunders. Este artículo investiga cómo Saunders regresa a esas comunidades del área de Nueva York y la Costa Este en el siglo XXI. Estas comunidades ahora son más igualitarias y "abiertas" pero siguen igual de preocupadas con estar al día y tener lo mismo, o más, que el vecino. Escribiendo sus historias con un toque distópico, Saunders no sólo explora en profundidad las ansiedades que plagan y afectan a sus comunidades, sino que también mantiene una perspectiva universal en su trabajo que facilita su interpretación más amplia, y relevante para la identidad nacional estadunidense en general. Saunders escribe como si fuera la "brújula moral" del sujeto perteneciente a esas comunidades que, aun teniendo éxito según los estándares de los EE.UU., no puede evitar sentirse *más sucio* después de que el servicio haya terminado de limpiar la cocina.

Palabras clave: Literatura contemporánea de EEUU, violencia sistémica, clases sociales, teoría crítica, George Saunders.

DECALIBRATING THE LANGUAGE. J.H. PRYNNE'S BITING THE AIR.

Wit Pietzak

The article focuses on J.H. Prynne's 2003 volume *Biting the Air*. I seek to explore the modes of reconstitution of language that Prynne shows to be enslaved in the various discourses of modernity. The idea of enslaving discourse is shown to be an unacknowledged aspect of modernity on the basis of Don DeLillo's *Cosmopolis* and Zbigniew Herbert's "Report from the Besieged City", both of which may be seen as illustrations of the hegemony of linguistic enslavement that Prynne struggles against in his poetry. Despite the difference of socio-linguistic and temporal context, both DeLillo and Herbert show that language, as Prynne

implies in the ending of *Biting the Air*, is a "calibrated" mechanism of oppression that, unbeknownst to most people, keeps man fixed within the field of binary rhetoric. In response to that situation, Prynne's poem is demonstrated to refashion the idiom by emphasizing the multiple process of meaning creation. It is in such decalibration of language that a path may be located beyond the reified linguistic praxis.

Keywords: J.H. Prynne, Zbigniew Herbert, Don DeLillo, contemporary poetry, comparative studies.

Este artículo se centra en el volumen de 2003 de J.H. Prynne *Bitting the Air*. En el busco explorar los modos de reconstitución del lenguaje que Prynne muestra que está esclavizado en los discursos varios de la modernidad. La idea de esclavizar el lenguaje se señala como un aspecto no reconocido de la modernidad sobre la base de *Cosmopolis* de Don DeLillo y "Report from the Besieged City" de Zbigniew Herbert. Ambas obras pueden ser vistas como ilustraciones de la hegemonía de la esclavitud lingüística contra la que Prynne lucha en su poesía. A pesar de la diferencia de contexto temporal y socio-lingüístico, tanto DeLillo como Herbert muestran que el idioma, como Prynne insinúa en el final de *Biting the Air*, es un mecanismo "calibrado" de opresión que, desconocido para la mayoría de la gente, mantiene al hombre atrapado dentro de un campo de retórica binaria. En respuesta a esa situación, el poema de Prynne muestra cómo se remodela el lenguaje enfatizando el proceso múltiple de creación de significado. Es en esa descalibración del lenguaje donde se puede encontrar un camino más allá de la praxis lingüística reificada.

Palabras clave: J.H. Prynne, Zbigniew Herbert, Don DeLillo, poesía contemporánea, estudios comparados.

Notes for contributors

NOTES FOR CONTRIBUTORS

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"…narrative to their function" (Labov and Waletzky 1967: 12).

…following Blakemore (1987: 35),…

…perform a distinctive function in discourse (Blakemore 1987).

…this issue has received a lot of attention by relevance theorists (Blakemore 1987, 1992; Wilson and Sperber 1993).

Should part of the original text be omitted, this will be made clear by inserting […], NOT (…).

Bibliographical references

Bibliographical references should be included in alphabetical order at the end of the manuscript and under the heading WORKS CITED. Authors' full first names should be used unless the authors themselves customarily use only initials. Set the author's last name(s) in small caps. References to two or more works by the same

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SAFRAN, Steve. 2007. "E&P: VT paper should be considered for Pulitzer". <http://www.lostremote.com/index.php?tag=virginia-tech>. Accessed July 25, 2008.

"Stars Slate Bush at Relief Event". 2005. BBC News. (September 19). <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/entertainment/4260182.stm>. Accessed February 21, 2010.

TURBIDE, Diane. 1993. "A Literary Trickster: Thomas King Conjures up Comic Worlds". *Maclean's* (3 May): 43-44.

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