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table of contents

IN MEMORIAM

Francisco Javier Sánchez Escribano (1948-2014)

Este volumen está dedicado a la memoria de Javier Sánchez Escribano, compañero y amigo del Departamento de Filología Inglesa y Alemana de la Universidad de Zaragoza, recientemente fallecido. Casi todos los profesores de este departamento conocimos a Javier Sánchez Escribano primero como profesor nuestro en la carrera. Ha sido para nosotros uno de los *old timers* que estaban ya en el departamento y en el área de Filología Inglesa en Zaragoza desde sus primeros tiempos; y enseñó Javier a muchas promociones de estudiantes desde los años 70. Siempre fue un excelente compañero, al que incluso en los momentos difíciles no le fallaban el buen humor, la amistad, y el trato amable. Era parte de esta vida cotidiana en la universidad —tantas reuniones, tantas clases y también muchos cafés que tomamos juntos; la vida sólida de cada día en la que confiamos pensando que nunca nos va a faltar, ese día a día que se vuelve la sustancia misma de la realidad. Damos por hecho no nos va a faltar sin pensarlo siquiera, como nadie había pensado que Javier pudiera morir tan pronto, a destiempo —como tampoco lo pensaríamos sobre nosotros mismos. Se retiró todavía joven, parecía que con mucho tiempo por delante, a disfrutar de una jubilación temprana y una vida que prometía ser feliz y tranquila, a orillas del Mediterráneo. Aunque lo perdimos de vista contábamos con volverlo a ver, cualquier día, en cualquier visita. Y no había de ser. Nunca sabemos si ya hemos visto a alguien por última vez, si ya hemos hablado por última vez con una de esas personas que han sido, con su compañía y con su amistad, la trama misma de nuestra vida diaria, y así nos sucedió con Javier.

Te echamos de menos, Javier, y sentimos no haber podido despedirte mejor, aunque es cierto que es imposible despedirse bien de quien no esperamos ni queremos despedirnos. Los académicos realizamos en estos casos rituales dedicatorios, ceremonias que no valen más que otras, pero que tienen el valor de mantener simbólicamente esta relación con nuestro compañero, de poder decirle adiós con aprecio y tristeza mientras reconocemos su labor y seguimos dirigiéndonos a él como uno de los nuestros, alguien que sigue ahí, en nuestra memoria, en ese tiempo fuera del tiempo en el que el mundo y las personas tienen una eternidad y una permanencia, y todo sigue siendo como debería ser, como era antes. Para eso son los textos —incluso los textos académicos, que estudian estas cosas— y la literatura, que es el mejor ejemplo de esa pervivencia.

De la literatura y la lengua inglesas disfrutó Javier, estudiándolas y enseñándolas, en sus clases y en sus publicaciones académicas. Y también disfrutó, a ratos al menos, como hacemos los académicos, con textos y estudios filológicos, en congreso con sus compañeros —estas cosas de la academia— cosas nuestras, a veces incomprensibles hasta para nosotros mismos, pero a ellas nos dedicamos, e incluso las dedicamos. A la Filología se dedicó Javier muchos años, toda una vida. Además de sus propios trabajos académicos, fue el fundador de la Sociedad Española de Estudios Renacentistas, que ha contribuido de modo tan significativo al desarrollo de la anglística en España. Y en esta parcela de nuestros estudios hizo su contribución Javier, desde lo que son ahora ya los tiempos heroicos. A estos estudios, sin embargo, se debió de ver atraído originalmente Javier más bien por la literatura que por la filología misma, pues su gran afición eran los escritores del renacimiento inglés, y el contacto que tuvieron con España, un contacto que él mantenía vivo y que nos sigue hablando desde sus escritos —*And of this book, this learning mayst thou taste.*

Nos despedimos como podemos, porque de alguna manera hay que despedirse. Por qué no, conversando con Shakespeare, como a menudo conversó Javier, con una de sus obras favoritas, *Ricardo II* —para darnos voz cuando falla la voz, y para servir como imagen de nuestro dolor al perderlo.

The shadow of my sorrow? Ha? Let's see,
'Tis very true. My grief lies all within,
And these external manner of laments
Are merely shadows to the unseen grief
That swells with silence in the tortured soul.
There lies the substance.

José Ángel García Landa
Universidad de Zaragoza

Articles

THE MULTIDIRECTIONALITY OF MEMORY: NETWORKS OF TRAUMA IN POST-9/11 LITERATURE

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Ever since the immediate aftermath of the terrorist attacks on September 11th 2001 a conspicuous indecision between a rhetoric of absolute singularity and unprecedented shock on the one side, and an uncanny feeling of familiarity with such spectacles of terror and violence on the other side, has characterised discourses about the events on that day. Leaving aside here the notorious argument that links the alleged déjà-vu effect of the attacks to the imagery of disaster movies, as well as the question of political motivations behind any such discourse, this ambiguity appears to emerge mainly from two dialectically intertwined sources of experience: the purely subjective present and its historical and cultural embedding. Thus, responses have been varying between the individual's shock at the moment of impact —"the unthinkable broke out of a glorious late summer morning, which inexplicably turned into something close to apocalypse" (Borradori 2003: ix)— and the global audience's collective memory, both from factual history and the imaginary realm of science fiction; even the by now established conventions of naming the attacks support such a notion as they allow this rhetorical difference to come into view; consider the familiar reference to the events by the "name-date" (Redfield 2009: 14), 9/11, which points to a note of the incommensurate, of traumatic shock within established discourse, as Jacques Derrida has observed:

> For the index pointing toward this date, the bare act, the minimal deictic, the minimalist aim of this dating, also marks something else. Namely, the fact that we

> perhaps have no concept and no meaning available to us to name in any other way this "thing" that has just happened, this supposed "event". (In Borradori 2003: 86)

The likewise much-discussed term 'Ground Zero', on the other hand, functions within networks of cultural reference as it carries an undertone of quite another disaster (and one in which, ironically, the US had the role of perpetrator), namely of the site of a nuclear attack. It is interesting to note a subtle ambiguity inherent in this usage; the context of Hiroshima, at the one and same time called up and displaced, can be psychoanalytically interpreted to function as an appropriation that allows us to identify with the innocent victims rather than acknowledge historical guilt (Davis 2006: 6), or, in more general terms, to uncover a likewise generally evaded inseparability of vulnerability and power (Redfield 2009: 24). Underlying the acts of naming the terrorists attacks on September 11th 2001 is therefore a double equivocality; they waver between implications of the un-namable in the name-date 9/11 and an apparently instinctive need for analogy and integration as surfaces in the term 'Ground Zero', which, in itself and in relation to the nuclear attacks in World War II in particular, is illuminating as much as it is inhibiting; the historical parallel provides an emblem for enormous suffering and death even while evoking strategies of repression in line with the rhetoric of patriotism.

This discursive tension finds its parallel in fictional 9/11 literature, where a noticeable tendency towards narrative strategies of cross-referencing can be observed; the intertextual frameworks, multi-perspectivity and complex character constellations which distinguish approaches towards the traumatic mark left by terrorist attacks on that day imply the potential of trauma to function as an intercultural and diachronic link. As other traumata, which have already been integrated into cultural memory, surface once more in the contemporary context, dialogical encounters between experiences of extremity develop and figurative frameworks emerge which allow this new trauma to be approached on a detour, whilst also complementing some specific characteristics of the reception of 9/11. For instance, the characteristic dominance of the visual mode and the compulsive recurrence of certain pictures —most famously the televised images of the planes crashing into the WTC, which came to resemble a mass-mediated traumatic flashback— might marginalise other possible modes of remembering that might have proved more productive in leading towards a meaningful integration into cognitive and affective networks, and thus enable a remembering beyond a fixation to trauma in structures of repetition and return. Narrative fiction, as I will argue, introduces exactly such a complex and alternative approach to the vast array of media imagery, political rhetoric and cultural expression after 9/11, by staging a fruitful, though not necessarily harmonious, encounter with traumata that have already been more deeply integrated into memory and thought.

As the historically singular nature of the attacks on September 11th 2001 is thus implicitly undermined, the quality of the trauma caused by the attacks and their repercussions on both an individual and a national, collective level is set in a different light. That this should be so especially for those directly involved is beyond questioning here, but the striking propensity in 9/11 fictional literature, the space where individual and collective experience most explicitly unite, to conjure up other, older traumata and intertextual references, gives rise to the impression that memorializing 9/11 functions in a more multidirectional way (following Rothberg 2009) than at first glance it appears to do. Literary trauma, rethought in the context of the terrorist attack on the US, emerges not primarily as an un-representable void, but rather in terms of a productive, albeit liminal in-between space of both individual and cultural remembering and aesthetic representation.

1. Trauma and the possibility of representation: Multimodal and multidirectional remembering

Ever since trauma theory first reached a peak at the time of the World Wars, theorists from various disciplines have conceived trauma as a crisis of memory and representation; in fact, the move from the individual pathology revolving around a dissociated, uncontrollable and inaccessible memory, onto a more culturally abstract, metaphorical level has in consequence led to a general understanding of trauma as a non-experience beyond direct reference and signification. This conceptual development appears as a common thread that runs through works ranging from Freud's history of Jewish culture as trauma in *Moses and Monotheism,* Walter Benjamin's observation of the demise of communicable experience after World War I in his essay *The Storyteller* and, to name but one prominent voice in the present context, Dori Laub's reflection after 9/11 that a "generalized amorphousness, bewilderment, and most of all, the numbness, seems to me a hallmark of collective massive trauma, a sense of shock so profound that it leads to both cognitive and emotional paralysis" (Laub 2002: 6). This perspective on trauma as a crisis of cultural expression has been given its most influential form in the context of the Third Reich's aftermath when the silenced genocide of the Holocaust penetrated general awareness. Under the auspices of two authors, Theodor W. Adorno and Jean-François Lyotard (whose respective, complex thoughts on the problematic relation between trauma and cultural expression I reduce to the most important common denominators for the context here), the dialectical tension between forgetting and remembering inherent in trauma assumed qualities beyond an individual

pathology of memory; they raised the inaccessibility of memory to an aesthetical and ethical imperative by explicitly radicalizing the psychological traumatic amnesia and implicitly extending the Benjaminian decline of communicable experience. As, in the aporetic thinking of both, the Holocaust can only be adequately remembered through the negativity of an aesthetics of silence, trauma now functions as a conceptual knot between a cultural-historical perspective on the incommensurate, a poetics of absence, and through this, an ethical postulate against forgetting. The aesthetics of trauma postulated here, therefore, centres on the force of a silenced howl in artistic representation, itself both called for by the need to remember and refused by the impossibility of adequate representation —the "unspeakability of history addressed by the unspeakability of art" (Rapaport 2002: 235), which is aesthetically and culturally self-aware. Oscillating between absence and presence, trauma thus acquires the status of a dissociated but insurmountable spectre which gains legitimacy as the non-identical and unsynthesizable within culture.

The most prominent contemporary voice in this tradition, though, is Cathy Caruth. Drawing on both Freudian psychoanalysis and poststructuralist theory, she conceptualises trauma as an inherently "missed experience" (1996: 62), that implodes comprehensibility and manifests itself only belatedly in its haunting, literal returns. Caruth takes trauma as a starting point to re-establish history and experience as phenomena beyond referentiality and comprehension that can only be accessed indirectly by a staging of the traumatic impact in a mainly literary and indirect manner; thus, trauma's relation to human experience is inverted: it is not that trauma must be integrated, but that experience and knowledge itself must adapt to the indirectness of their emergence that arises from literary readings rather than the empiricism of the natural sciences: "In its active resistance to the platitudes of knowledge, this refusal [of comprehension] opens up the space for a testimony that can speak beyond what is already understood" (1995: 155). Thinking about trauma thus, as a negative force that challenges literary representation, is a two-sided coin when considered in the context of post-9/11 literature. The notion that trauma occupies a liminal space of referentiality and signification is, on the one hand, an essential and omnipresent implication underlying relevant trauma literature; nevertheless, the contemporary context necessitates a rethinking of the negative referentiality of trauma and its latent preconditions of stasis and unvarying repetition in favour of a more dynamic model of indirect signification; hence, the denial of aesthetic mediation makes space for a more flexible approach that understands literary trauma as a narrative spiral around the traumatic kernel, and is characterised by the possibility of metaphoric truth claims instead of a referentiality completely unlinked to comprehension and meaning. In terms of the discussion of the aesthetic and

epistemological relations between various traumata which forms the centre of the argument here, there are two aspects worth special consideration; one concerns the temporality of trauma and centres on a more many-sided model of traumatic latency than pure Freudian belatedness, while the second involves an approach to traumatic memory that combines multidirectionality on the cultural-aesthetic level, and a multimodality of memory in the individual's case. The traumatic core, therefore, is neither solely the radical 'beyond' of literary representation in affinity to post-structuralist thinking, nor an affect to be worked on in terms of a positivist process of objectification. Rather, its truth claim in literary representation is of a multidirectional and indirectly metaphorical nature.

When examining closely the impact of traumatic memory on the individual mind, what emerges is a multimodal in-between process constituted by interactions and disruptions between elements of cognition and articulation, the visual, and the corporal. By way of both analogy and interaction, this borderline space of the faculties of the mind ties in with the seesaw of cultural memory as specific traumata evoke different modes of remembering. Indexical reference on a visual and physical plane may account for most indications of 9/11 in post-9/11 literature, whereas the representation of 'older' traumata adds a layer of articulation and communicability (though not necessarily always successful) to the more recent shock. Drawing on Dominick LaCapra's helpful distinction between the "acting out" of trauma, a melancholic state of inescapability and repetition, and its more dynamic and therapeutic "working through" (2001), the interrelation between the multidirectional framework described above and the disruptive, bodily and visual indices, which indicate the more recent trauma, can be described in terms of a narrative approximation, with a latent but pervasive aspect of the 'not quite' to it.

Most arguments against the representability of trauma in literature take the phenomenon of dissociation as their starting point. As the traumatic shock unsettles the victim's mind frame to the point where no experiential memory can be formed, trauma becomes what Cathy Caruth aptly describes as an experience in which forgetting is inherent (1995: 7); it therefore eludes cognitive control and engulfs the traumatised person in an eternal traumatic present to re-live their shock in uncontrollably repetitive nightmares and physical re-enactments. Of particular interest here is not the implosion of conscious remembering as such, but the very complexity of traumatic memory as it alternates between inscriptions in the body, visual manifestations, and verbal symbolization. Departing from Freud, who understood the memory traces of affect and consciousness to be mutually exclusive, these modes of memory appear to form an interactive structure of dynamic

remembering in contemporary trauma literature. The bodily scar, a "wound that cries out" (Caruth 1996: 3) remains pre-linguistic; as it is written on and externalised by the body, trauma insists on the primordial shock at the centre of traumatic experience that, as such, is beyond the reach of words. The body thus functions as a site of index to trauma, an immediate and contiguous reference without communicable meaning attached to it. Traumatic visual images are in a similar way burnt into traumatic memory; Horowitz and others have noted the literality of traumatic images which border on the intensity of immediate perception (Horowitz 1999: 3), making them structurally similar to the bodily wound as un-encoded messages that refer rather than mean and are consequently often accorded the status of a counter- or "phantom memory" ("Phantomerinnerung", Assmann 2006: 221). Both the body and the visual, by the way, occupy special spaces in memorializing 9/11 and are therefore of specific contextual significance in literature relating to this event; while the visual image, repeated on screens all over the world, seemed to reign in the aftermath of the attacks, the wounded body has been all but excluded from official discourses about the attacks.

On a third and final note, verbal articulation of traumatic experience constitutes a different mode of remembering, not only because it implies a more detached point of view and therapeutic value, but especially as it introduces trauma into the realm of symbolization and communication. In the multimodal model of traumatic remembering as understood here, though, telling is not the teleological aim of all efforts; the emphasis lies rather on the mutual interactions and influences between the different modes, be they indexical or symbolic, that retain the complexity of trauma as a force that implodes affect and meaning, body and mind.

In the instances of trauma literature discussed here, this multimodality of memory is paralled on the level of collective memory by a similar in-between state, not concerning individual faculties but historical experiences. Telling 9/11 indirectly through the reception patterns and symbolic frames of traumatic events that actually are in essence disparate, be they the nightmarish experience of bomb raids or the Holocaust, raises questions concerning the nature of collective and historical memory and also calls for further examination of how such an oscillation ties in with the possibility of literary reference to trauma and the various modes of remembering as sketched out above.

In the context of studies on cultural memory, one such focus on the possible interrelations between traumatic experiences has been prepared mainly by Michael Rothberg's theory of the multidirectionality of collective memory, the preconditions of which prove crucial in our context here as he formulates the way in which memories of different, mainly traumatic events, can function and result in a productive mutual enrichment (Rothberg 2009). This model presupposes

collective memory in terms of a processual "mnemonic labor" (Rothberg 2009: 15) which emerges from negotiations between social groups and their respective memorial focal points in a malleable, media-informed public sphere. Multidirectional memory therefore is not, and emphatically so, a competitive struggle for recognition in which the remembrance of certain historical traumata blocks out others, as has been implied in criticism which sees the strong Holocaust memorial culture in the US as a reason for a relative displacement of the suffering of slaves or Native Americans in official remembrance (Rothberg 2009: 3). Rather, Rothberg explores the dialogical exchanges between memory traditions which take the form of a non-linear remapping of collective memory; just as, for instance, W.E.B. Du Bois' visit to the Warsaw Ghetto resulted in his concept of a double consciousness in which experiences of other minority groups enter into the African American perspective, such multidirectional processes result in establishing connections between apparently disparate events in history but also, and this is equally important, serve to crystallize their specificities (Rothberg 2009: 111). The detour through collective memory to incorporate traumata in various stages of integration and symbolization constitutes, therefore, not simply a form of displacement, but can provide enriching filters and a cultural analogue to the analyst-patient dialogue in psychoanalysis to help to articulate the apparently incommensurate experience of 9/11.

Casting a side-glance at the foundational texts of trauma theory to explore this culturally informed hypothesis on the individual level as well, it is interesting to note that the notion of trauma as a space of oscillation and in-between-ness can, in its essence, be traced back to observations by Sigmund Freud and his contemporaries. In his writing, Freud crystallizes a question that is crucial when considering diachronic relations and trauma, namely that of traumatic temporality. When compared, the contemporary model of multidirectional memory and Freud's diagnosis that traumata have the potential to trigger each other into consciousness complement each other on their respective levels of cultural discourse and the individual mind (Freud 1892). If the newer traumatic shock can evoke an older one and in turn add meaning to the recent trauma, then traumatic temporality assumes the quality of what LaPlanche would later term the "seesaw effect" (in Caruth 2002: 102) which in its mutual movement adds to the haunting belatedness and repetitiveness of re-enactments and nightmares from which trauma victims suffer. Trauma, it can thus be said, is an experience essentially constituted by a specific and complex temporality of cross-reference that goes beyond a restricted focus on literal repetition. The back-and-forth movement of traumatic temporality and memory thus encourages a model of trauma aesthetics that builds on a creative dialectic instead of closure by complete and unreflective integration into narrative coherence.

While literary trauma in the context of 9/11 can, within this framework, be described as multimodal and multidirectional, this does not mean a return to an independent network of signifiers. Self-referentiality remains an important implication of this aesthetic of search and processual approximation to the initially dissociated experience, and functions as a metafictional pointer to the difficulty of representing trauma, but there exists also, and crucially so, a strong overtone of cross-generational communicability of trauma. Therefore, trauma is signified in a way that can be described as a functional analogy to Ricoeur's concept of metaphorical truth, as he positions metaphor ultimately within the contained copula of the verb 'to be': "The metaphorical 'is' at once signifies both 'is not' and 'is like'. If this is really so, we are allowed to speak of metaphorical truth, but in an equally 'tensive' sense of the word 'truth'" (Ricoeur 1986: 7). Comparable to this tension between the 'is' and 'is not', the inherent self-awareness of the simultaneous likeness of traumatic experience across time and place and its incompatibility is the key to the authenticity of an indirect signification of trauma. The trauma of Hiroshima, of bomb raids in WWII in 9/11 literature, at the same time is and is not the 9/11 survivor's trauma as it comes close in impact and structure of perception but remains at distance in essence. However, and just as importantly, Ricoeur goes beyond this gap within metaphor by exploiting its epistemological potential as a combination of reference and an innovation in meaning, and it is in just this way that literary trauma steps out of the mere negativity of the void into a status of communicability, not as a positively but as a metaphorically signified, not unproblematic closure or sublimation, but liminal space of dialectic articulation and communication, in an "in-between-voice of un-decidability and the unavailability or radical ambivalence of clear-cut positions" (LaCapra 2001: 20). What surfaces, however, is the latent possibility of comprehension and metaphorical truth. The potential of aesthetic representation is thus recognized, and added to as specifically literary forms of metaphorical referentiality and signification are acknowledged.

To put these arguments in a nutshell, the multidirectionality and multimodality of traumatic narration relate in various ways; they form analogies on the cultural and the individual level in doing justice to trauma as both transhistorical and singular, a pathology of the mind as well as the body and senses; moreover, though, trauma is re-integrated into the realm of referentiality and symbolization within the tentative and experimental space which literature provides, allowing an approach trauma on the detour of indirect reference through collective memory. The various traumatic experiences evoked in 9/11 literature furnish different modes of remembering and thus function as cultural filters and narrative support towards framing the new, as yet uncomprehended trauma of September 11th.

2. Intergenerational and intertextual networks in Jonathan Safran Foer's *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close* and Art Spiegelman's *In the Shadow of No Towers*

In this paper, I focus on Jonathan Safran Foer's *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close* and on Art Spiegelman's *In the Shadow of No Towers*, as both exemplify the association of 9/11 in the minds of traumatised Manhattanites with traumata stemming from WWII, but moreover offer perspectives which differ in an interesting way and are in part genre-related. While in Spiegelman's graphic novel, which depicts the author's troubled state of mind after the attacks in his own neighbourhood, the secondary trauma of the Holocaust functions as part of a broader intertextual search for strategies of comprehension, in *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close* an 'intertraumatic' network is established in which differing representational techniques of dealing with specific traumatic events are exemplified from the points of view of the three protagonists. Both Spiegelman's and Foer's works, though, combine the movement between traumata with a narrative tension (a tension between what I will term 'indexical' reference to 9/11) and more coherently phrased accounts of other traumatic events. Trauma in Foer's and Spiegelman's texts therefore emerges as a 2-way circuit: the more performative, often visualised references to 9/11 provide a metacommentary of speechlessness, whereas the integration of other texts and traumata offers a cognitive prosthesis for dealing with 9/11 as well as a narrative one with the survivors' depiction of traumatic events. The authenticity of such trauma narratives, however, arises from exactly this combination, as the actual terror cannot be conveyed in merely documentary reference, but lies in its structure of reception —the implosion of conceptual networks, struggles of representation and the metatextually implied difficulty of dealing with trauma.

The Leitmotif of J.S. Foer's *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close*, the chaotic and experimental quest (for the matching lock to a key found in his late father's closet) that the hyperactive boy Oskar conducts in order to come to terms with the death of his father in the World Trade Centre, underlines the novel's indirect and many-sided approach to writing trauma; its embedding within the interwoven perspectives of his grandparents, haunted by memories of the air raids in World War II, adds a layer of interaction with historical memory to the child's individual level. While the voices of the three protagonists merge together and split apart, the novel moves through the geography of New York, recent history and the characters' imploded memories and shattered lives towards individually characteristic and aesthetically complementary recollections of the initially dissociated traumatic experience. While the novel has been criticised for its detachment from socio-political

circumstances and its melodramatic mode, a narrative strategy undoubtedly present throughout the text and interpreted by Sven Cvek to exemplify a national process of restorative mourning (2011: 65), its embedding in broader discourses lies on a level different from direct political engagement: it works as a prism in which historical experiences and specific representational strategies are made to mutually interact.

Oskar, a representative example of the outsider-as-victim of the highly mediated terrorist attacks, is traumatized when he receives phone messages from his father in the World Trade Centre and is compelled to listen to his increasingly desperate voice without being able to pick up the phone; this indirectness of experience, though, also points to its specific nature as traumatic memory; what haunts Oskar is, after all, not only the phone messages and thus his own, albeit partly displaced, memory, but also his compulsion to picture his father's death and therefore an experience unlinked to himself; he is hit by the impact of 9/11 without actually witnessing it.

The disruptive manner in which references to the destruction of the World Trade Centre emerge throughout the novel emphasises this insistent absence, referred to but elusive, of which the photograph of a man jumping from the skyscraper is the epitomous example both in this novel as in the commemoration of 9/11 as such. This disturbing image evokes Aleida Assmann's commentary on the potential of photography to turn into memory phantoms in a very literal way, as its real-life model was at times dissociated from official discourses and withdrawn from public circulation but has nevertheless retained its disturbing force. Functioning in a paradoxical manner, it suggests the documentary value of the photographic picture which appeals to Oskar in his search for the facts behind his father's death, but, in an ironic twist, turns out to depart from this promise and adopt a referential value that, following Peirce's terminology, can be termed indexical rather than epistemological; the index as a sign, in opposition to an icon or a symbol, is one which "stands for its object by virtue of a real connection with it, or because it forces the mind to attend to that object" (Peirce 1895: 14); it is this relation of contiguity, and the singularity of the referent it is tied to and whose existence it proves, that defines Peircean indexicality and accounts for its productivity here. The photographic image is such a referent and therefore a form of evocation that excludes any denotative ascription of meaning and relies solely on its contiguity to the referent. It provides a direct link to the traumatic experience itself which disrupts narrative coherence and figurative referentialities analogously to the insistence of individual bodily memories of the victim's mental integrity. It is the fact of its occurrence, not the what happened, but the simple confirmation, that something must have happened, which visuality and corporality convey as specific

signifiers as they mark the occurrence of an event and convey its affective content, without stating its nature or context.

The image of the jumping man, therefore, is no source of knowledge and understanding, but a discomforting proof of a terror that remains outside the child-protagonist's conceptual frame —as Oskar comments, "The closer you look, the less you see" (Foer 2006: 293)— in its mere material contiguity to the event, a Barthian indexical statement of the "ça, c'est ça, c'est tel" (Barthes 1980: 16) stemming from the photograph's status as imprint of the image itself on paper.

In this context, it is helpful to pause to consider the role of the unmediated visual in *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close* in more general terms. The reproduced photographs and excerpts from diaries by Oskar and his Grandfather which intersperse the text are diverse as to their content —photographs from Oskar's collection, for instance, range from mating turtles to performances of Hamlet, another trauma intertext— and some are mere illustrations of the boys experiences; what is interesting, though, is that especially those photos which are not taken by Oskar himself, but have been collected or printed out like the image of the jumper, remain largely uncontextualised, frozen moments that exist beyond cognitive reflection or articulation and outline the uncanny within Oskar's ramblings. Even though this statical character is modified with the introduction of flexibility to the pivotal image of the falling man at the end of the novel, when Oskar reverses the temporal order to make him 'fall' upwards into safety instead of to his certain death and thus converts the image into something he may be able to integrate into his worldview, the illusory side to this dreamy end puts a strong question mark behind this attempt to tame this traumatic image.

Stemming from a more personal background, but similar in function, are the corporal scars and bruises Oskar inflicts on himself to exteriorise his inner pain, as well as the structurally more defining phone messages which Oskar continually returns to in his efforts to grasp the traumatic moment on September 11th. Rather than offering direct access to his father's last minutes, his words point to an experience that, in its terror, is indicated but not articulated or communicated, "Smoky. I was hoping you would. Be. Home. I don't know if you've heard about what's happened. But. I. Just wanted you to know that I'm OK. Everything. Is. Fine" (Foer 2006: 69). When alluding to the destruction of the Twin Towers in Foer's novel, a referential relation to what remains an unknowable void is therefore established to overlay symbolic meaning or factual knowledge in Foer's novel. Thus, these references to 9/11 serve to establish an impression of unspeakability as their indexical character highlights their proximity to traumatic flashbacks; throughout the text, they indicate the traumatic core at the centre of the narrative.

"That is what death is like" (Foer 2006: 187) is how a survivor finishes her account of the Hiroshima nuclear attack, which Oskar plays out to his stunned classmates; and that is, all in all, what the contributions by survivors of traumatic events other than 9/11 provide in *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close*. In the novel, the inclusion of the older trauma of Oskar's grandparents, the firebombing of Dresden in WWII, also represents a turn towards a verbal communication of trauma.

Oskar's paternal grandparents have both survived the bombing of Dresden and remain deeply traumatized by the experience, trapped in a past whose wounds they externalize in their numbed senses of sight and speech. In a striking paradox, though, the mute grandfather becomes the central figure in the novel to articulate trauma in a verbal way as he manages to put his experiences into written words in a letter to his son: "I saw humans melted into thick pools of liquid [...], I saw bodies crackling like embers, laughing" (Foer 2006: 211). The realistic style of his depiction of the horrific events of that night reverses the indirect references to 9/11 into their opposite, styling it into a contrastive foil that, together with the Hiroshima survivor's account, exemplifies a marginalised but uncompromising position in trauma aesthetics, namely W.G. Sebald's 'documentary realism'. While sharing a strong scepticism towards artistic renderings of trauma with his contemporary Adorno, he arrives at an ideal that is diagonally opposed to the latter's negativity:

> The ideal of truth inherent in its entirely unpretentious objectivity, at least over long passages, proves itself the only legitimate reason for continuing to produce literature in the face of total destruction. Conversely, the construction of aesthetic or pseudo-aesthetic effects from the ruins of an annihilated world is a process depriving literature of its right to exist. (Sebald 2003: 53)

Mr Schell's letter, though, simultaneously deconstructs this potentially slightly pornographic approach on a metatextual level as the letter's reproduction in the novel is strewn with the red markings his son made when reading it, following his habit of correcting mistakes in texts. Whereas Sebald appraises radical realism as the only ethically legitimate stance of narrating the air raids, this reaction suggests helpless incomprehension rather than communication, and sheds doubt on the potential of a documentary depiction of traumatic events alone to convey the complexity and shock of the experience.

Oskar's grandmother, on the other hand, for most of the novel fails to put her memories into words. It is only after her primary trauma is triggered by the secondary one of 9/11 in which she loses her son, that she communicates her past to her grandson Oskar; in an even more pronounced way than is the case with her husband, her traumata merge into each other in one everlasting traumatic present, "like the space was collapsing onto us" (Foer 2006: 228), in which details from the

night of the bombing supply parallels for what happens in the present. "Rubble" (Foer 2006: 232), for instance, is such an instance of a two-fold reference in that it recalls both the debris of the WTC under which her son is buried and the ruins of her parents' house in Dresden. Her narrative, generally more associative and emotional in tone than her husband's, is more accessible and at the same time more complex; instead of offering a crass mirror of near-death and violence, she still displaces experiences which nevertheless must be central to the traumatic impact of her experience, such as her father's last words. In this way, communicability is achieved around forgetting, while absolute faithfulness induces opaqueness in the reader. Consequently, the grandparents' letters, taken individually, can be read as failed communications as, in the face of extremity, the potential of language to convey meaning itself is foregrounded and revealed as limited: "Language is strained to the breaking point. Being forced to its expressive extremes of dense volubility, on the one hand, and ominous silence, on the other, it is barely capable of serving its traditional function as a vehicle of communication between the generations" (Versluys 2009: 80).

What emerges thus is a self-reflexive metalevel, which emphasises the collapsing force of trauma on literary representation and language and complements the psychical trauma suffered by the protagonists. The communicatory rupture between the novel's characters, therefore, is not replayed in exactly the same terms on the compositional level. It is from the perspective of the reader that the fragmenting impact of trauma, psychically, socially and in terms of its artistic expression, becomes readable as the multiple voices come to interact as complementary parts of a self-reflexive search for representation.

Moreover, and on a slightly different note, the setting of this act of writing trauma in the non-space of an airport adds a more abstract level to 'Grandma's' individual layers of trauma. This is a telling reflection on the articulatory and communicatory potential of the intermediary in trauma literature, just as a metafictional implication about the specificity of literature in broader cultural discourse, the airport as "Not coming or going. Not something or nothing. Not yes or no" (Foer 2006: 312) frames this multilayered representation of trauma with the individual and associative freedom that comes with its ultimate ambivalence.

In *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close*, the compositional heteroglossia can thus be said to provide the basis of a shared ethics of vulnerability, as Ilka Saal suggests (2011: 464); however, this is not to be understood in terms of a complete equality of experience and its literary representation, as witnesses from World War II supply what remains outside the field of vision of the external witness of 9/11, and to a certain extent a taboo in official commemoration of the attacks: the actual individual suffering and inhuman grotesqueness of violence at that scale. While the

three witnessing voices of Oskar and his grandparents, and their respective modes of remembering, are too far apart to smooth trauma as depicted here into a homogenous, globalized state of mind, the interweaving perspectives nevertheless underline the interactive potential between ways of dealing with traumatic memories and contrastive narrative strategies, even though the events behind them may be largely incomparable —the individual's suffering remains the common fact. While the communication between the protagonists themselves remains largely obstructed, their complexity both in point of view and individual setup as well as narrative technique provides the reader with a multilayered network of traumatic experience that, latently and self-reflexively, makes trauma readable. Not forcing into coherence but multimodal remembering, not singularity and closure but an allowance for voices from different historical backgrounds, not pure negativism but narrative approximation, the kind of trauma narrative as seen in Foer's novel suggests a comformity to the Zeitgeist and socially responsible obligation to tell and attribute meaning to the events of 9/11.

Reflections on the multidirectional potential of traumatic memory, though, lead to different conclusions when considering Art Spiegelman's graphic novel *In the Shadow of No Towers*, which aligns efforts to grasp his own traumatized state of mind with an experimental search for means to represent the condition of society after the attacks. In his introduction, Spiegelman very distinctly makes his transgenerational inheritance of a sensitiveness towards traumatic events the framework of this hybrid cartoon, handed down to him from his parents whose sufferings in the Holocaust he made the topic of his *Maus*-cartoons, as well as his ambiguous feelings towards his own initial impression of the absolute singularity of the attacks on September 11th and their ensuing, politically initiated closure. Leaving the political undertones and the intriguing relationship between satire and trauma aside for present purposes, this oscillation between primary and secondary trauma is, of course, of major interest and is supplemented by a different kind of seesawing; Spiegelman constructs an intertextual, genre-centred framework of cartoons as a specific form of cultural expression, deeply ingrained in everyday culture and concerns, which form a productively contrasting background for the insistently recurrent images of the glowing towers of the World Trade Centre.

The one leitmotif that relentlessly permeates Spiegelman's tumultuously collage-like, outsized panels is a digitalised reproduction of the North Tower at the moment before collapse. A "vision of disintegration [...] burned onto the inside of my eyelids" (Spiegelman 2004: introductory panel), this skeletal rendering of an architectural structure void of human life assumes the character of an indelible mark of trauma on the mind and body of the author-protagonist. It is also, and essentially, an outsider's observation and therefore more directly symbolizes the

traumatic implosion of the familiar architectural and socio-cultural environment than the impact of the attacks on the individual within. The human suffering that underlies the traumatic impact of this distinctly abstract vision is thus placed in the emptiness within, a visualised traumatic gap of what cannot be witnessed from the outside and what exceeds straightforward integration and artistic representation. There is, all in all, a general impression in Spiegelman's cartoon panels that the attacks as such are discursively close to the unspeakable. When, for instance, "Awesome" (Spiegelman 2004: panel 2) is the term he comes up with to describe the moment when he heard the Tower falling, this resembles more an ironic comment on the lack of adequate linguistic referents than an actual description and complements the visual indication of an epistemological divide. Around this central image, though, instances of other traumata as well as cartoon microcosms are drawn up to fulfil a twofold function; they help chart the impact of 9/11 on cultural identity and structures of meaning on the one hand, and allow the void indicated in the image of the glowing tower to be approached on the other hand.

First and foremost, *In the Shadow of No Towers* is visually integrated into collective national memory, as it is set between two reproductions of a newspaper title featuring another September in US history, namely exactly a century before in 1901, when President McKinley was assassinated. While the first newspaper page preceding the actual comix appears as a comparatively authentic reproduction, it is covered in a layer of headlines referring to the post-9/11 world at the end. The headline "President's wound reopened. Slight change for worse" (Spiegelman 2004) sets the slightly fatalistic tone for the graphic novel but simultaneously embeds 9/11 within a framework of historical national shock; the terrorist attacks, such is the suggestion, are not something that is absolutely unforeseen, but rather a vulnerability triggered freshly into consciousness on a collective level; the individual and collective experience emerge as parallels here, as the individual son of Holocaust survivors also experiences his indirect, transferred trauma surfacing with the shock of the new one. While this diachronic alternation is a typical instance of the intergenerational transmission of trauma (see, for example, Kühner 2007: 68) as well as a basic implication of Rothberg's model of multidirectional memory, the Holocaust in *In the Shadow of No Towers* also assumes a more productive function in providing an existent symbolic system for representing trauma. The highly iconic *Maus* imagery he developed in his Holocaust cartoons thus allows Spiegelman the means with which to express the feeling of helpless vulnerability that is new to him as an individual. Due to the abstractness of the imagery, the implication is not so much an equation of Holocaust suffering and 9/11 (which, if the case, would indeed have been questionable), but rather a movement away from this tradition of Jewish suffering to a repetition with a difference; the *Maus* imagery is re-valued in the contemporary context to suggest trauma as independent

of place and time, a state of mind unlinked to specific events. Historical trauma here, therefore, does not fill the void of 9/11 with concise images of suffering; rather, an implication of speechlessness is preserved. Just as no apt words are found for the collapse of the World Trade Centre, "indescribable" (Spiegelman 2004: panel 3) is the term transferred from Spiegelman's father's memories about the smoke in Auschwitz to the toxic stench on Ground Zero. Consequently, the value of historical references lies in the existence of a symbolic system in order to represent and communicate trauma as a mental state, even while and because the sense of a non-articulated shock impact that wavers beneath this transfer is preserved. History in *In the Shadow of No Towers* therefore emerges, on an individual as well as cultural level, as a history of trauma in which the artistic representations of disparate events inform each other. In a productive association between traumatic belatedness and materialistic historiography, Sven Cvek describes this dynamic in Benjaminian terms, as a pattern of cyclic repetition structured by the intrusions of latent historical events into the present. This model of history in its most basic assumptions, even though the revolutionary, illuminative potential of the moment in which the time spheres implode, seems a rather individualistically utopian view in the face of Spiegelman's engagement in the negotiation of meaning in the contemporary media-saturated reality. It is nevertheless an interesting precursor of multidirectional models of collective remembering. Through the intergenerational trauma of the author-protagonist, the Holocaust and 9/11 therefore enter into a "generative dialogue" (Cvek 2011: 95) in which both emerge as much through their analogies as their discrepancies.

The *Maus* references, however, are not the only and not even the most conspicuous instance of a multidirectional trauma representation here. *In the Shadow of No Towers* owes its hybridity to a large extent to an intertext of historical cartoons. Departing from their characteristically closed symbolic microcosms and neat and linear structure, these implode into each other and suffuse the graphic novel's context in a search for adequate expression as the specific cultural memory of newspaper cartoons is activated on a disordered surface. In a transformatory pastiche, the innocent anarchism of these cartoon heroes turns into 21st-century terror and violence, as the 19th century 'Katzenjammer Kids' run in fear with the burning towers on their heads, or their 'Uncle Screwloose' emerges as a vengeful caricature of US militarism fighting the 'Iraknid' bug (Spiegelman 2004: panel 5). The world after 9/11, which the author-protagonist remains at odds with throughout the cartoon, is thus made available by contrast; the reader can nostalgically peruse the included comics supplement to witness the endearingly rebellious original figures contained in their boxes and microcosms, whilst their breaking loose and collapse into the contemporary narrative manifests a cultural-aesthetic traumatic disintegration of distinctive borderlines and categories of

understanding. Still, and crucially, these cartoons also supply iconic frameworks to work with and to communicate to a wider public. While the glowing tower remains comparatively static, it is the detour through the flexible cartoons that allows the portrayal of a traumatic implosion and the process of working through which finally results, again, in their and the traumatic glowing tower's containment within the panel-filling towers on the last page. The author-protagonist and his family remain vulnerably depicted as *Maus* characters, but with the orderly structuring of the cartoon boxes the shock impact mirrored by the historical cartoons, chaotically jumbled up before, seems to have been detained. Intertextuality in this trauma narrative is therefore not limited to the suggestion of inescapability, which Ann Whitehead emphasises (2004: 90), but provides a symbolic framework with which to access 9/11.

The inclusion of older traumata in narrative discourses on September 11th, paradoxical at first glance, thus emerges as a complex attribute of fictional literature in that it sheds new light on traumatic signification as an indirect but dynamic process, allows the exploration of the interrelations between the multimodal nature of individual memory, the multidirectionality of collective remembering and their respective narrative potentials, and, lastly, carries implications for literature as a factor of flexibilisation in broader cultural discourse.

A form of witnessing that emanates from a border space between distinct historical traumata rather than the contemporary context alone, this oscillation acknowledges the dilemma of representing the elusive shock of traumatic experience while, simultaneously, allowing the possibility of communication to arise and move beyond conveying a purely negative void. The contemporary trauma narratives after 9/11, therefore, depart from the trauma aesthetic indebted to Adorno or Lyotard in their emphasis on the productive potential of diachronic detours through historical traumata and intertextual experiment with representational possibilities. Because witnesses and iconic systems from disparate experiences enter into a mutual interaction and complementation, the terrorist attacks on September 11th 2001 enter into a framework that encourages telling and makes accessible what was initially experienced as incommensurate.

Returning to the broader context of post-9/11 discourses, the instances of literature discussed here open up the rhetoric of singularity that was pervasive especially in the immediate aftermath of the attacks in a way that strongly differs from simple displacement, undifferentiated comparison or a certain competitiveness between the commemoration of different collective traumata, be it WWII or 9/11. Their multidirectionality and multimodality counter tendencies of oversimplification and closure whilst providing a historically and aesthetically dynamic possibility of remembering.

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REIVINDICACIÓN DE LA CULTURA URBANA EN "THE ROLE OF NOTABLE SILENCES IN SCOTTISH HISTORY", DE A.L. KENNEDY

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1. Introducción

Durante el siglo XIX, Glasgow se convirtió en la segunda ciudad del Imperio británico gracias a su prosperidad industrial, que continuó creciendo hasta la primera mitad del siglo XX. Este hecho llevó a que Glasgow desarrollase una identidad independiente de la imagen estereotipada que se atribuía a la Escocia rural, identificada con las Highlands. Asimismo, debido a la migración proveniente de allí y de las Lowlands, así como de Irlanda, la ciudad creó unos rasgos identitarios diferentes, que se proyectaron en las artes. En este ámbito aparece la escuela *Kailyard* que, hasta el periodo de entreguerras, representaba, no sin cierta nostalgia, una Escocia rural idealizada como contraste a la ciudad industrial en la que el sujeto social moderno se veía obligado a luchar para sobrevivir y a enfrentarse con el capitalismo responsable de su desprotección social. Con el *Scottish Literary Renaissance*, cuyo carácter era marcadamente masculino, comenzó la búsqueda de una identidad colectiva acorde con la mayoritaria clase obrera de Glasgow.

No fue hasta el llamado *Second Scottish Renaissance*, a finales del siglo XX, cuando las diversas identidades colectivas que se habían ido elaborando empezaron a verse cuestionadas por las mujeres y, en menor medida, por autoras y autores con conciencia de raza, que adquirieron una mayor visibilidad en el panorama literario nacional. En este sentido, Moira Burgess apunta en *Imagine a City: Glasgow in*

Fiction: "As the nineteen-eighties moved into the nineties, with developments in Glasgow fiction and in social conditions jointly working towards empowerment, things began to change. Glasgow women, among them Janice Galloway and AL Kennedy, began to attract the critical attention they had always deserved, and the woman's viewpoint became acknowledged as an element in Glasgow fiction" (1988: 294). En 1990, Glasgow es nombrada Ciudad Europea de la Cultura y se convierte en la primera ciudad británica que obtiene este título. Esta distinción generó una gran polémica entre la intelectualidad de la ciudad, que debatía si la clase política y las multinacionales del turismo debían seguir lucrándose con el comercio de la cultura local.

La obra de A.L. Kennedy se caracteriza por ofrecer una reinterpretación literaria de los modos en los que la ciudad de Glasgow se ha ido representando a lo largo de la historia. Como en otros contextos nacionales, la historia oficial no recoge las experiencias de quienes vivieron vidas anónimas en la ciudad y se centra, casi exclusivamente, en las de los personajes públicos que contribuyeron a configurar el panorama sociopolítico de la urbe escocesa. Por contraposición a este modelo histórico, en su relato "The Role of Notable Silences in Scottish History", recogido en *Night Geometry and the Garscadden Trains* (1990), la autora cuestiona la autoridad geopolítica en el ámbito cultural y reivindica la importancia de la heterogeneidad en la construcción del discurso nacional escocés. A tal fin, ofrece una redefinición literaria de Glasgow, en la que propone una imagen alternativa de la ciudad dibujada mediante un amplio abanico de discursos que destacan la individualidad de la ciudadanía anónima, así como sus experiencias en el contexto urbano. A partir de estas observaciones, el presente artículo propone analizar la representación de los diferentes espacios que habita la protagonista del relato en la ciudad de Glasgow y las experiencias vividas por ella, como símbolo de su rechazo hacia la invisibilidad socio-histórica de las mujeres, la decadencia urbana y los roles de género imperantes en Escocia durante los últimos años de la década de 1980.

2. La ruptura de los silencios históricos

"The Role of Notable Silences in Scottish History" cuenta la historia de una muchacha que no tiene reparo en mentir y para quien la farsa forma parte de su identidad escocesa, pues siente que las verdades a medias que esconden la historia y la cultura de su tierra han ido envolviendo su vida. Trabaja como crítica literaria y también como redactora para la empresa "Local Passenger Transport Executive", cuyos jefes le dictan lo que ha de escribir y cuyos lectores compran lo que quieren leer. Cuando no está trabajando, reflexiona sobre la posibilidad de que alguien

investigue las vidas cotidianas de la población de Glasgow. Para hacerlo, persigue a gente desconocida por la ciudad y se inventa su muerte como muestra de rechazo ante la imposición de la historia canónica, puesto que dicha invención supone otorgar visibilidad e importancia a las experiencias diarias de la ciudadanía: "Conventional reports are wholly truthful when they deal with the manner of death and only begin to lie when they look at life" (Kennedy 1990: 70). Un día encuentra al compañero perfecto para desarrollar esos obituarios que imagina y se enamora de él. El destino quiere que su pareja muera durante una pelea en un bar, dejándola a ella con muchos recuerdos que guardar y con su historia común mal contada por los periódicos.

Kennedy decide no proporcionarle un nombre a la protagonista —y también narradora— del relato para evitar definirla como mujer o como escocesa. De esta manera, los lectores de la historia van moldeando y reconsiderando continuamente la identidad de la protagonista de acuerdo con la participación que esta tiene, como sujeto social, en los distintos espacios de Glasgow que recorre, y de acuerdo también con la influencia que sobre ella ejerce el pasado de la ciudad.

La socióloga Kirsten Simonsen (2000) apunta que el espacio actúa como un recipiente en el que se pueden localizar las conductas corporales en contextos específicos, además de identificar las luchas de poder producidas a través de la inscripción de narrativas corporales y de las señales de resistencia que se pueden desprender de estas. En este sentido, la historia escocesa adquiere una dimensión espacial tangible en las zonas urbanas que se representan en el relato de Kennedy, puesto que el cuerpo de la protagonista se convierte, como apunta Elizabeth Grosz (1998), en el mecanismo más directo para absorber la normatividad impuesta socialmente, en este caso a través de las percepciones sensoriales que la protagonista tiene en determinados lugares. De esta manera, el texto sugiere la necesidad de agudizar los sentidos en la ciudad para poder distinguir los códigos que se esconden tras las experiencias urbanas. Al detenerse en los edificios históricos, como bibliotecas o museos, para escuchar con atención, la protagonista afirma que es capaz de percibir el significado de la historia y el discurso autoritario que determinan las identidades colectivas y que exigen se respete la unidad cultural: "Go to any place where history is stored and listen. Hold your breath. Hear how still it is. [...] It is the sound of nothingness. It is the huge, invisible, silent roar of all the people who are too *small* to record. They disappear and leave the past inhabited only by *murderers* and *prodigies* and *saints*" (Kennedy 1990: 64 [la cursiva es mía]). Su crítica a la manipulación narrativa de los roles desempeñados por las figuras históricas de la nación contrapone la actividad silenciada de las individualidades activas en el proceso cotidiano de interacción y construcción de la comunidad a la redefinición de los comportamientos moralmente censurables de los *murderers*

—simbólicos o reales—, *prodigies* y su canonización histórica como *saints*. Estos dechados históricos contribuyen a componer una nación imaginada (Anderson 1983), que se convierte así en un texto colectivo en el que el control del lenguaje y sus formas escritas —cuya autoridad les ha sido conferida por las elites sociales— legitiman o censuran la pertenencia al colectivo, así como la posibilidad de desarrollar unos comportamientos e identidades legitimados por el discurso nacional, identidades entre las cuales resultan determinantes las de género.

El silencio histórico que se logra mediante la ordenación urbana y al que queda relegada la mayor parte de la ciudadanía, crea, desde un plano simbólico, un discurso autoritario que limita las identidades e invita a respetar la homogeneidad cultural. En la construcción de este enmudecimiento significativo en la historia, adquieren relevancia tanto las dimensiones de los edificios públicos, como el contenido cultural que estos albergan. Aunque la protagonista del relato de Kennedy es consciente de que, en el contexto urbano, la jerarquía de la organización de las relaciones sociales —o *geopolítica*, según Foucault (1976)— tiene una gran importancia, demanda una historia basada en la ciudad, en su disposición geográfica, en sus habitantes y en las experiencias urbanas que se desarrollan en ella, en lugar de una historia nacional representada por bibliotecas y archivos históricos. Para hacer frente a una autoridad inamovible, busca la plasticidad espacial —es decir, la posibilidad de articular diversas estrategias identitarias y relacionales dentro de un mismo contexto (Rose 1999)— de manera que se visibilicen las vidas anónimas. Igualmente, decide manifestarse en contra del orden y la notoriedad de los mártires nacionales, cuyas vidas contribuyen a recordar aquellos acontecimientos que mejor se ajustan a los discursos normativos. De esta manera, ocupar un espacio en la de que, en el contexto urbano, la jerarquía de la organización de las relaciones sociales —o *geopolítica*, según Foucault (1976)— tiene una gran importancia, historia se convierte en una cruzada en contra de las jerarquías sociales. En este sentido, los medios de comunicación también contribuyen a limitar la participación de las vidas anónimas en la historia y, por consiguiente a negarles el reconocimiento público, al dedicarles apenas breves y escasas referencias. La narradora decide, así, empezar a contar "mentiras" sobre su vida urbana —por ejemplo, a través de la reseña de un libro inventado que titula "*Killing Time: Seven centuries of Scottish slaughter* by Rosamund Lundquist" (Kennedy 1990: 68)— cuando descubre el silencio histórico en el que está envuelta: "I don't like that. It makes what I do seem pointless" (Kennedy 1990: 64). Su determinación y sus experiencias se revelan como un discurso que no encaja con la homogeneidad cultural exigida, por lo que la protagonista se verá discriminada, social e históricamente, al no querer participar en lo que ella denomina "Scots pathology" (Kennedy 1990: 68).

3. Tácticas urbanas como mecanismo de reorganización socio-espacial: el espacio como texto

Para el historiador y filósofo Michel de Certeau (1984), la ciudad se compone de estrategias de poder y tácticas para luchar contra el orden establecido. Mientras que las estrategias cristalizan la disposición y la grandeza de la arquitectura urbana, que encarna el control moral, social y económico, las tácticas se presentan como prácticas de la vida cotidiana. Si bien las estrategias asumen el espacio y, por tanto, la autoridad, las tácticas dependen del tiempo y simbolizan la resistencia a los sistemas hegemónicos. En este sentido, la protagonista del relato adquiere, progresivamente, ciertas habilidades de manipulación narrativa, fundamentalmente cuando se ve obligada a utilizarlas en su vida laboral. La empresa en la que trabaja, el "Local Passenger Transport Executive", le pide que escriba un informe expresando lo que la propia directiva piensa sobre el transporte público en Glasgow. La redactora se percata de que, con la excusa de beneficiar a los clientes ofreciéndoles billetes más baratos, lo que se hace es clasificar en subgrupos a quienes viven en los márgenes sociales —personas jubiladas, desempleadas y minusválidas. Así, como explica la socióloga Mireia Baylina (1997: 130), la ciudadanía comienza a distinguir las características socioculturales que dividen a la sociedad y se da cuenta de que existen lugares que se constituyen en el epicentro de las desigualdades. De hecho, los medios de transporte público se consideran sitios en los que se reúnen ciudadanos diversos y son tanto puntos de encuentro, porque lo reducido de su espacio obliga a los usuarios a interaccionar, como de desencuentro, pues en ellos se reúne gente que ocupa el estrato más bajo de la escala social y que se enfrenta a los intereses de las autoridades:

> Unwary travellers from other lands, not fully acquainted with our language may inadvertently happen to board a bus. Unaware of the bus's true nature they will mistake both their fare and their way and be submitted to untold indignities en route while their final destination will be constantly in doubt. Such international incidents cannot help but usher in a new age of disharmony between nations. (Kennedy 1990: 65)

Igualmente, la protagonista proporciona nuevas lecturas a las prácticas urbanas que forman parte de la vida cotidiana de la población de Glasgow, como es la costumbre de hacer cola para coger un autobús, un estereotipo de orden público atribuido al Reino Unido —especialmente a Inglaterra— que la redactora aprovecha para contrastar con otro ejemplo diametralmente opuesto: una manifestación de protesta. Ambas situaciones demuestran una finalidad en la conciencia de la población. Así, hacer cola adquiere un significado regulador,

puesto que contiene la idea de respetar los códigos de conducta entre los sujetos de la sociedad. Por otro lado, una manifestación permite la brecha en el orden social y su causa origina nuevos discursos creados colectivamente contra la autoridad. Por este motivo, tal como argumenta la protagonista, la sociedad no puede desarrollarse sin autobuses que des-unan los márgenes sociales; ni los autobuses pueden funcionar sin paradas donde la gente espere respetando la cola; ni las colas pueden tener sentido si no se establece un diálogo entre quienes esperan; ni las manifestaciones o las asambleas pueden existir sin que haya una conversación que dé significado a la oposición social, de tal forma que "the bus may be responsible for irreversible damage to the very order and serenity on which our lives are based" (Kennedy 1990: 66).

La respuesta social contra el orden establecido no solo aparece en el relato asociada a los significados que se les atribuyen a los medios de transporte. De hecho, la gente moviéndose por las calles de Glasgow puede crear nuevas tácticas urbanas. Al caminar, "it's like strolling across a book, something big and Victorian with plenty of plots. It makes you wonder who's reading you" (Kennedy 1990: 67). Con los recorridos que dibujan a diario, se apropian de una ciudad sobre la que escriben, mediante los trazos que son las tácticas, infinidad de relatos protagonizados por multitud de personajes. Para Michel de Certeau (1984: 93) esas rutas diarias conquistan la geografía urbana e inscriben tácticas que convierten a la ciudad en un texto con innumerables historias y protagonistas. Todos los argumentos de esas experiencias creadas al caminar están conectados y forman redes anónimas de simultaneidad. Con el paso del tiempo, las conexiones socio-espaciales generan historias más complejas que no se tienen en consideración cuando se recogen los acontecimientos históricos, ya que no coinciden con los programas académicos y gubernamentales. Asimismo, la ciudad se diseña teniendo en cuenta la normatividad que debe prevalecer en ella y les ofrece a sus habitantes un mapa sencillo con el que puedan caminar a través de su organización arquitectónica. Esta disposición que proporciona la dialéctica socio-espacial (Soja 2000), le permite a la protagonista deambular por las calles sin correr el riesgo de perderse, puesto que el orden establecido en la ciudad cuidará de ella igual que las autoridades cuidan de la sociedad:

> I was out walking quite recently, just clearing my head in the kind of clean afternoon a frost will leave. I went up Blythswood Street which crosses St Vincent Street and then West George Street and leads into a corner of Blythswood Square. I walked around the square and into West George Street again and into Pitt Street, where the policemen live, along and into St Vincent Street and back into Blythswood Street. Then down. (Kennedy 1990: 67)

FIGURA 1. Tomada de Google Maps. Glasgow, centro de la ciudad.

El trazado del itinerario descrito por la narradora revela un corazón ubicado en el centro de la ciudad, en una zona urbana donde se concentra mucha de la actividad diaria de la ciudadanía. Igualmente, en un plano simbólico, muestra el intento por satisfacer el deseo de una regeneración cultural nacional y urbana en favor de la exaltación de las experiencias anónimas. Aunque la protagonista se siente atrapada en esta red de calles, donde las posibilidades de perderse son mínimas, es capaz de crear un nuevo discurso en los márgenes de la geopolítica. El problema al que se enfrenta la sociedad es que no puede disociarse de sus influencias culturales o, como diría Homi Bhabha (1994), que encuentra difícil negociar la pedagogía de la ciudad y sus *performances* en la propia urbe. Por esta razón, en "The Role of Notable Silences in Scottish History", se hace evidente que los códigos de conducta que se reproducen una y otra vez en el contexto urbano con la ayuda de mensajes explícitos se han convertido en parte del lenguaje urbano. Los geógrafos Mick Smith, Joyce Davidson, Laura Cameron y Liz Bondi, en *Emotion, Place and Culture*, señalan que las emociones pueden considerarse un mecanismo para entender las prácticas espaciales: "[emotions] might need to be understood as events that take-place in, and reverberate through, the real world and real beings, and so far as we know the existence of living, breathing, creatures is a pre-requisite

for emotions to exist at all" (2009: 2). En este relato, la protagonista encuentra en su camino señales que la guían a salvo de los peligros; ha interiorizado las normas para desenvolverse en la ciudad. De ahí que, por ejemplo, cuando pasa junto a una señal advirtiendo "KEEP OUT and DANGER OF DEATH" (Kennedy 1990: 67), su propio cuerpo puede sentir parte del mensaje y evita entrar en el lugar, porque físicamente percibe la energía que procede de un generador, interpretando su negatividad y peligro.

4. Coincidencias espaciales atemporales: una reivindicación de la cultura urbana silenciada

Al examinar las representaciones estereotipadas de Glasgow, David Bell y Azzedine Haddour determinan que la ciudad "has long been synonymous with poverty and violence" (2000: 60), por lo que los hilos argumentales del pasado vician cualquier interpretación nueva de la urbe y, en consecuencia, la experiencia urbana de sus habitantes, especialmente de las mujeres. Existe una imagen negativa de la ciudad, que destaca la violencia que se genera en ella y la refuerza mediante las narraciones de lo popular. Asimismo, la construcción de mitos urbanos comporta que la población solo pueda vivir sus experiencias dentro de unos estrechos límites, ya que dichos mitos crean a su alrededor unas normas de comportamiento, que se interiorizan sin ser cuestionadas. En el relato de Kennedy, por ejemplo, mientras la protagonista pasea, coincide en el espacio, pero no en el tiempo, con la historia de Madeleine H. Smith y se pregunta si percibiría las mismas sensaciones que aquella al transitar esas calles. Los hechos reales que ocurrieron en el número 7 de Blythswood Square en torno a Madeleine H. Smith (1835-1928) son un adelanto de la postura que adopta la protagonista para redefinir su propia identidad frente a las actitudes discriminatorias implícitas en la recopilación de datos para la narración de la historia.

De acuerdo con la narrativa popular, recogida por MacGowan en *Murder in Victorian Scotland: The Trial of Madeleine Smith* (1999), Madeleine, nacida en el seno de una familia de clase alta, se ve envuelta en un escándalo por asesinato en 1857. Tras una larga estancia en Londres, donde estudia por decisión de su padre, vuelve a su ciudad natal y se enamora de Pierre Emile L'Angelier, un hombre de las Islas del Canal, aprendiz jardinero en la tienda de los Saunders, reputados comerciantes. Mientras los dos jóvenes viven su *affaire*, la familia de Madeleine, ajena a su relación clandestina, le ha buscado un pretendiente de clase social adecuada, William Harper Minnoch. Al enterarse de los planes de su familia, ella intenta terminar su noviazgo con L'Angelier, pero este quiere casarse con ella, así que la amenaza con sacar a la luz las cartas de amor que se han estado escribiendo. Madeleine no ve otra salida que comprar arsénico en una droguería y firmar el

recibo como M.H. Smith. El 23 de marzo de 1857, encuentran el cuerpo sin vida de L'Angelier y se determina que la causa de su muerte es el envenenamiento. Madeleine es arrestada y acusada de asesinato cuando se encuentran las cartas de amor que le ha dirigido a L'Angelier. Sin embargo, en el juicio, la defensa consigue que no se prueben las acusaciones, ya que las cartas no están fechadas y no hay testigos que puedan afirmar que ha existido una relación amorosa entre ellos. El escándalo es tan grande que pasa a la historia de Escocia como "el juicio del siglo" y ella tiene que abandonar el país.

Hoy en día, a Madeleine se la recuerda no solo por el juicio, sino también porque no siguió las normas de conducta victorianas, que consideraban escandaloso que una mujer de clase alta mantuviera una relación amorosa y sexual con un hombre fuera del matrimonio. Este hecho, que se recuerda a través de las narraciones populares, delimita la propia historia de la protagonista del relato. En su opinión, las personas son víctimas de las coincidencias que surgen en sus vidas y no pueden hacer nada por cambiar el destino que les espera. Justifica así que Madeleine reaccione asesinando a su amante, al verse atrapada en una red de coincidencias: un matrimonio concertado por su familia, las normas de comportamiento femenino que regían su época y la posibilidad de que se descubriera que había perdido la virginidad antes del matrimonio y con alguien que no pertenecía a su clase social. Por estos motivos, la narradora de la historia afirma: "people enter a life of coincidence and follow it to the end" (Kennedy 1990: 68), puesto que las pautas que rigen la conducta de la población coartan su libertad y capacidad de cambiar intencionadamente. Recordar este tipo de historias por medio de la cultura es una manera de resaltar las conductas que se consideran erróneas, de forma que la sociedad no las repita y que se perpetúe el orden establecido. Mientras tanto, el resto de las experiencias urbanas quedarán silenciadas en la historia.

5. Voyeurismo femenino y reescritura cultural urbana

El hecho de aludir al caso de Madeleine le permite a la protagonista defenderse de su propia actitud ante la muerte, que para ella es un misterio reconfortante. Por eso dedica su tiempo libre a indagar sobre asesinatos, espiando a la población de Glasgow y utilizándola como objeto de su investigación de campo. La teórica Kristeva explica que el voyeurismo es un mecanismo necesario a la hora de construir las identidades, pues implica una observación que determina los afectos y sentimientos en relación a otra persona u objeto. En este sentido, "[v]oyeurism is a structural necessity in the constitution of object relation, showing up every time the object shifts towards the abject; it becomes true perversion only if there is a failure to symbolize the subject/object instability. Voyeurism accompanies the writing of

abjection. When that writing stops, voyeurism becomes a perversion" (1982: 46). Si a la perversión que se desprende del propio hecho de observar se le suma el factor discriminatorio del género, pues aquí [en el texto objeto del presente análisis] se trata de una mujer, se puede decir que la protagonista subvierte doblemente los códigos sociales. Precisamente, su método resulta eficaz, puesto que, al adoptar esa posición ventajosa con respecto a otras personas, se aprovecha de su condición de mujer en situaciones en las que pasa desapercibida gracias a que se atiene a los patrones de conducta impuestos al colectivo femenino: "I once hunted a man, collected his life, enquired at his place of employment and found him staring up at me from behind a small desk. He had been reading a Statistical Account of Dundee and District" (Kennedy 1990: 70). Además, como apunta Linda McDowell, la propia ciudad invita a curiosear sobre la vida de las personas, ya que "the city was an arena where the strict and hierarchical ties of small towns and villages were relaxed and dissolved" (1999: 155). Convertirse en una *flâneuse* es la manera que la protagonista tiene de crear un nuevo discurso a partir de la normatividad, ya que "sabe-pensar-el-espacio" y se aprovecha de las grietas del sistema social construido sobre estereotipos de género. Por otro lado, la ciudad también se caracteriza por ser un espacio geográfico en el que existe una inclinación hacia la violencia y en el que se hace especial hincapié en los crímenes en los que los hombres son los agresores y las mujeres las víctimas, acentuando el estereotipo que las presenta como frágiles féminas, amenazadas por constantes situaciones de peligro e incapaces de resolver los conflictos violentos. Sin embargo, la protagonista rompe con estas ideas preconcebidas al transformarse en *flâneuse*, ya que ella misma se convierte en una agresora de la intimidad de los demás y las demás, especialmente de la de los hombres que son quienes menos dudan de sus intenciones: "it isn't hard for a woman to follow a man. They don't expect it, you're not a threat. And you disappear and they don't see you and you start to follow them again" (Kennedy 1990: 69).

Su presencia no supone un peligro, ya que no tiene intención de agredir físicamente a nadie, pero sí deja claro que disfruta recabando todo tipo de información sobre sus víctimas, agrediéndolas psicológicamente. A pesar de que a la ciudad se le atribuye el anonimato, la protagonista demuestra que se trata de una utopía, puesto que existen diferentes medios para poder indagar en las vidas ajenas, como los registros, las guías telefónicas o las cartas que llegan a los buzones. Busca los datos a fin de componer un libro con noticias sobre fallecimientos que ella misma se inventa; es decir, está confeccionando un obituario muy particular. La protagonista está convencida de que los medios de comunicación no cuentan toda la verdad acerca de las vidas de quienes mueren. Puesto que las autoridades silencian las experiencias vitales de las personas, ella se encarga de escribir la biografía de quien ella se imagina que ha fallecido y lo hace componiendo la crónica que considera más adecuada a la persona supuestamente muerta. Así,

construye una narración que tergiversa la realidad y, por ende, subvierte la inscripción inconsciente de los textos individuales en el con/texto urbano, tal como describe Michel de Certeau: "[people's bodies] follow the thicks and thins of an urban "text" they write without being able to read it. […] The networks of these moving, intersecting writings compose a manifold story that has neither author nor spectator, shaped out fragments of trajectories and alterations of spaces" (1984: 93). Este concepto de ciudad, que la hace susceptible de ser analizada como si se tratara de un texto, permite que la narradora, convertida en espectadora de otras vidas, pueda apropiarse de las historias ajenas y convertirse en autora-lectora privilegiada de un texto cuya estructura solo ella es capaz de identificar. De este modo, la narradora pone en práctica sus propias tácticas urbanas para descifrar códigos de conducta, en este caso los silencios históricos, y crea a partir de ellos nuevas normas que visibilizan las vidas anónimas de Glasgow. Asimismo, la ciudad participa activamente en la creación de los discursos silenciadores: "The city knows about lies, too. It makes them and loves them and forgets they were never the truth" (Kennedy 1990: 70). La aplicación de los códigos de conducta urbanos hace que se difumine la línea que separa lo que para la ciudadanía es políticamente correcto de lo que es incorrecto, y que dichos códigos se perpetúen sin que la población los cuestione.

La oposición de la protagonista al orden geopolítico adquiere sentido cuando conoce a alguien que comparte sus mismas inquietudes culturales y vitales. Al participar conjuntamente en su peculiar forma de visibilizar la vida de la población anónima de Glasgow, ambos sienten que sus respectivas identidades se vuelven más poderosas. Aunque la sociedad influya en su concepción del mundo, la protagonista y su compañero son capaces de distinguir los rasgos culturales que no comparten con el resto: "As we travelled together, he compiled our list of lies. We found lies about ships, the weather, trains, communal toilets, drink, pies, bridies, comedians, drunks, singers, happiness, tea shops, culture, blueprints, socialists, hunger, anger, clay, houses, capitalists, painters, hogmanay and Irn Bru" (Kennedy 1990: 70-71). Todas las mentiras relacionadas con la cultura que ambos van encontrando se las ofrecen como verdades quienes construyen el discurso de la identidad colectiva. No obstante, para su satisfacción, en la esfera privada la narradora y su compañero pueden decidir cuál es el grado de veracidad que tienen las costumbres y elegir lo que se ajusta a su experiencia vital.

Por otro lado, los protagonistas no pueden escapar ni a la influencia ni a las particularidades normativas que la geopolítica ejerce sobre la construcción de la ciudad. Él muere en una pelea de bar porque, casualmente, se encuentra en el lugar y momento equivocados. La protagonista no solo busca la razón de la muerte de su compañero en la casualidad, sino que trata de encontrar más causas en el plano

psicológico que gobierna la ciudad: "Because the stranger believed in lies about blood loyalty and city violence, he came to the pub to make them true. He walked straight in, quite quickly, and stabbed my friend. My friend had chosen to stand in the wrong place" (Kennedy 1990: 71). La muerte de su compañero le deja un vacío sentimental y cultural. Y siente un profundo dolor, que se ceba en ella, cuando se percata de que los medios de comunicación recogen el suceso, pero se olvidan de contar el papel que jugaba ella en la vida de la víctima. Su desacuerdo con la realidad la empuja a intentar seguir dándole sentido a la existencia de su amante escribiendo los cuadernos en los que él anotaba su concepción de la ciudad. De esta manera, se escapa del silencio y consigue dejar indicios de su experiencia en Glasgow.

La protagonista ha de decidir si narra la muerte de su compañero o participa en la perpetuación de la gran mentira histórica, que es una actitud más cómoda: "our city and us inside it and me inside us. I should write descriptions of them all, but everyone knows I lie too much, so who would believe me" (Kennedy 1990: 71). Se cuestiona el sentido de desmontar la construcción de la historia si, en opinión de las demás personas que forman parte del sistema social, ella es una mentirosa y carece de crédito debido a su continua oposición a la realidad. Su decisión final de optar por la pequeña aportación que puede hacer a la historia mediante sus necrológicas imaginadas, la lleva a pensar que en el futuro alguien compartirá las mismas inquietudes sobre la veracidad de los hechos vitales y de la muerte, igual que ella comparte las suyas con Madeleine Hamilton Smith.

6. Conclusiones

Según la descripción literaria que A.L. Kennedy hace de Glasgow, se puede destacar que la ciudad se comporta como un texto en el que aparece codificada la normatividad social y en el que las personas tejen los hilos argumentales de su vida —a pesar de las casualidades que condicionan sus experiencias urbanas, interactuando y desarrollando una cultura alternativa e individualizada. Para interiorizar las normas de convivencia de la ciudad, los personajes utilizan las sensaciones de sus cuerpos y aprenden cuáles son los límites de la movilidad, también de la suya, que determinan la configuración del espacio urbano, así como las consecuencias implícitas en esas restricciones. Además de por las emociones, en "The Role of Notable Silences in Scottish History" las experiencias urbanas se ven influenciadas y reguladas por la interiorización de los discursos sobre la tradición escocesa. La narradora y protagonista de esta historia adopta un método para refutarlos basado en el cuestionamiento de la autoridad de los textos históricos y las narraciones de la identidad colectiva, un método que consiste en comparar sus propias técnicas narrativas con las de aquellos. De este modo, la narradora pone de manifiesto la diferencia entre la *verosimilitud* de las

narraciones fijadas en los archivos de la ciudad y en las mentes de las distintas generaciones que la han habitado, por un lado, y, por otro, la verdad de las *realidades* que interpreta la protagonista al declarar abiertamente las *mentiras* sobre las que construye los breves textos que escribe para una publicación periódica. Su transgresión narrativa y su transgresión espacial corren parejas, puesto que se atreve a traspasar los límites que, de diversos modos se les imponen a las mujeres en las ciudades, sobre todo, convirtiéndose en una *flâneuse* que captura y manipula a su antojo las historias de las personas desconocidas a las que acecha en las calles para inscribir sus significados imaginados en el espacio urbano.

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RICHARD FORD'S FRANK BASCOMBE AS AN AMERICAN EVERYMAN

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Novelist and short-story writer Richard Ford (Jackson, Mississippi, 1944) has been considered by professor Huey Guagliardo as "first and foremost an American writer whose works often offer penetrating explorations into American culture" (2001: xi). The national experience of the citizens of the United States becomes the element that fuels Ford's narrative engine. More specifically, Ford's main novelistic project, the Bascombe trilogy, composed of *The Sportswriter* (1986), *Independence Day* (1995) and *The Lay of the Land* (2006), investigates different discourses of 'Americanness', and in doing so, proposes possible cultural identity models, attending to a variety of social categories. In this article, I will provide a detailed analysis of the autodiegetic narrator, Frank Bascombe, as a representative US everyman.

One need not read more than a couple of in-depth interviews to realize how elusive writers of fiction tend to be when asked to dissect the components of their narrative. Understandably, they would rather not reduce their work to a series of formal elements and patterns —which literature is to a significant extent. In the essay "Nobody's Everyman" (2009), Richard Ford refuses to attach the reductionist label 'everyman' to his signature character, Frank Bascombe. This should come as no surprise: the author argues that he is not interested in types but in human beings, which would be a valid point except for one detail: Frank does not have an existence outside the written text. Regardless of the artist's intention,

his creature stands in these novels for something else, and I agree with many critics, commentators and readers that Ford's character represents one of the finest embodiments of Americanness in contemporary US fiction. For one thing, Frank assigns himself such a label —via Ford, obviously— when he presents himself to the reader as an "arch-ordinary American",[1] a modern incarnation of the common person that, as George Lipsitz observes, has been eulogized in US fiction from the New Deal period (2001: 21). In the following pages, I will try to assess the accuracy of the term as applied to Frank.

A preliminary factor must be taken into account: there is no single version of Americanness in these novels. Frank Bascombe represents a mainstream ideal of US citizenship, but secondary characters such as Mike Mahoney —Frank's Tibetan business associate— offer challenging versions of national identity. Apparently, the Bascombe saga has little to do with questions of gender, race or class, in the sense that its dominant narrative voice and main character embodies the unmarked categories of male, heterosexual, white and middle-class.[2] Thus, Ford resorts to the hegemonic perspective of a WASP tradition. As Michael S. Kimmel remarks, "[o]nly white people in our society have the luxury not to think about race every minute of their lives. And only men have the luxury to pretend that gender does not matter" (2000: 7). However, the key lesson extracted from Toni Morrison's influential volume *Playing in the Dark* (1992) is that social elements apparently ignored in canonical US fiction have an unconscious yet unavoidable presence in it. In other words, the kind of Americanness Frank stands for is defined both by what he does and does not represent. In any case, this article will attend to the validity of the term 'everyman' as applied to Frank Bascombe, since a discussion of alternative US identities informed by racial, gender and class questions would go beyond the scope of the present work.

Therefore, Frank's self-definition as a US everyman poses an initial problem: does it make any sense to claim that there exists an archetypal US citizen? On the one hand, there is no clearly discernible group of features shared by all of the citizens of such a vast nation. Interestingly, in "How does being an American Inform What I Write?" (2002), Richard Ford admits that prior to gaining a national consciousness, he sensed the regional awareness of being a Mississippian, leading to a sense that the US represents a joining together of seemingly disparate territories. As though the description of a national identity in the United States were not complex enough, it is also subject to further regional deconstruction. Frank's biography offers an obvious example of a diverse US: a Mississippian who went to college in Ann Arbor, married a Midwesterner (Ann Dykstra), dated a Texan (Vicky Arcenault), and definitively settled in New Jersey, where he has a Tibetan business partner (Mike Mahoney). As a Southerner spending most of his life in the North,

Frank comes to draw together elements of arguably the two longest-standing male myths in the history of the United States: the Confederate chivalry and the self-made Yankee —those conflicting visions of manhood whose opposition during the Civil War "signaled the triumph of the urban industrial entrepreneur over the genteel southern patrician" (Kimmel 2006: 50). In Frank, too, the booster Yankee prevails over the Southern cavalier.

As a matter of fact, Frank's feelings toward both his native South and its inhabitants conflict in various ways. A case in point would be the relationship between Frank and Fincher, a character he meets in *The Sportswriter* and greatly dislikes, especially when he begins acting "Southern",[3] which means, among other things, relating to family and place in a particular way, along with an idiosyncratic diction and tone. In general, Frank does not feel at ease in the presence of fellow Southerners, and is happy to avoid the topics *he* assumes they would like to discuss: namely politics and race.[4] What emerges as significant is that Frank himself realizes that there is no such a thing as a Southern essence, and offers his own experience by way of example: "I simply couldn't imagine going to high school with a bunch of Yankees —though, of course, I would someday become one of them and think it was great" (*LOTL* 319). The connotations of the term are explained by Kimmel: "Southerners saw northerners as crassly commercial, avaricious, unscrupulous, aggressive, and mercenary; 'Yankee' was a decidedly negative term, denoting unethical business practices and concern only for the bottom line" (2006: 51). In any case, the fact that a Mississippi-born citizen can become a convinced Yankee must mean that nationality (or in this case, regional belonging) is to a great extent a performance, a habit that can be either exercised or challenged.

1. A self-made everyman

As A.O. Scott notes, Frank has been labeled as "a Representative Man, an Everyday Hero, a shining exemplar of the Great American Average" (2006).[5] In Vivian Gornick's words, the opening Bascombe novel offers "life inflicting itself on the most ordinary of men" (2008: 156). One assumes that Frank would sanction such terminology; not in vain, "being an ordinary citizen" is one of the modest goals he establishes as soon as readers begin to familiarize themselves with him (*SW* 11). Frank craves for anonymity and for an ordinariness that justifies the term 'everyman': "Better to think that you're like your fellow man than to think […] that no man could be you or take your place" (*SW* 78). In fact, one of the reasons why he reckons he is good at sponsoring (a home-delivery version of telephone counseling) is that he suspects he has "a lot in common with *everybody*" (*LOTL* 139; emphasis in the original), a feature he benefits from in his business activity.

However, race, class and gender differences will stand between him and a large number of his fellow US citizens, challenging his self-assigned representative quality. The regular incongruities between Frank's self-image and his acts,[6] along with his idiosyncratic yet rather superficial meekness, which seems to facilitate Ford's goal of writing about an essentially decent human being (Bonetti 2001: 29), reinforce the notion of a man who displays an idealized image of himself.

For one thing, Frank self-fashions as an ideal practitioner of the quintessential profession in the land of commerce and consumerism: "'I understand conventional wisdom,' I say. 'I'm a salesman'" (*LOTL* 224). Furthermore, the figure of the traveling salesman reflects an ideal of simplicity promulgated by Frank, in contrast to the intricacy of writing fiction (*SW* 39). In truth, Frank is a descendant of what Daniel Boorstin called "*Businessman Americanus*" (1965: 121), not necessarily a new species *per se* but an individual whose uniqueness emerges from the peculiarities of the American experience. In Kimmel's historical review, salesmen were the twentieth-century version of the self-made men, who sold "themselves, their winning personalities, their smiles and shoeshines" (2006: 71). In his introduction to one of the novels that best captured the Puritan ethos, Henry James' *The Bostonians*, R. D. Gooder emphasizes many of the features associated with the Puritan tradition, which are equally present in the myth of the self-made man, such as determination, self-control and self-examination, or rectitude (1998: ix, xviii).

Puritanism's strong urge for success, ambition and work-ethic are inextricably linked to capitalism. In his analysis of Cotton Mather's biography of John Winthrop, Sacvan Bercovitch remarks that Winthrop's life becomes a model for the American stories of thriving, in part because "Puritanism opened the way to material as well as spiritual prosperity" (1975: 3). Indeed, in the first Puritan communities of the New England area, material prosperity was seen as a proof of moral grace. With God on their side, not only did settlers sanction a concern for wealth, they also promoted it. These circumstances combined to form a typification of the way US citizens have historically faced material progress –especially since the New England Way was adopted to a significant extent as the American Way (Bercovitch 1975: 108). As the nation relentlessly consolidated its position as a capitalist power controlled by corporations, the myth of self-made men became increasingly harder to sustain —especially when the United States completed the transition from "a nation of small entrepreneurs […] into a nation of hired employees" (Kimmel 2006: 158). Being bossed by a superior dramatically challenges the self-reliance that has characterized the ideal American man. Individualism has to be redefined to fit the social and economic reality of corporate America, where men are "subject to so many forces outside their control" (Kimmel 2006: 159). In his deconstruction of the myth, George Lipsitz sees the ideology of the self-made man as an element

of the conservatives' allegiance to the American master narrative (2001: 79). In a similar vein, Howard Zinn describes the 'rags to riches' myth as an ideology designed to facilitate social control of the working class, "a lesson in values [rather] than as a description of reality" (1995: 156, 248). When social mobility failed (and that was commonly the case), the nation searched for alternative myths to avoid despair. Geographical mobility acted as a compensatory option —or, as Kimmel puts it, "one could at least head west" (2006: 61).

An interesting question ensues: does Frank respond to the ideal of the self-made man? His parents were "rural Iowans" who moved around before Frank's birth until they finally settled in Biloxi, Mississippi, where his father "had some work that involved plating ships with steel" at a ship-building company (*SW* 21-22). Therefore, Frank's humble origins are a fact. Upon his father's death, Frank was sent to Gulf Pines, a military school through which he came to win an NROTC scholarship (i.e. a scholarship granted by the Navy) that allowed him to enroll at the University of Michigan. Frank's stroke of luck continued and he wrote a book of short stories he managed to sell "to a movie producer for a lot of money", as he confesses in *The Sportswriter*'s opening page. Thanks to the deal, "I was rich, at least for those times. It was 1968" (*SW* 34). Arguably, fortune was on Frank's side. Although his promising book of fiction was a product of his talent, it became his only successful attempt at literary creation, since he failed to write a follow-up. Shortly after the sale and with the help of the money earned by Ann Dykstra's modeling —they had met and married along the way—, they bought a house in the fictitious suburb of Haddam, New Jersey. A number of sporadic articles, followed by an offer to write sports news full-time for a magazine, secured his position even as Ann got pregnant and quit modeling. Any lingering economic worries he might have had came to an end in the period between *The Sportswriter* and *Independence Day*, with the profitable sale of his house (after Ann divorced him). From that moment on, already a well-established real estate agent, Frank would not need to concern himself about money anymore.

Therefore, against the oversimplified template of the self-made man narrative as a 'rags to riches' story, with wealth as the result of hard work and resilience, Frank does not exactly match the myth: a little less chance and a little more persistence would probably do the trick. On the other hand, for Michael S. Kimmel, the self-made man was defined by "success in the market, individual achievement, mobility [and] wealth" (2006: 17). Without being a hypercompetitive salesman, Frank is certainly successful in the new line of work he takes up in *Independence Day* and *The Lay of the Land*. A degree of individual achievement can be granted him in virtue of his business success and his having written a valuable piece of fiction —despite his faults as a husband and a father. He is likewise presented as a man on

the move, in part due to the fact that these three novels are set in holidays (Easter, Independence Day and Thanksgiving), and his mobility provides Ford with narrative possibilities in his attempt to show a rich picture of contemporary USA. In conclusion, Frank's life experiences are at the same time specific and ordinary enough to allow his ascription to the malleable myth of the self-made man.

2. A male utopia

Frank recurrently insists on, even boasts about, his average character: "I think I'm just more at ease in the mainstream. It's my version of sublime" (*ID* 272). Anonymity represents for him a possibility of continuous renewal, the kind of new beginnings longed for by his proverbial optimism (*SW* 148). Along these lines, he explains at the Deerslayer Inn, where he and his son Paul arrive after dinner time:

> I hate to be the one asking for special treatment, who wants his dinner late, his laundry returned without his ticket, who can't find his stub for his prints, has to have his tires rotated *this* afternoon because he needs to drive to Buffalo in the morning and the left front seems to be wearing a little unevenly. I prefer my regular place in line. (*ID* 312; emphasis in the original).

Better not pay much attention to the fact that after this declaration of principles, he tries to get a meal although the kitchen is closed; as usual, Frank's self-fashioning is a source of contradictions. He belongs to the stock of twentieth-century "other directed" men described by Kimmel (2006: 81), characterized by an urgent need to be liked by their fellow men (in the case of Frank, first and foremost, his readers). One might have expected quite the opposite: that such a ruminative and reflective character would have rather resembled the lonely nineteenth-century "inner directed" man with a strong character, but that is something Frank realizes he lacks, much to his dismay (*LOTL* 74). Kimmel summarizes that turn-of-the-century social change thus: "[t]he rugged individualism of the nineteenth century had been replaced by the shallow sociability of the modern American personality" (2006: 176). In fact, when Frank applies his own version of individualism to his personal relations as disconnectedness, the result is nothing short of disastrous, as Brian Duffy (2008) observes.

Frank's ideal of (male) Americanness is embodied by Lloyd Mangum, the man in charge of Mangum & Gayden Funeral Home in Haddam:

> Lloyd is a man not much made in America now, though once there were plenty: men without preconditions or sharp angles the world has to contend with, men who go to work, entertain important, unsensational duties, get home on time, mix a hefty brown drink after six, enjoy the company of the Mrs. till ten, catch the early news, then trudge off to bed and blissful sleep. (*LOTL* 95)

Frank refers with nostalgia to the simplicity of a gendered pastoral past, so that the elegiac tone of this novel marks one of the fundamental changes of a character who proclaimed in *The Sportswriter* his belief that "Americans put too much emphasis on their pasts as a way of defining themselves, which can be death dealing" (21). The autumnal mood of *The Lay of the Land* depicts Frank trying to maintain his innate optimism, not an easy task once life has become permanent and the largest part of it is already on the books; in Frank's words, the Permanent Period (his name for his vital moment in the months previous to *The Lay of the Land*) can "erode optimism, render possibility small and remote, and make any of us feel that while we can't fuck up much of anything anymore, there really isn't much to fuck up because nothing matters a gnat's nuts" (*LOTL* 109). So his consolation consists in being content with what the present offers rather than expect much from the future (a life stance, I would argue, not that different from the one advocated by the Existence Period, his approach to life in the days covered by *Independence Day*'s plot).

Some other male characters, much as Frank may have reservations about them, represent in his view an idealized US identity. Such is the case of Tom Benivalle, the possible business associate of Mike Mahoney —Frank's partner— in *The Lay of the Land*, whose description echoes Lloyd Mangum's: "he's exactly what this country's all about: works like a dray horse, tithes at St. Melchior's, has never personally killed anyone, stays in shape for the fire department, loves his wife and can't wait for the sun to come up so he can get crackin'" (*LOTL* 282). In his semi-ironic description, Frank goes so far as to offer Benivalle as a symbol of the United States, as the fulfillment of the American Dream. However, unlike Lloyd, Benivalle comes out as an ambitious character that yearns for economic profit, which on the other hand suits Mike perfectly well, since Frank's partner "sees clients as rolls of cash that happen to be able to talk" (*LOTL* 613). The contradiction here is merely apparent. In fact, Frank's eulogy makes complete sense when one considers the similarities between the two: both Frank and Benivalle thrive through speculation, although the former lacks the ambition of the latter, which may explain Frank's reservations about him. Indeed, with this in mind, Frank's praise of Benivalle may be read as being not far from self-flattery.

Not only does Frank highlight the character traits of his model US citizen, he also eulogizes the external appearance of the American everyman, which he tries to imitate: "an ordinary-looking Joe in a crew-neck sweater, chinos and a John Deere Tractor cap I'd affected when I got to Berkshire" (*SW* 221). This last item, more commonly associated with the clothing of a farmer than with a sportswriter or a Berkshire College professor (Frank's profession for a short time), strikes readers as particularly out of character. It seems that Frank tries to evoke the idealized quality

of physical labor (and the manliness it implies) he never really had to resort to in order to earn his living, first as a writer of fiction and sports events, then as a residential agent. Throughout the trilogy, Frank's lack of distinction is reflected by his physical aspect. He wears what he describes as "[g]eneric clothing" ordered from a catalog (*ID* 296). In fact, he maintains that his dress style has remained unchanged since the early sixties (*LOTL* 211). He does, however, confess the rationale behind his clothing choice: to make buyers feel not only comfortable, but also slightly sorry for him. His reasons evoke those expressed by Kimmel in his reference to the plain and simple businessman clothes designed to inspire confidence in clients (2006: 20). Thus, in *The Lay of the Land* Frank asserts that both his car and his clothes are "intended to make as little statement as possible, letting me portray myself to clients as the non-risk-taking everyman with a voice of reason, who only wants the best for all" (547). In a word, he aims for conveying the same "steadiness" that his parents' clothes represented when he was a child (*LOTL* 548), which at the same time contributes to the search for continuity with the past he carries out in the last Bascombe novel. Therefore, as is the case with virtually any aspect of his behavior Frank's attention, or lack thereof, to his physical appearance is driven, consciously or not, toward obtaining some profit or advantage.

3. Temporary about himself

In his essay on isolation and alienation in the Bascombe novels, William G. Chernecky mentions Alexis de Tocqueville's assertion that "Americans seemed to take more pride in their sameness than in any sense of individuality or personal independence" (2000: 174). It seems that Frank perfectly responds to that observation. The protagonist of these novels is not "particularly a private person" and his interests are limited to the public "parts of man" [*sic*] (*SW* 84, 187). Arguably, Frank wishes to join the not-so-exclusive group of US everymen in order to keep anxiety at bay; his problems do not seem so important upon the realization that "there's no way that I could feel what hundreds of millions of other citizens haven't" (*SW* 367). This feeling of belonging to something greater provides Frank with solace in times of need, as when he is diagnosed with prostate cancer: "you share your condition —a kind of modern American condition— with 200,000 other Americans, which is comforting" (*LOTL* 168-69). Thus, Frank resorts to the national imagery in order to produce a self-serving version of the equalizing feeling inscribed in the mythology of the United States. Indeed, Frank's consolation on the misery of others also reflects the self-deceptive nature of the character.

In several instances the narrative stresses Frank's lack of a distinctive individuality. In *The Sportswriter*, he feels "as invisible as Claude Reins in the movie" after being defined by Ann as "a cliché" (330-31) for his suggesting that they have sex in Walter's post-suicide house; and he is even mistaken for another person in his quick Easter visit to a Presbyterian church, though he is not bothered by this, "since nothing here could matter less than my own identity" (232). Similarly, in *Independence Day* Frank advocates a lifestyle that goes unnoticed, which is actually a fitting summary of his so-called Existence Period. In fact, the Existence Period, with its low expectations, equips Frank with a lukewarm perspective that infuriates other characters who interact with him, such as Joe Markham, an unusually difficult client. As a reply to Frank's criticism that Joe should stop looking at 'things' (i.e. his life) from above, Joe abruptly states that Frank "just see[s] everything from the fucking middle, that's it" (56). As a matter of fact, Joe's disgust with Frank's attitude is not completely beside the point. The narrative in *Independence Day* seems to suggest that Frank's lack of commitment, his reluctance when it comes to complete involvement and full self-disclosure, lies at the heart of his personal problems. On the other hand, in *The Lay of the Land* invisibility is better understood as the consequence of contemplating the penultimate stage of one's existence. Thus, both Frank and one of his clients are rendered invisible by a much-younger group of volleyballers during a stroll on the beach (419), an appropriate image for a fictional world where the limits of its protagonist's existence are constantly reassessed.

According to Huey Guagliardo, the Bascombe novels transcend the plight of the modern individual and chronicle the larger cultural malaise of contemporary society, a scenario that features "the individual's sense of alienation, restlessness, displacement, and fragmentation; the sense of rootlessness, of being cut off from the past, which so often characterizes life in an increasingly mobile society; the disintegration of community; the breakup of the family; and the impoverishment of all human connections" (2000: 5). Obviously, certain hidden anxieties are brought to light by Frank's lack of specificity. For one thing, there is an undefined existential quandary associated with not sensing a strong unique personality, a regular and recognizable character, or an inner essence. This was precisely Frank's plight during his Existence Period, the result of which was the unnoticed and unnoticeable life of "a man with no calculable character" (*LOTL* 75). Frankfurt School psychologist Erich Fromm describes the predicament of the contemporary alienated individual as a person with "opinions and prejudices but no convictions, […] likes and dislikes, but no will" (in Kimmel 2006: 158). The reader of the trilogy is constantly confronted with Frank's capricious preferences and aversions, but Frank himself admits that he lacks a strong character and moral position —a troubling condition, specially for his confused son, Paul, who in *Independence Day*

stands for the contemporary teenager in need of a point of reference. But Frank, rightfully labeled as "a perpetual escapee" by Alice Hoffman (1986: 14), seems to be even more lost and less reliable than his son.

Frank believes that the modern predicament —exemplified by his clients' "realty dreads"— stems from "the cold, unwelcome, built-in-America realization that we're just like the other schmo, wishing his wishes, lusting his stunted lusts, quaking over his idiot frights and fantasies, all of us popped out from the same unchinkable mold". Although he praises a nondescript existence, Frank is aware of the giddiness resulting from "being tucked even deeper, more anonymously, into the weave of culture", as symbolized by owning your own house (*ID* 57). Thus, Joe Markham's refusal to be content with any of the large number of houses shown by Frank can be read as a modern instance of the escape from culture and civilization epitomized by US mythical figures such as Huckleberry Finn. Different though they may seem, both Frank and Joe yearn to be like any other fellow citizen, but not too much —the American equalizing feeling can be a scary burden too.[7]

In conclusion, Frank Bascombe represents an embodiment of a mainstream US national identity. His biographical details and his profit-driven behavior facilitate a discussion of the social utility of myths such as the American salesman and the self-made man, along with the equalizing ideal and the cultural and regional diversity of the United States. Interestingly, these mythical representations, based on a paradigm of self-reliance and allegiance to the principles of capitalism and consumerism, are discourses presented by the hegemony as unquestionable historical facts. Due to Frank's self-characterization as an American everyman, the deconstruction of such an ideal of standard identity —with its implied racial, gender, sexual or class features, questioning its validity as an eternal narrative, becomes not only relevant but necessary. Cultural identity in the Bascombe novels is exposed as a performative act where citizens, consciously or not, participate in order to reinforce their 'Americanness'. The golden mean promulgated by Frank crystallizes in the picture of a man with no strong personality or unique individuality. At the same time, his encompassing nature as an average man does not exclude the necessity to examine alternative ways of Americanness in the fiction of Richard Ford. Indeed, although Frank epitomizes an exclusively male ideal of citizenship, the Bascombe novels resort to both their protagonist and multiple supporting characters, besides the interaction between them in a particular context, in order to display a rich image of life-as-it-is in the last few decades of the United States. Nevertheless, the fact that Ford's character-driven novels primarily focus on the existential tribulations and anxieties of their main character justifies an exploration of the qualities that account for Frank's self-fashioning as a quintessential US individual in a complex portrait of the white, male, middle-class segment of US citizens.

Notes

[1]. Richard Ford, *Independence Day* (London: The Harvill Press, 1995): 141-42. Further references to the novel will be to this edition, and will appear parenthetically, with the acronym *ID*.

[2]. I borrow political scientist Francis Fukuyama's simple definition of the middle class as "people who are neither at the top nor at the bottom of their societies in terms of income, who have received at least a secondary education, and who own either real property, durable goods, or their own businesses" (2012). In other words, the group of people placed, in the social stratification, between the upper and working classes.

[3]. Richard Ford, *The Sportswriter* (London: Bloomsbury, 1986): 64-66. Further references to the novel will be to this edition, and will appear parenthetically, with the acronym *SW*.

[4]. Ford, *The Lay of the Land* (London: Bloomsbury, 2006): 497. Further references to the novel will be to this edition, and will appear parenthetically, with the acronym *LOTL*.

[5]. However, the *New York Times* journalist and film critic maintains that "Frank Bascombe is not a type […], but rather the irreducible, expanding essence of himself", an almost unique representation of life-as-it-is in US fiction.

[6]. In Alice Hoffman's opinion, Frank is "an emotionally untrustworthy narrator" (1986: 14).

[7]. A summary of that feeling would be what Daniel Boorstin calls the "*priority* principle" (1965: 78; emphasis in the original). Popularized by the dictum 'First come, first served', it is a philosophy of life that, Boorstin argues, works as an equalizer: your past makes no difference, you only need to pass the winning post first in order to achieve a benefit (1965: 112). However, the work of progressive historians like Howard Zinn, whose *A People's History of the United States* focuses on class struggle and the role of the underprivileged in national construction, reminds readers of the fact that the relentless growth of the United States as the model of a capitalist society cannot possibly be explained without the presence of an exploited workforce, exposing along the way the myth of the US as the land of opportunity.

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MEMORY MATTERS: ALICE MUNRO'S NARRATIVE HANDLING OF ALZHEIMER'S IN "THE BEAR CAME OVER THE MOUNTAIN" AND "IN SIGHT OF THE LAKE"[1]

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Age can make us more human, if not wiser. This could easily be Alice Munro's motto, to judge by her portrayal of elderly people in her fiction. Illness and old age have always been relevant topics in her short stories, as one would expect of a writer who has never shied away from "the cruel ironies" and the apparent "absurdity of the human condition" (Cox 2013: 277). However, as the writer herself has grown old and experienced physical decline, these issues have gradually moved to the foreground. Although some reviewers (Lorentzen 2013) have noted that Munro's interest in old characters became more visible in *The Progress of Love*, first published in 1986, most critics agree that aging emerged as a central topic with the publication of her *Hateship, Friendship, Courtship, Loveship, Marriage* (2001), a collection including "more and more tales that zero in on old age and infirmity" (Balée 2002: 308). It is to these above-mentioned collections in Munro's extensive list of publications that I want to turn my attention. In particular, I have chosen to revisit one of her most celebrated stories, "The Bear Came Over the Mountain" —first published in *The New Yorker* in 1999, and later anthologized in *Hateship*— side by side with "In Sight of the Lake", included in her last collection to date, *Dear Life* (2012).[2]

As Susan Balée argues, Munro "manages to create variants of the narrative of decline that no one else has thought of" (2002: 308). While the Canadian writer had explored old age, illness and death in previous narratives, what makes "Bear"

and "Lake" especially poignant is their attempt to fictionalize Alzheimer's disease. In the following analysis I want to argue that, in scrutinizing the ways in which these characters attempt to cope with an increasingly obvious frailty of memory and dissolution of self, Munro stretches and modulates her narrative art so as to involve the reader in the characters' process of deterioration. As a result, postmodern uncertainty manages to sneak into an otherwise realist narrative framework. It could be argued that Munro's use of a disabling illness in these two stories is merely prosthetic, in the sense that it functions as a metaphor for the larger concept of postmodern indeterminacy. Indeed, recent critical appraisals of Munro's fiction, like Linda Simon's "Battling the 'Invincible Predator': Alzheimer's Disease as Metaphor" (2014), argue that the current obsession with Alzheimer's disease primarily reflects the contemporary fear of isolation and fragmentation (14).[3] Therefore, she reads Munro's and other writer's Alzheimer's Disease narratives as a subterfuge for talking about those "larger" issues. And yet, I contend that, in Munro's stories, Alzheimer's is much more than a narrative prosthetic or a pretext for exploring an abstract concept; on the contrary, her Alzheimer stories are very much rooted in and explicitly explore the very nature of the disease, with its painful loss of memory, its tenuous grasp of reality and the intimation of a dissolving self.[4] It is more accurate to say that, in Munro's fiction, disability is used more literally than prosthetically.

The perception of truth and reality as filtered through time has been one of Munro's recurrent concerns. The writer is known for her "striking handling of time" (Berthin-Scaillet 2010) and for her fascination with "the effects of time" (Enright 2012), not only *real* time but also narrative time, where she skillfully plays with prolepsis, analepsis and ellipsis in order to reconstruct the way time changes or obliterates memories, and how it gives significance to certain events that had passed unnoticed. Munro has been lauded as a *virtuosa* in the "art of indeterminacy" (Howells 1998: 85), and age seems to highlight that radical indeterminacy, changing your perceptions "of what has happened —not just what can happen but what really has happened" (Munro in Enright 2012). This may be one of the reasons why she usually resorts to dislocations in linear time: "Anachronies disrupt linearity" and complicate the understanding of a given event (Duncan 2011: 156). Sometimes narrative techniques like flashbacks or flash-forwards contribute to building suspense, and then readers' expectations are more often than not thwarted, as is the case in the title story "Hateship, Friendship, Courtship, Loveship, Marriage". At other times, as we shall see in "Lake", temporal disorientation is employed to convey the crumbling of the self. These and other structural experiments with narrative time are of paramount importance in Munro's fiction.

While narrative time, with its back-and-forth movements and its revealing ellipses, becomes a privileged instrument in the —often vain— search for certainties about past events, memory is equally crucial in the reconstruction of the puzzle of the past. More often than not in Munro's stories, its apparent fallibility renders the project of reconstruction arduous if not impossible. Some of her narratives manage to capture the elusiveness of memory precisely by focusing on its frail nature, on its gaps and ruptures. Nowhere is this more obvious than in the narratives dealing with Alzheimer's disease. We tend to find Alzheimer's particularly worrisome inasmuch as it exposes not only our physical frailty, our aching bodies, but also our *aching minds*. This type of dementia[5] highlights the tenuous grasp that our minds can have of what we understand as reality; as such, it is an invaluable —albeit painful— resource for writers who want to explore the limits of our knowledge and the blurred frontiers of identity.

What Alzheimer conjures up, with "its merciless assault on memory, the locus of selfhood and our connection with others" (Brooks 2011), accounts for the increasing visibility of this disease in literature and films. While the relational aspects of identity cannot be underestimated, it is the conflation of selfhood and memory that seems more prevalent in Western neoliberal societies. In "Struggling over Subjectivity: Debates about the 'Self' and Alzheimer's Disease" (1995), Elizabeth Herskovits focuses on the socio-cultural construction of the illness, especially on the debates revolving around the "loss of self" so commonly associated with the disease. Alzheimer narratives bring to the fore that anguished concern for remaining who we are, and, concomitantly, they force us to reconsider the very constitution of our identity: "what seems to be at stake on a deeper level in the struggle over the self in Alzheimer's is our very notion of what comprises the "self" and what constitutes subjective experience" (Herskovits 1995: 148). Memory is, presumably, the building block of identity and is thus central to the process of self-formation. This, of course, is a social construct, but few dare to question it. As Herskovits convincingly claims, it is only recently that the Alzheimer's discourse, with its attendant debasement or erasure of humanity, has come under critical scrutiny, thus forcing psychologists and philosophers to rethink the ways in which human identity is understood (159). For the most part, however, experts and lay commentators alike continue to stress the "horror" of the disease and the helplessness of its "victims". Among the tragic losses most commonly mourned are the inability to recognize oneself in the past selves (as in photographs) and the loss of accumulated memories that, for many, make us who we are. Elizabeth Ward, for example, describes how the Alzheimer patient has irretrievably lost "that accumulation of concrete experience by which we know life [...] [W]hat seems to be lost to the Alzheimer *victim*, piece by piece, is sense experience, the concrete particulars of the past, until there is only the present, blurred, incomprehensible" (in Herskovits 1995: 157; emphasis added).

Memory, therefore, continues to be central to the Western understanding of human identity, and a dramatic erosion of memory, such as that experienced by Alzheimer's patients, necessarily evokes a parallel erosion of one's identity. In our contemporary societies, then, it is still taken for granted that the loss of memory and the impairment of our "cognitive functioning" (Gaines and Whitehouse 2006: 71) inevitably entails the gradual loss of self. Departing from this pervasive obsession with memory loss, in "The Word is Colander: Language Loss and Narrative Voice in Fictional Canadian Alzheimer's Narratives" (2009), Wendy Roy focuses instead on the "loss of narrative ability" in the patients, and how this is transferred to the diegesis itself. While Roy is aware of the memory loss associated with Alzheimer's, her primary concern is how Canadian fiction explores the patients' inability to narrate themselves and, hence, construct their identity.[6] Even though I agree with Roy's emphasis on the role of linguistic and narrative skills in the development and preservation of identity, I do not entirely dismiss the role of memory in that process of self-construction. Hence, both will be present in my analysis of "Bear" and "Lake".

Munro's "The Bear Came Over the Mountain", which gained popularity thanks to the 2006 film adaptation by Sarah Polley, *Away From Her*, traces the gradual losing of touch with reality that an old woman, Fiona, seems to experience.[7] Although we have an extradiegetic third-person narrator, for most of the story the focalizer is Fiona's husband, Grant, so it is through his eyes that we see the progressive deterioration of Fiona's memory and, we assume, the onset of Alzheimer's. As is usual in Munro's fiction, the chronological linearity in this story is disrupted and the narration moves back and forth, juxtaposing different temporal frames, which are simplified to three in the film adaptation (Berthin-Scaillet 2010). The text opens with a quick analepsis describing when and how Fiona proposed to Grant, and the narrative swiftly goes forward and takes us to the moment when Fiona is getting ready to depart for the nursing home. Then, in another flashback, we are told of Grant's gradual realization that something was the matter with his wife. Here are the first hints that he perceives the deterioration of her memory as "a game that she hoped he would catch on to" (*Hateship*). Grant concedes that, for a while, he found it "hard to figure out" how much Fiona's forgetfulness was due to her absent-minded character and how much to a neurological problem. Fiona seems to view her occasional slips and mistakes in a rather light-hearted way, "as if it was a joke", which would suit her penchant for irony: "I don't think it's anything to worry about. […] I expect I'm just losing my mind" (*Hateship*). Even when the episodes become more worrying and the police find Fiona wandering in the streets, totally lost, her attitude seems to be one of playful nonchalance:

> A policeman picked her up as she was walking down the middle of the road, blocks away. He asked her name and she answered readily. Then he asked her the name of the Prime Minister.
> "If you don't know that, young man, you really shouldn't be in such a responsible job". (*Hateship*)

In fact, Fiona's grasp of reality seems to be still fairly firm when she decides to move to an assisted living center, Meadowlake.[8] When the time comes to go to the nursing home, Fiona appears to take it all in her stride. Before leaving her house, she flippantly compares life at the nursing home to living "in a hotel". As Grant drives Fiona to her new *home*, she recognizes the countryside around Meadowlake, where both had gone "night-skiing" many years before. Once more, Grant muses about the degree to which her memory is damaged, since she remembers past events in such a detailed manner. Fiona finally *checks in* and Grant goes back to their house, alone.

Neither visits nor phone calls are allowed during the first month to facilitate the patients' adaptation to the new routine, and Grant cannot stop thinking of Fiona: "some ticking metronome in his mind was fixed on Meadowlake" (*Hateship*). When he is finally allowed to visit her, Grant gets up early, "full of a solemn tingling, as in the old days on the morning of his first planned meeting with a new woman", both anxious and thrilled, driven by "an expectation of discovery, almost a spiritual expansion" (*Hateship*). At the same time, his unusual buying of an expensive bouquet tinges his arrival with implicit guilt: "He had never presented flowers to Fiona before. Or to anyone else. He entered the building feeling like a hopeless lover or a guilty husband in a cartoon" (*Hateship*). To Grant's dismay, Fiona not only fails to recognize him, but she also seems to be much more attentive to Aubrey, her "new friend" or, in the nurse's words, her "best buddy". Apparently, Fiona takes Grant for a new resident, and her last words have a highly ironic resonance:

> "I better go back", Fiona said, a blush spotting her newly fattened face. "He [Aubrey] thinks he can't play without me sitting there. It's silly, I hardly know the game anymore. I'm afraid you'll have to excuse me. […] So I'll leave you then, you can entertain yourself? It must all seem strange to you, but you'll be surprised how soon you get used to it. You'll get to know who everybody is. Except that some of them are pretty well off in the clouds, you know —you can't expect them all to get to know who *you* are". (*Hateship*, emphasis in the original)

Given Fiona's playful character, Grant even expects her to turn around and explain that it was all a joke. Just as the onset of her illness had been confusing and, at first, he had not been able to figure out whether everything was due to her quirky character rather than to a serious malady, so the new situation was also disorienting: "He could not decide. She could have been playing a joke. It would not be unlike

her. […] I wonder whether she isn't putting on some kind of a charade" (*Hateship*).[9] Although this sentence appears in both versions of the story, it is the longer one (*Hateship*) that especially underscores the fact that it may all be a farce, a prankish game on the part of Fiona. This makes sense to Grant because he has not always been the ideal husband. During his time away from Fiona, Grant reminisces about their life together and we learn that their marriage has been punctuated by his frequent affairs with university students, infidelities that he had apparently managed to keep secret from Fiona. If this were not the case, and she had known about his cheating all along, this "charade" might be understood as retribution: Fiona would be paying Grant back for his betrayal. This will become even more significant at the end of the story, where the information provided by these flashbacks will complicate the interpretation of the last scene. As Munro often does in her fiction, analepsis allows her to "postpone or withhold vital pieces of information that may confirm suspicions fuelled earlier" (Duncan 2011: 156). However, this situation lasts longer than a practical joke is expected to. Fiona's "best buddy", Aubrey, seems a more solid presence in her new world than her own husband, whom she does not seem to recognize at all. He acts rather possessive, especially in Grant's presence. Fiona's aforementioned "blush" and her timid touching of Aubrey's hand at the end of the scene reveal the irony of the new situation: both Aubrey and Fiona seem to feel and behave like teenagers in love —suggested by the teenager analogy appearing in the longer version of the story— while Grant is only an insignificant, tolerated presence.

The visits continue, but Grant sees little change in Fiona's attitude to him or Aubrey. If anything, the two residents' attachment seems to grow stronger by the day, while Grant continues to be perceived as an intruder who disrupts the lovers' intimacy. Grant acts as a jealous husband, more explicitly in the longer version of the story, where he wonders about the nature of Fiona and Aubrey's mutual involvement. Not wanting to use the term *sexual*, he merely asks the nurse whether it is common for these attachments to develop further and "go too far" (*Hateship*). The nurse's answer does not put Grant's mind at ease, especially her passing comment that it is as common for old women to go "after the old man" as the other way around (*Hateship*). Part of the reason why Grant's suspicions are not allayed by the nurse's words is the way in which language betrays her. Here, Munro resorts to what Héliane Ventura describes as "misnomers, grammatical mistakes and other happy 'infelicities' which point towards another locus of meaning, secretly but intentionally encoded in between apparently ordinary language" (Ventura 2010a). The specific example that Ventura sees in "Bear" is the incorrect past participle that the nurse employs when he answers Grant's jealous query: "Old women going after the old men. Could be they're not so wore out, I guess" (*Hateship*). By replacing the correct verb form *worn* with *wore*, whose near-

homophone lurks in this sexually charged context, the nurse (un)wittingly fuels Grant's suspicions about Fiona's busy sexual life at the nursing home. Although Ventura polemically interprets the short story as "document[ing] the transformation of a lady into a promiscuous Alzheimer patient", she is right in that the linguistic mistake "allows truths that belong to the unconscious or cannot be directly expressed to come to the surface and destabilize our understanding of characters" (2010a). In this case, the ugly truth very likely exists in Grant's imagination only, rather than in the actual facts of the affair, but its effects on him are no less true for that. Even though the nurse quickly adds that "Fiona is a lady" (*Hateship*), in contrast to her previous allusion to promiscuous old women, her attempt to reassure Grant fails, and he cannot help imagining his wife "in one of her long eyelet-trimmed blue-ribboned nightgowns, teasingly lifting the covers of an old man's bed" (*Hateship*).

Everything changes when Aubrey has to leave Meadowlake: his wife has come back from her trip and wants to take him back to their house. Fiona falls into despair, refuses to rise from her bed, and her health deteriorates rapidly after Aubrey's departure. The home supervisor warns Grant that, since his wife is "not thriving", they might have to start "consider[ing] upstairs" (*Hateship*), where they place the residents who can no longer take care of themselves. Facing that grim prospect, he decides to pay a visit to Aubrey's wife, Marian, and convince her to take Aubrey back to Meadowlake for regular visits, if not permanently, for Fiona's sake. This is the price he is willing to pay to avoid putting Fiona's tenuous life at risk. At first, Marian does not agree to Grant's plan, not so much out of jealousy, as Grant had expected, as for materialistic reasons.[10] However, only a few hours later, Marian leaves a message on Grant's voicemail inviting him to a dance, because "it doesn't hurt to get out once in a while" (*Hateship*). Grant sits near the phone, weighing the pros and cons, and assessing Marian in an obviously sexual way, but we are never told what his final choice is. This constitutes a good example of Munro's astute use of narrative ellipsis, for the narrative gap that precedes the last scene allows —and even compels— the reader to envisage multiple interpretations. And yet, most critics and reviewers assume that Grant finally goes on a date with Marian and that, some time later, he manages to bring Aubrey along when he visits Fiona. This common reading of the narrative ellipsis may also be caused by the film's unambiguous adaptation of Munro's original story, in which the director "renders this improbable trade-off [of spouses] explicit by allowing the spectators more than a glimpse into Grant and Marian's bedroom", while in both versions of the short story "we are not allowed to witness such *rapprochement*", since the writer consciously "leaves unuttered the terms of Aubrey's return" (Ventura 2010b).[11]

True enough, the last paragraph in the penultimate scene, focalized through Grant as has been the norm throughout the story, reads as a not too subtle sexual appraisal of his next *prey* and places him back in his role as philanderer: Marian's "cleavage, […] would be deep, crepey-skinned, odorous and hot. He had that to think of, as he dialled the number that he had already written down. That and the practical sensuality of her cat's tongue. Her gemstone eyes" (*Hateship*). Despite the narrative ellipsis, this anticipation of sexual pleasure hints at the fact that Grant starts a relationship with Marian or, as Robert McGill perceptively notes, at least "play[s] on Marian's attraction in order to gain her permission with regard to Aubrey's visit" (2008). In addition, Grant's excessive attention to Marian's charms, already obvious in the description of his visit to her house, somehow diminishes or tarnishes his otherwise apparent altruism: "Munro tinges Grant's generosity with a whiff of egoism, as when he privately enters into a not-entirely-indifferent appraisal of Marian's physical attributes" (McGill 2008); read in this context, "his claim to be pursuing 'fine, generous schemes'" proves ironic (McGill 2008), "parodic" (Ventura 2010b), hypocritical. However, in both versions of the short story, the intervening scene is not present, so we can only conjecture as to whether Marian and Grant get involved in some sort of sexual or romantic relationship. If they only flirt and merely agree to Aubrey's visits, Grant's sacrifice can be construed as less cynical than otherwise.

The final scene is even more crucial than the ambivalent narrative ellipsis. Rather short and sparingly narrated, the scene explicitly confirms the presence of Fiona and Grant, who engage in a brief dialogue, but Aubrey's presence in the same room is never ascertained. The description remains ambiguous. The first thing we notice is that Fiona seems to be doing better than the last time Grant visited her: she is no longer bed-ridden and she seems to have taken up reading again, in this case a book that Grant had given her as a present. She does not remember this fact, but she does remember that she would never have chosen for herself the color she is dressed in: "I think they've got the clothes mixed up —I never wear yellow" (*Hateship*). This might be construed as a sign that she is recovering her memory, at least the more distant one, which is common not only among patients with Alzheimer's condition, but also among old people in general, as Munro notes in an interview: "It's interesting what happens as you get older because memory does become more vivid, particularly distant memory" (Munro in Awano 2013: 184). Although this detail might have sparked Grant's reflections and fed his hopes of Fiona's recovery, the narrative voice is not explicit about this. Instead, what follows is a concise dialogue supplemented with few, but deeply relevant narrative comments:

> "Fiona…", he said.
> "You've been gone a long time. Are we all checked out now?"
> "Fiona, I've brought a surprise for you. Do you remember Aubrey?"
> She stared at *him* for a moment, as if waves of wind had come beating into her face. Into her face, into her head, pulling everything to rags. (*Hateship*, emphasis added)

This last paragraph effectively describes the loss of memory in metaphorical terms. In Fiona's startled gaze, as that of someone who has been physically and emotionally *bouleversé*, Grant reads the mental deterioration that he has already witnessed. The shorter version of the story is even more emphatic: "pulling everything to rags. All rags and loose threads" (*NY*). Here, the telegraphic repetition reinforces the metaphorical force of "rags" and "threads", which become an apt objective correlate for the disorder that Grant imagines exists in Fiona's mind. Significantly, too, in this early part of the episode, there is no explicit deictic reference to Aubrey. He may not have entered the room yet, or if he has, Fiona has not yet seen him, as her eyes seem to be fixed on Grant the whole time. Whereas the *New Yorker* story originally stated "She stared at Grant for a moment […]" (*NY*), in the longer version Munro skillfully opts for a vague "She stared at *him* […]" (*Hateship*). Thanks to her dexterous choice of words Munro manages to reproduce in the reader the same disorientation that Fiona must be feeling under the ravages of Alzheimer's disease. For a moment, we do not know whether the "him" she is looking at is Aubrey or Grant. After all, "Munro is interested in how we get things wrong" (Enright 2012), and that applies not only to people with dementia, but to apparently *sane* people like Grant or the reader.[12] Through her narrative architecture and her linguistic choices, Munro encourages the reader to entertain doubt, to waver between different interpretations, to experience the confusion that Fiona feels at that moment, and that Grant, to a lesser extent, has experienced as well. The apparently simple linguistic choice of an unanchored pronoun —*him*— makes all the difference in terms of narrative control and rhetorical effectiveness.

The final part of the scene remains equally ambiguous, and the *him* vaguely identified:

> "Names elude me", she said harshly.
> Then the look passed away as she retrieved, with an effort, some bantering grace. She set the book down carefully and stood up and lifted her arms to put them around *him*. Her skin or her breath gave off a faint new smell, *a smell that seemed to him* like that of the stems of cut flowers left too long in their water.
> "I'm happy to see you", she said, and pulled his earlobes.
> "You could have just driven away", she said. "Just driven away without a care in the world and *forsook me. Forsooken me. Forsaken*".
> He kept his face against her white hair, her pink scalp, her sweetly shaped skull. He said, Not a chance. (*Hateship*, emphasis added)

Here, the reader may be more inclined to see Grant as the person being hugged, from the very fact that only the character-focalizer would have been able to notice the "faint new smell" in Fiona, and Grant has been the focalizer for the entire story. Such productive ambivalence, unfortunately, vanishes in the film version, where visual realism replaces textual ambiguity, and the device whereby readers can share Fiona's uncertainty about reality is lost. This sudden epiphanic moment, couched in the classical *topos* of anagnorisis, differs from the kind of subdued ending that Munro tends to prefer, but proves very effective in making us participate in the characters' profound sense of disorientation.

This last scene also succeeds in highlighting the linguistic deterioration associated with Alzheimer.[13] First, Fiona recognizes that "names elude me" (*Hateship*), which is as much a sign of memory loss as a metalinguistic statement. More importantly, Fiona's last words, her hesitation when using the past participle of *forsake* reproduces linguistic deterioration and at the same time dramatizes the torture of being at a loss for words: "[…] forsook me. Forsooken me. Forsaken" (*Hateship*). It is not just communication with the others that is at stake, it is the ability to narrate/construct the self that is also at risk. Ventura interprets these words differently, as "a process of reparation of language and reparation of the self" (Ventura 2010b). I would argue that the "reparation" Ventura sees in this last part of the scene is, at most, temporary, since Fiona's decline is undeniable, and time can contribute only to deterioration, not to amelioration.

The ending leaves us with many unanswered questions, not about Fiona's progress and the ultimate outcome, which we know is death, but about the provisional situation that emerges from Fiona's apparent recognition of her husband. We do not know whether she will take up with Aubrey again, or if that option is ruled out now. The same can be said of the relationship between Marian and Grant, whatever its nature. And yet, these are all circumstantial and secondary issues. What matters here is this final anagnorisis, both painfully ironic and gratifyingly empathic. On the one hand, this final recognition conjures up Grant's previous suspicions of a playful revenge.[14] We can indeed construe Fiona's involvement with Aubrey as part of her cruel scheme to make Grant pay for his infidelities. Even then, as Coral Ann Howells claims, the doubt remains as to whether Fiona has actually succeeded in her endeavor or whether Grant will relapse into deception: "the strange sly ending elides divisions between present and past as the woman with her old 'bantering grace' suddenly makes a joke to her husband. But is this real warmth or only imagined? And does his reassuring response just repeat his old marital betrayals? […] As so often with Munro there is no way of knowing" (2003; cf. Balée 2002: 309; Simon 2014: 11-12).

On the other hand, the final anagnorisis can be interpreted in more celebratory terms, thus giving some respite in an otherwise unsparing narrative of human pain and estrangement.[15] I, for one, am more inclined to read the ending at face-value, as a genuine recognition, devoid of any vengeful connotations. The irony remains that it is only when Grant gives up his selfish possessiveness and Fiona is free to pursue her relationship with Aubrey that she finally recognizes Grant. Or it may not be ironic, but a certain poetic justice rewarding Grant's selfless act. Either way, Munro's ultimate triumph lies in her uncanny narrative gifts: not only her ability to make readers empathize with a hateful character, Grant, but, more crucially, her ability to proffer a privileged glimpse into a crumbling mind, Fiona's. For a brief moment readers are not sure who that person is that Fiona is hugging: we no longer know what is real, names elude us too, and the very demarcations between sanity and insanity prove flimsy, a process that becomes more obvious in the next story, "In Sight of the Lake".

In this short story, one of the last to be published by Munro, the writer once more explores that tenuous boundary that separates reality from illusion, what might have happened from what really happened. Here, Munro resorts to space metaphors to render more vivid the progression and the effects of Alzheimer's disease. Seemingly narrated in a realist mode, with her typical attention to detail (Beran 1998: 227), "Lake" traces the real/imaginary journey of a woman in search of an "Elderly Specialist" (218), in the euphemistic jargon employed by the doctor's assistant. The beginning of the story replicates the grammatical conventions of joke-telling by referring to the main character with the indefinite *a* and using the historic present tense: "A woman goes to her doctor to have a prescription renewed…" (217). This register both prepares and does not prepare the reader for what is coming. On the one hand, the whole story may be seen as a prank played on the reader, a joke after all. On the other, the subject in hand is serious and dramatic enough: the apparent onset of Alzheimer's. The story is narrated by an extradiegetic narrator but clearly focalized through the woman, Nancy. The narrative voice starts by hinting at the early symptoms of Alzheimer's disease, since Nancy has apparently "mixed up Monday with Tuesday", which makes her wonder whether "her mind is slipping a bit" (217). She then decides to go to the village where the new doctor's office is located, to get familiar with the place, even if her appointment is for the following day. She drives to the town on her own, without her husband, thus trying to verify her self-sufficiency.

The small town becomes the first evident objective correlate in the short story. Like Nancy herself, this small town "has seen better days" and its clock "no longer tells the time" (219). Perceptive readers will realize that her wandering about that rather empty town analogically signifies her wandering in her own *emptying* mind.

Since, in this case, the focalizer is not external to the patient, as was the case in "Bear", but is the patient herself, the reader may start entertaining doubts as to the accuracy of the narration. If Grant found it hard to tell the difference between absent-minded mistakes and the first symptoms of Alzheimer's in Fiona's behavior, Nancy is even more confused as to her own mental decline: "It takes her a while to figure that out.... The doctor's name [... has] slipped below the surface of her mind" (220). The reader's unease gradually increases, but confidence is newly restored when, after a while, that name "come[s] back to her" (220). This memory slip is reasonably accounted for: it can happen to anyone, it does not necessarily indicate brain deterioration. The name slips her mind once more some time later, when she stops to ask for directions, which can trigger off readerly doubts once more.

In her search for what could be the doctor's house, Nancy finally strikes up a conversation with a man who is tending his garden. At first, he answers her curtly as if she were an unwelcome nuisance, an intruder, much like the plant he snips at for "encroaching on the path" (224). He soon relents and starts talking about the town, even though he himself is "not from around [t]here" (225). The way townspeople hush as the two of them walk by is rather ominous and may disturb the reader, who at this point has no inkling of what is going through their heads. One wonders if those people surmise that Nancy is somehow disturbed and the man is accompanying her so that she does not get lost again. This would be confirmed by the last image Nancy sees as she drives away:

> When she is on her way out of the town she catches sight of him again in the rearview mirror. He is bending over, speaking to the couple of boys or young men who were sitting on the pavement. [...] He had ignored them in such a way that she is surprised to see him talking to them now.
> Maybe a remark to be made, some joke about her vagueness or silliness. Or just her age. (228)

She soon arrives at the nursing home that the man had mentioned as being just out of town.[16] It is apparently deserted, which Nancy is not surprised at, since it is evening already, and "[b]edtime comes early in these establishments" (229). The building, like the parking lot, seems "spacious" and easy to access, for "the door opens on its own" (229). Once inside, she finds "an even greater expression of space, of loftiness, a blue tinge to the glass. The floor is all silvery tiles, the sort that children love to slide on [...]. Of course it cannot be as slippery as it looks" (229). Once more, spatial metaphors prepare us for the epiphany that closes the story. The description of the building, with its emphasis on empty space and slipperiness, cannot but evoke in the reader the very image of a failing mind. The fact that Nancy starts speaking "to somebody in her head" (229) does not help to dismiss

this impression either. There is nobody to be seen, not even at what looks like the receptionist's desk, so Nancy starts showing signs of irritated surprise: "You would think there would be a way of getting hold of somebody, no matter what the hour. Somebody on call in a place like this" (230).

As the spatial references become more and more immaterial or disembodied, the metamorphosis of real into imaginary space becomes more conspicuous: "She gives up on the desk for the moment, and takes a closer look at the space she has found herself in. It's a hexagon, with doors at intervals" (230). What follows is a Kafkaesque description where doors take you nowhere and see-through windows do not allow you to see through (230-231). Frustrated by "the trick of the glass" or "the uselessness of the polished knobs", Nancy feels more and more desperate: "There is nothing to do but get out of this place" (231), which, of course, she is unable to do. A perceptive reader might have guessed, by now, that the building Nancy is entering is Cicero's "memory palace". The allegorical resonances of the spatial description have become rather obvious: Nancy is both lost and trapped within her own empty, uninhabited brain, and what fails to be "on call" is her own consciousness, her own sense of identity. At one point in "Bear" the narrator referred to the residents of the nursing home as "inmates", but it is in "Lake" that the prison-like atmosphere becomes more literal. Nancy finally resigns herself to living in this restrictive "inside" looking at the "flowers outside", in the "mild evening light" (231). The metaphor of light complements the spatial allegory, as Nancy becomes aware of the gradual closedown of her brain: "The place will get dark. Already in spite of the lingering light outside, it seems to be getting dark. No one will come". (231-232). Loss of language seems simultaneous with that slow dimming of the mind's "lights", as she is unable to utter a word, "to yell" for help (232).

At one point the pain becomes physical, as Nancy finds it hard to breathe: "It is as if she has a blotter in her throat. Suffocation" (232). The language employed accordingly becomes more telegraphic, and the staccato rhythm imitates her being out of breath as much as her trying to regain self-control: "Calm. Calm. Breathe. Breathe" (232). To the loss of language and breathing difficulties, the narrator now adds a third factor: the loss of a sense of real time. Nancy cannot tell if "the panic has taken a long time or a short time" (232). In narrative terms, readers cannot be sure if this has taken a few minutes, months or years, for the next thing we see, in the final scene, is a woman who has lost her sense of time. Or so it seems to others:

> There is a woman here whose name is Sandy. It says so on the brooch she wears, and Nancy knows her anyway.
> "What are we going to do with you?" says Sandy. "All we want is to get you into your nightie. And you go and carry on like a chicken that's scared of being et for dinner".

> "You must have had a dream", she says. "What did you dream about now?"
> "Nothing", says Nancy. "It was back when my husband was alive and when I was still driving the car".
> "You have a nice car?"
> "Volvo".
> "See? You're sharp as a tack". (232)

While the pages of "Lake" up to this point have narrated a *lie* in the multiple forms of illusion, dream or mirage, this last concise dialogue, much like the one closing "Bear", wakes us up to reality: Nancy is already a patient in the nursing home. An image had anticipated this narrative reversal, that of the bicycle rider that Nancy caught sight of while wandering in the unknown town: "Something about its rider is odd, and she cannot figure it out at first" (222). Then it dawns on her: "He is riding backward. That's what it is. A jacket flung in such a way that you could not see —or she cannot see— what is wrong" (222). Like Nancy, readers may suspect something is off-balance in this story, but fail to see what. The "jacket" hiding the narrative deceit from the reader is the apparent realist convention within which the narration seems to be working.[17] It is only when the claustrophobic metaphors start to accumulate that we get a glimpse of the narrative ruse, which is finally revealed in this last scene.

This last, *real* dialogue also contains clues that confirm Nancy's fears of dissolution. Once more, Freudian slips are instrumental in conveying messages that cannot be openly articulated. In Sandy's patronizing simile, Nancy is "scared of being *et*" (232, emphasis added), a slip or else a variant instead of the correct grammatical form, "eaten"; in fact, Nancy is indeed afraid of being reduced to non-human materiality, to an *it* without a clear consciousness of herself. This process of "objectification" functions as the "disease double", both haunting Alzheimer's patients and threatening the non-patients who, in "contemplat[ing] the self-as-monster in Alzheimer's" have to confront their "own future potential monstrousness" (Herskovits 1995: 152, 160). Furthermore, the fact that Nancy can still function in the referential present —she can read Sandy's name on the brooch and is able to recognize it as the nurse's name— proves equally disturbing for readers. If she is able to understand these things, if she is able to remember the car she used to drive, she may also be aware of her mental deterioration; hence, her "dream" may not be a dream but a faithful description of her agony.

Once more, just as she had done in "Bear", Munro gives us a taste of what it must feel like to be partially aware of the crumbling of memory and identity caused by Alzheimer's. In "Lake", Munro dares to use the patient as the main focalizer, which confounds and leads the reader to see reality as Nancy does, with no certainty, even though, in the last page, she ironically feels "she is nearly safe" (232). As happened in "Bear", the last scene in "Lake" invalidates the smug

certainties of the preceding pages (cf. Cox 2013: 277). Following in the steps of Calderón's *La vida es sueño*, Munro "stage-directs the confusion between life and illusion", as Ventura puts it, dissolving "the boundaries between sanity and dementia" and undermining the sanctity of "[t]he ultimate threshold, that of life versus death" (2010b).

Time, especially temporal disjunction, proves essential in eroding such certainties and underscoring the fragility of the self. In an analysis of several stories included in *Too Much Happiness,* Cox argues that "sudden transitions in the lives of their protagonists [imperil] the continuity between past and present", with the consequence that "[t]he sense of an enduring, essential self [seems to be] under threat, especially when her characters reach old age" (2013: 279). This is what happens in these stories that pivot around characters suffering Alzheimer's disease: their sense of self becomes shaky, as their memory and language abilities begin to crumble, and old certainties about human identity, sanity and insanity, start to fall apart.[18]

True literature, Viktor Shklovsky argued, must achieve *ostranenie* or defamiliarization (1965: 12-13). Critics agree that this is Munro's most significant talent as a writer: "To enter and engage with an Alice Munro story is to see what you think you know with fresh eyes" (Haun 2010). In the two stories analyzed in this essay, it is through an unexpected convergence of narrative technique and thematic focus that Munro accomplishes such a feat. Not only does she narrate, skillfully as ever, the gradual decline associated with Alzheimer's, but she also manages to involve readers in that process of gradual disorientation, by playing with our expectations, pointing to the undecidable nature of language and of narrative itself, and debunking all the certainties we had treasured so far. Munro's fiction, "sharp as a tack", pierces our smug complacency until we are compelled to participate in that radical indeterminacy, in that bottomless fragility that is deeply human.

Notes

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[2]. Henceforth, "The Bear Came Over the Mountain" and "In Sight of the Lake" will be referred to as "Bear" and "Lake", respectively.

[3]. Following Susan Sontag's contention that "a culture needs to translate an illness into metaphors to explain something more than disease", Simon argues that the recent proliferation of narratives focusing on AD or Alzheimer's Disease bespeaks our "abiding fear of loss, isolation, and disorientation" (Simon 2014: 14). Thus, Simon reads Munro's and other writers' use of AD as

narrative "prosthesis", even if she does not use the term herself. For an in-depth study of narrative prosthesis, see Mitchell and Snyder.

[4]. As we shall see later, this dissolution of the human self may be more in the observer's gaze that in the person who has Alzheimer's, as Tom Kitwood and Kathleen Bredin have argued; for them, the person with some form of senile dementia may even become the "epitome of how to be human" (in Herskovits 1995: 157).

[5]. There is no scientific agreement as to whether Alzheimer's disease significantly differs from other forms of senile dementia; the difference may be quantitative rather than qualitative, as some experts have noted (Herskovits 1995: 149). For a detailed history of the "discovery" and "construction" of Alzheimer's, see Fox 1989 and Herskovits 1995.

[6]. Accordingly, Roy dismisses fiction like Nicholas Sparks' *The Notebook* and Munro's "Bear" for their "concentration on loss of memory" and their neglect of language problems.

[7]. There are two versions of this story: the shorter one that first appeared in *The New Yorker* in 1999 and the longer version included in the 2001 collection, as mentioned above. In order not to confuse readers, after each quotation I will briefly note *NY* for the original *New Yorker* version and *Hateship* for the longer version.

[8]. Elderly people often react to changes in their environment with disorientation and even shock. This is even truer if they have to move to a "home" to be cared for. For an in-depth study of the relationship between memory and domestic environment among elderly people, see Krasner 2005.

[9]. Grant asks the nurse, but she cannot be of much help to him: "She might not [know who you are]. Not today. Then tomorrow —you never know, do you? Things change back and forth all the time and there's nothing you can do about it" (*Hateship*). Such radical indeterminacy underscores the feeling of helplessness not only for Grant, but for the reader as well.

[10]. She does not want to send Aubrey back to the expensive nursing home for good, a likely consequence of his frequent visits, which would only upset him. If Aubrey were sent to Meadowlake on a permanent basis, Marian would have to sell the house she struggled so much for: "And it means a lot to me, my house does" (*Hateship*).

[11]. Polley's decision to offer one possible interpretation, in detriment of others, makes Berthin-Scaillet wonder whether one can "cinematize a text" while keeping "the guessed-at ambiguities it withholds" (2010). For a detailed analysis of Polley's adaptation of Munro's short story, see McGill's (2008) and Berthin-Scaillet's (2010) critical articles, as well as Alleva's (2007) review.

[12]. Grant's confusion is metaphorically suggested by his spatial disorientation at the Meadowlake home: "The more he explored this place the more corridors and seating spaces and ramps he discovered, and in his wanderings he was still apt to get lost" (*NY* and *Hateship*). It is even more explicitly explored in the longer version of the story, which adds the following: "He didn't like to mention this to [the nurse], lest she think he was suffering some mental dislocations of his own" (*Hateship*). His own forgetfulness as regards the term "drape" highlights the fact that anyone is liable not only to forget a word, but also to suffer memory or mental disorders.

[13]. For an exploration of language loss in recent Alzheimer's narratives, see Roy (2009).

[14]. This revenge may be alluded to in the title, "The Bear Came Over the Mountain". For a detailed analysis of this phrase, inspired in a children's "nonsense" rhyme, and its impact on how we interpret the story, see Ventura (2010b). The critic sees Fiona as the bear in the song/title, who "engages in a journey which takes her to a different world called Meadowlake". However, either Grant or the reader can also be read as the bear who gets to see "the other side" of the mountain: how it feels to be cheated, in Grant's case, or how it feels to lose one's mind/memory, in the reader's.

[15]. Most critics agree that Munro always shies away from sentimental and

moralist attitudes. Her style has been described as "nonjudgemental" (Beran 1998: 227) and "unsparing" (Duffy 1998: 182). Compare her muted, unsentimental style with Polley's adaptation in *Away From Her*, especially the parting scene, with its "excess of pathos" in the adaptation: "the film stages *à l'excès* what the text keeps silent" (Berthin-Scaillet 2010).

[16]. If the nursing home in "Bear" was named after a lake, this one is similarly called "Lakeview Rest Home". This coincidence can be caused by a real(istic) geographic landmark in a region well known for its myriad lakes. At the same time, the allegorical function of the lake is as old as Poe's *The Fall of the House of Usher,* where it witnessed, mirrored and participated in the physical and psychological collapse described in the narrative. House and selves were literally "swallowed" by Poe's "deep and dank tarn". The lake not only bespeaks decay but obliterates identity by drowning it in its liquid homogeneity, much like Alzheimer's disease. In conclusion, apart from evoking appeasing images of serene old age, lakes have traditionally conjured up ominous threats of drowning and dissolution.

[17]. In addition, the street where Nancy sees the cyclist "is a curved dead end. No going farther" (222). Like her brain cells, like her degenerative illness.

[18]. Significantly enough, in these late stories, unlike what had happened in her earlier fiction, where Munro often focused on the caregivers, she turns her attention more and more to the patients themselves. It may be argued that Grant and Fiona share protagonism in "Bear", but in "Lake" it is clearly Nancy's plight that is foregrounded. Privileging the person who is experiencing the symptoms of the disease proves exceptional among Alzheimer narratives. As Philip Stafford puts it when reviewing the discourse surrounding the disease, "it is as if no one has thought to ask these people about the nature and experience of their illness" (in Herskovits 1995: 153). In this, too, Munro shows her unusual talent.

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TRAVERSING THE FANTASY IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY BILDUNGSROMAN: THE ONTOLOGICAL QUEST AND LACANIAN PSYCHOANALYSIS IN DAVID MITCHELL'S *NUMBER9DREAM*

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> "[…] if we really want to change […] our social reality, the first thing to do is change our fantasies that make us fit this reality".
>
> (Žižek 2010)

In the 2007 *Time* list of the 100 people who are transforming the world, British writer David Mitchell appears as the man who "created the 21st century novel" (Iyer 2007) with his debut *Ghostwritten*, published in 1999. Mitchell's 2001 novel *number9dream* has predominantly been read in terms of the *Bildungsroman* or coming-of-age formula of a hero going out into the world to search for his identity and a place in society.[1] It is not difficult to see why: preceded by an epigraph taken from Don Delillo's debut *Americana*, "It is so much simpler to bury reality than it is to dispose of dreams", *number9dream* tells the story of nineteen-year-old Eiji Miyake, a daydreamer extraordinaire, arriving in Tokyo to search for the father whom he has never met, having grown up on a rural Japanese island. "What is a missing father but the absent source of the narrative of one's own life?" as Jonathan Boulter poignantly noted apropos of Mitchell's coming-of-age tale in his book on *Trauma, History and Memory in the Contemporary Novel* (2011: 124).[2] That Eiji's identity and position in the world are nothing short of muddled at the outset of his voyage is established in the course of the first chapter of the novel. Having just arrived in Tokyo on the verge of turning twenty, the narrator of his own story, Eiji

Miyake is a regular visitor to Tokyo's video game arcades, as well as to the café in which his love interest works. Moving in and out of temporary jobs, Eiji spends his leisure time mostly alone in bed in the capsule-room he rents above a video shop, where he principally daydreams, smokes cigarettes, and listens to the music of his all-time hero, the 'dreamer' John Lennon (whose song "#9dream" lends its title to the novel).

Surely fostered by the complex, mass-media infused realities of the late capitalist postmodern world Mitchell conjures up in *number9dream*, Eiji's achievement of 'self-knowledge' and 'awareness', the major goals of the traditional *Bildungsroman*,[3] is primarily delayed by his own escapist pursuits and the generally reclusive and introverted lifestyle that characterize him in the early stages of the novel. These obstacles to the protagonist's achievement of maturity (as well as Eiji's more profound psychological problems, which are revealed as the narrative progresses) are likely to be overcome in the course of a *Bildungsroman* narrative, and, as many will argue, they are overcome to some extent in Mitchell's novel. But, assuming that *number9dream* at least partly fulfils these basic *Bildungsroman* goals, and the protagonist is ushered into the world as a more capable and clear-thinking young man than the man he was before, what exactly does this mean in the acutely *contemporary* context in which the narrative visibly operates?

Kathryn Simpson's contribution to the first collection of essays published on David Mitchell[4] helpfully discusses *number9dream* as a "postmodern *Bildungsroman*", a novel that "engage[s] in the process of redefining the coming-of-age narrative through a postmodern frame" (2011: 51). Simpson asserts that the novel shows Eiji attaining, through his various experiences, "a more adult perspective on the world" (2011: 68), though she also argues, taking her cue from Linda Hutcheon's 'parodistic' reading of postmodernist poetics, that this "humanist concern" of *number9dream* is at the same time "destabilize[d] and question[ed]" by the "knowingly postmodern qualities" of the novel. Referring more specifically to the excessively practiced "blurring of boundaries between reality, virtual reality and fantasy" (2011: 51),[5] Simpson at once acknowledges the importance and centrality of fantasies and dreams to Eiji's ongoing creation of his identity and perceives them as counter-productive in this respect (2011: 69). As a result, for Simpson "the question that finally hangs over the novel is whether Eiji will or can ever stop dreaming" (2011: 70).

While agreeing with Simpson's point about the complex significance that dreams and fantasies assume in *number9dream*, this article proposes to adopt a different approach to it. Taking as my theoretical grounding the theory of Jacques Lacan, I argue that *number9dream* can be interpreted in terms of an individual's journey

into maturity achieved, not by abandoning dreams and fantasies, but by critically assessing them. Far from subordinating fantasies to the 'reality principle', as would be the case for more conventional coming-of-age tales, in Mitchell's twenty-first-century *Bildungsroman*, as in Lacanian psychoanalysis, the notion of 'reality' itself comes under scrutiny. Where the *Bildungsroman* typically aims at the hero's adjustment to the demands of reality, *number9dream*'s aim amounts to a task analogous to what Lacan called *la traversée du fantasme*, the 'traversing, going-through' of the fantasy —the subject's critical engagement with his fantasies premised on the notion that the world that concerns him, rather than being always-already there, always emerges through his own 'fantasmatic' activities. Crucial to my argument is the Lacanian triad of the *Imaginary*, *Symbolic*, and *Real*, as well as Lacan's notion of fantasy as set out in his *Seminars*. Viewed together with the interpretations this conceptual framework has received throughout the work of philosopher Slavoj Žižek, one of the leading contemporary exponents of Lacanian theory, Lacan's triad and his concept of fantasy provide the main theoretical grounding of this article. Specifically pertinent is Žižek's elaboration of Lacan's concept of fantasy. As Žižek has shown, for Lacan fantasy is much more a part of reality than we expect: fantasy is not on the other side of reality but 'beneath' reality, sustaining it. In this context, Mitchell's treatment of the *Bildungsroman* will be seen to follow a distinct (post-)postmodern aesthetic logic. While this logic is addressed only cursorily in most analyses of Mitchell's fiction so far, Brian McHale's seminal book on *Postmodernist Fiction* offers a useful beginning in this respect, and his study will constitute the second important theoretical source of this article.

My argument will be developed in two stages. Joining the discussion of Mitchell's place in the context of twenty-first-century writing, the first part of the analysis will draw on Brian McHale's well-known theory of postmodernist fiction to reformulate Simpson's definition of *number9dream* as a postmodern *Bildungsroman*. Key in this task is what will be described here as the novel's *ontological quest*. The second part of the analysis will then apply Lacan's and Žižek's ideas of subject- and reality-formation to a close reading of the novel from the point of view of what I see as its two major areas of ontological concern: 'subjectivity' and 'reality'. Against this background, Mitchell's aesthetic strategy, loosely describable as a combination of the *Bildungsroman* narrative and more experimental postmodern literary strategies, will emerge in its actual 'non-reductive' logic. This logic is neither attributable to the realist paradigm of the traditional *Bildungsroman* based on the 'naïve' opposition of fantasy and reality, obviously, nor the "self-evidently bizarre" (Bradford 2007: 67) scenarios of what has recently been labeled (too short-sightedly, I think) "New Postmodernist Fiction".

1. What world? What Postmodernism?

Mitchell's *Bildungsroman* is organized as a series of thematic and formal explorations, all carried out against the backdrop of Eiji's problematic relationship with the world as he knows it. As Eiji's hunt for his father gains momentum in the novel, the protagonist's various forms of withdrawal from reality that are introduced in the novel's first chapter gradually turn out to be just the visible signs of more complex psychological issues. Moving through a series of twists and turns revolving around Eiji's bungled efforts to find the mysterious man, the ensuing chapters not only see Eiji descending deeper and deeper into the nightmarish underworld of the yakuza, but also burrowing deeper and deeper into the protagonist's own 'underworld'. In the midst of the various physical and psychological trials unfolding in these regions, the unacknowledged, repressed truth of Eiji's identity finally surfaces: we find out both about Eiji's mother (she abused, then abandoned him as a child, succumbing to alcoholism) and his twin sister Anju (she drowned when Eiji was eleven and has haunted her brother's memory ever since). Mixing elements of psychological novel and cyber-espionage thriller among other literary forms, and smoothly seguing between logical plot development and forays into Eiji's memory and dream life, Mitchell's "postmodern *Bildungsroman*", as Simpson has termed it, devotes itself with increasing fervor to the exploration of its protagonist's traumatized mind, though not single-mindedly so: Mitchell is also very much committed to exploring the reality of an inscrutable, implacable, and quite violent postmodern, late capitalist Tokyo, a mass media-infused place teetering between the states of 'real' and 'hyperreal'.

'Postmodernist' is a term widely used in the nascent Mitchell studies to describe the sheer flamboyance, excess, and heterogeneity of Mitchell's fiction. However, most discussions building on the notion of his fiction as postmodernist have either tended to reduce it to a specific kind of market-oriented, philosophically shallow postmodernism or have underestimated aspects essential to his work. Let me detail this a little. In *The Novel Now*, Richard Bradford discusses David Mitchell, along with Toby Litt, Matt Thorne, Will Self, Ali Smith, John Lanchester, and a number of other present-day novelists as part of a new brand of writers that he names the "New Postmodernists". According to Bradford, various as they may be in their concerns, these writers all have in common a more relaxed and affable relationship with the 'Postmodern Condition' when compared to their academic counterparts. Though, as Bradford underlines, the New Postmodernists, from Amis to Mitchell and Smith, are commonly schooled in the language and methodology of the postmodern theorists, where the likes of Foucault, Jameson, Eagleton, Baudrillard, Lyotard, or Derrida tended to write in a restless and agitated, and, in most cases, jargon-ridden manner about the intellectual and cultural state of nihilism they

believed defines the contemporary condition, the new fiction writers "have seized upon this as a saleable commodity" (2007: 67). Attuning their fiction to the demands of the marketplace, the New Postmodernists, Bradford claims, "create fictional scenarios that are precipitately and self-evidently bizarre and in doing so they both entertain the fashionably accomplished reader and confirm that the actuality of existence outside the novel is by implication reassuringly normal" (2007: 67).

Much as I agree that Mitchell's fiction, like other recent existing work by emerging novelists around the world, can be seen as part of a 'new' form of postmodernism that readers are challenged to name for the twenty-first century —to bring to mind Linda Hutcheon's challenge in 2002[6]— I would argue that Bradford's attempt to do so misconstrues the philosophical tenor of, at least, Mitchell's fiction. To take the example of *number9dream*, rather than "confirm[ing] the actuality of existence outside the novel", the novel continues what McHale, in his seminal 1987 study of *Postmodernist Fiction*, determined as the "ontological skepticism" characteristic of postmodernist fiction. Simpson, Childs and Green (2011), and also Bayer (2014) have already noted *number9dream*'s concern with ontological issues, i.e. questions of *being* as opposed to questions of *knowing* (or 'epistemology') that were by McHale's definition characteristic of modernist novels.[7]

A further development of ideas hinted at by these scholars is taken up in this essay: that the crucial touchstone of Mitchell's maneuver in *number9dream*, i.e. the characteristic 'postmodernist' giving of precedence to questions of *being* over questions of knowing, is precisely the 'quest' structure itself. This flexible heuristic structure, traditionally organized around such epistemological issues as how the hero establishes knowledge of himself and of a world to which he seeks to conform, is, I argue, reorganized by Mitchell in terms of what might be called an *ontological quest*. As a search for the very 'being' of the protagonist's subjectivity and his life-word, this quest is not confined to investigating (as McHale had believed to be the case with modernist works) "What is there to be known? Who knows it? And to what degree of certainty?", but, like the postmodernist works under examination in McHale's study, extends to asking questions such as, "Which world is this? What is to be done in it? Which of my selves is to do it?" (in McHale 1987: 10).

Extrapolated from Dick Higgins' distinction between "cognitivist" and "postcognitivist" art (Higgins 1978), McHale's theory of postmodernist fiction remains an essential tool in dealing with the ongoing ontological interest of much of present-day writing in general and Mitchell's fiction in particular. Different as Mitchell's work may be in content, style, and scope from that of the first-generation postmodernist writers such as Robbe-Grillet, Pynchon, Barthelme, or Brooke-Rose, to name but a few of these well-established figures, my contention is that in

terms of its underlying philosophical assumptions, Mitchell's fiction carries further, possibly even outreaches, the ontological project initiated by his postmodern predecessors.

An example of what I have in mind is the exploration of the idea of 'Multiple Reality' that takes place in the first chapter of *number9dream*, named "PanOpticon" after the Tokyo skyscraper in which Eiji's only connection to his father at that stage, the law firm his father is consulting, is situated. In close resemblance to the diegetic world of a video-game that is not 'closed' but multiplied into the plurality of several possible versions of itself, the chapter stages Eiji's imaginative testing of methods for contacting his unknown father, and generates a range of different scenarios with different outcomes of the same basic plot. At the beginning of Chapter one, we witness Eiji sitting in a café across the street from the building where he believes he will find clues about his father, when the narrative suddenly begins to navigate us through what seems like a cyberpunk video game sequence, in which Eiji walks out of the café and shoots his way into the PanOpticon to steal a file on his father. This fantasy is suddenly interrupted by another scene in the café, which demonstrates that the preceding was just a figment of Eiji's imagination. In this next scene, a scenario of biblical proportions is introduced, in which the whole city is submerged in a flood and Eiji dies in a spectacular rescue mission. Another imaginary attack executed by Eiji on the PanOpticon building follows a few pages into the chapter, this time resulting in Eiji tracking his father's lawyer Katōinto a movie theatre where she has a rendezvous with him. While all of these scenes are figments of Eiji's tight-strung, hyper-inventive imagination —daydreams in which he indulges as he gazes at the PanOpticon, smoking cigarettes and seeking to summon up the courage to actually walk over to the building— we are deceived each time as to the proper locations of these fantasies, the highly 'unreliable narrative' moving almost seamlessly between the real-life café-setting and the various 'screens' of Eiji's consciousness (whose actual nature is presented as that of a video game's constantly reloading surfaces).

However, ingeniously and elaborately handled though it may be, the unreliability of the narrative in this chapter —epistemological concern par excellence— is not its essential point at all. Even though there are several textual markers of unreliable narration in this chapter, including the computer icons that graphically announce the beginning of each new daydream of Eiji's, as well as Eiji's statements, such as, "I would shoot her but I left my Walther PK in my last fantasy" (Mitchell 2001: 27), all enabling us to discern what is 'really' happening and what occurs only in Eiji's daydreams, it is not even *crucial* to interrogate this chapter for its narrative unreliability. As McHale might argue, the point of this chapter, epitomizing the concern of the novel at large, is arguably that it gives rise to *ontological* questions

instead. Overall, the novel's semantic principle could be said to be to create uncertainty about the very *being* of Eiji's world, which remains even after the epistemological questions, the questions of Eiji's narratorial reliability, have been settled. Regardless of whether the bulk of Chapter one is ultimately revealed as a figment of Eiji's imagination, once we have been navigated through the multitude of worlds Mitchell conjures up for us here (as well as in subsequent parts of the novel) a destabilization concerning what Eiji's reality might be is definitely effected.

In the light of this, it seems that the novel indulges in the specific kind of ontological skepticism that is now urged upon us by recent developments in quantum physics: Žižek has described this as the uncanny sense that there is never only one ontologically constituted reality, never one final version of reality, but that reality itself is split open into a multitude of parallel realities. In his reading of quantum theory's more daring postulates about the nature of our reality, the actuality of our present reality does not mean that other realities are simply cancelled out. On the contrary, these alternative realities supposedly continue to exist somewhere else, haunting and interacting with our present reality.[8] Applied to *number9dream*, this interaction of different realities is what happens, for example, in the above-quoted scene where Eiji recalls having left his pistol "in another fantasy". It is this notion of reality being irreducibly multiple, this sense of radical ontological openness, that continues to reverberate throughout the whole novel, even after we discern the unreliability of parts of its narrative.

In his review of *number9dream*, Robert MacFarlane wrote about the spirit of Mitchell's book, "This is the mind of postmodern youth, Mitchell seems to be saying, weaned on computer games, movies, online multiverses and habituated to an incorrigible plurality of realities" (2011). The sense of ontological openness radiated by Mitchell's twenty-first-century *Bildungsroman* is well-condensed in these words, and they may be taken to suggest that Mitchell is part of a new generation of postmodernists indeed, albeit one that may be said to supersede the ontological skeptics McHale wrote about in 1987. While the writers discussed in *Postmodernist Fiction* moved to interrogate the ontologies of their (fictional) worlds because, as McHale explains in a footnote in his book, the epistemological skepticism that had been the focus of the preceding, 'modernist' generation was already established as something they could take for granted (1987: 237), Mitchell might be said to write at a point in history where this ontological skepticism itself, in turn, is beginning to be taken for granted. Promulgated even by the natural sciences ('quantum theory'), ideas of ontological skepticism such as the notion of different possible worlds coexisting, which early postmodernist writers were the first to bring into awareness, are now widely disseminated. While any more

scrupulous evaluation of Mitchell's place in contemporary writing begs questions that clearly go beyond the scope of this essay,[9] future research might begin to engage with them and so to reconsider labels such as "New Postmodernists", inasmuch as, as in Bradford's study, they do not so much point to something 'new' as to a reduced, philosophically shallow manifestation of postmodernism, something that, I would insist, cannot do justice to Mitchell's fiction.

2. The Lacanian triad and the 'precariousness' of reality

In what follows, I would like to use Lacan's theory for a discussion of what I have named *number9dream*'s *ontological quest*, particularly of what I regard as the novel's two main areas of ontological concern— subjectivity and reality. To elucidate the place of these areas in Lacanian theory, I shall briefly outline Lacan's concept of *Imaginary-Symbolic-Real*. A segmentation of human experience into the three registers of these names, Lacan's triad suggests that the world, as we know it, does not simply 'exist' but rather depends on our structuring activity to constitute itself. As elaborated on by Žižek, this proto-poststructuralist notion goes back as far as Kant, who had realized, in Žižek's words, that "reality is non-all, ontologically not fully constituted, so it needs the supplement of the subject's contingent gesture to obtain a semblance of ontological consistency" (2000: 158). In contrast to the pre-Kantian world-view that the world is something that pre-exists the subject, a given environment for the subject to explore —a view implicitly asserted by any traditional *Bildungsroman*— Lacan argued that the world, as we know it, is not without the subject. As Žižek reads Lacan's theory, the world in its 'pure state' is nothing but an ontological chaos, a multitude of undirected potentiality, the utterly unimaginable, protocosmic abyss of undifferentiated matter which Lacan placed under the notion of 'Real'. Far from being —as the term 'Real' and its capitalization in much of contemporary Lacan criticism (Žižek's included) might suggest— the 'true' reality behind our everyday world of symbolic 'appearances', the *Real* in Lacan's (and Žižek's) theory is related to trauma, to the Unconscious, to the uncontrollable contingency of chance and haphazardness, to the incestuous Mother-Thing, as well as to the excess of sensory experience Lacan termed *jouissance*. When or how does something like 'reality' become possible, though?

In *Seminar VII*, in the section "On Creation Ex Nihilo", Lacan suggests that a certain blockage, a certain repression of the pre-ontological Real must occur before the world, as we know it, can begin to constitute itself. An act must take place which introduces an emptiness into the Real, a void that allows for the binary play of presence and absence of signification which we perceive as 'reality' to take

place.[10] For Lacan, this act of 'voiding', of 'repressing' the Real (which he baptizes the "Thing" with an eye toward both Heidegger's 'empty' vase from which he takes his cue and the Freudian 'lost' Mother-Thing), simultaneously marks the birth of the subject. It is the very gesture by which the subject 'attains itself', by which it 'posits itself' as an object distinct from its surroundings. By evacuating the Real/Thing from its life-world, Lacan argues, the subject creates the very place from which it can initially appear to itself as distinct from itself; it attains the inner distance towards itself that allows for self-awareness, for 'consciousness' of itself which defines it as a subject. Thus, no longer associated with the subordination under the symbolic Law as in other parts of Lacan's teachings, the subject in Lacan's *Seminar VII* emerges as the "first signifier", as the stroke of creation that by grounding itself, 'ex nihilo', via the introduction of a void into the Real, simultaneously grounds the ontological order that it perceives as reality. With reference to the full Lacanian triad, both the subject and what it perceives as reality can be said to be henceforth organized, beginning with that foundational moment, through a complex interplay between the orders of the Imaginary (the order of images and semblances with which we identify and through which we desire) and the Symbolic (the discursive network of cultural meaning, or the 'big Other', as Žižek refers to it, which structures our social practices and defines our symbolic identity), while the *Real* is what is necessarily kept at bay by the other two orders for our experience of reality (and of ourselves as 'subjects') to be sustained.

Lacan's doctrine of the creation of reality 'ex nihilo', via the evacuation of the Real, besides asserting the active, creative role of the subject which conventional approaches to Lacan's theory usually overlook, is also illuminating with regard to what is perhaps the crucial point about Lacan's understanding of *reality*: the assertion of its "precarious status", as Lacan termed it (1997: 30). According to Žižek, for Lacan, reality is inherently fragile. Because Lacan conceives of reality as something that is based on the exclusion of the Real, reality itself, for him, is marked by a central impossibility, a central void at its heart, which renders it 'non-all', 'perforated', and 'inconsistent' from the beginning. And, as Žižek has repeatedly shown, this is where fantasy comes in: formally indicated as the 'frame' of the triad of Imaginary-Symbolic-Real, fantasy is what acts as reality's 'support', its fundamental 'supplement'. It obfuscates, 'veils' the void around which reality is organized and so enables reality to be perceived as a consistent whole. "As soon as we renounce fiction and illusion," Žižek says, "we lose reality itself; *the moment we subtract fictions from reality, reality itself loses its discursive-logical consistency*" (2003: 88-9; emphasis in the original). It is here, then, that the Lacanian Real displays its affinity, indeed its synonymity, with the term *trauma*: according to Lacan, our entire experience of reality ultimately turns on the repression of the Real and on how something conforms to our fantasies, images and symbolic codes,

an 'encounter with the Real' is one of the privileged names in Lacanian (and Žižekian) theory for a traumatic event, an event outside the range of usual human experience, which cannot be integrated into our symbolic universe and persists as the 'hard kernel' of the Real on which our reality 'chokes'.[11]

3. The Real as pre-ontological multitude and trauma in *number9dream*

This arguably provides the background for conceiving of Mitchell's *ontological quest* in both its subject-oriented and world-oriented dimensions (if they can be thus separated at all). Returning to the previously discussed ontological openness of Eiji's life-world depicted in Chapter one, this surely can now be seen in its analogy to the Lacanian idea of a 'pre-ontological Real', of a reality that is not yet fully determined, but, as Žižek once pointedly suggested in the context of a discussion of Krzysztof Kieślowski's films, a reality which exists as a "primordial, pre-symbolic, inchoate 'stuff'", as the neutral medium that has not yet attained its definite version (cf. 2001: 95). Fittingly, Mitchell, in this chapter borrows from the diegetic logic of multiple reality video games as well as from the aesthetic of surrealist films to articulate the vision of an unformed proto-reality of the Real, of a reality that never pre-exists our fantasy-frames but is always found to emerge through them. As testified by this chapter, the formal heterogeneity of *number9dream* thus does not at all amount to the domesticated, consumer-friendly play with the vocabulary and methodology of postmodernism that Bradford had considered it to be. Placed in the context of what I have called Mitchell's *ontological quest*, the various narrative and reality frameworks employed throughout the novel clearly work to display (and explore) both the questing individual and the world he must deal with in their radical contingency, plurality and potentiality, in their constant process of being determined, realized, performed, and re-enacted through various fantasmatic activities.

The Real, in its other sense of 'trauma', plays a crucial role in understanding the specifically subject-focused dimension of *number9dream* —the actual coming-of-age narrative centering on Eiji's development, which is the objective of the remainder of this analysis. Defining this dimension as Eiji's journey towards accepting his sister's death and coming to terms with his parents, Simpson has called into question the success of this journey, interpreting the frequent and continual overlapping of fantasy and reality that characterize it as signals of Eiji's escapism and self-deception, and ultimately decrying Eiji's dreams as counter-productive to his journey towards self-knowledge and understanding (cf. 2011: 69).

By contrast, I would contend that fantasy plays a constitutive role in Eiji's process towards achieving these goals, because "[i]t is through such alternative forms of speech that trauma finds a way to be heard" (Bayer 2014: 132). A consideration of Eiji's voyage from the point of view of the *ontological quest* and the Lacanian Real shows how both his success in attaining maturity and recovering from his traumas effectively rely on Eiji's fantasmatic activities. At the beginning of the novel, Eiji's psychological stance may be described as 'escapism', indeed, as the running away from past traumatic events, such as the painful details surrounding his twin sister Anju's death, for which Eiji has held himself responsible ever since, as well as the fact and circumstances of his father's absence, which, as is recounted in Chapter two, so deeply traumatized his unstable mother that she attempted to kill her son by throwing him over the balcony when he once cried 'Daddy' as a child. In "Lost Property," Eiji describes his familial relations in the following words:

> I'm used to my mother being out there, somewhere, but not too near. Things are painless that way. If I move anything, I'm afraid it will start all over again. […] If this is a cop-out then, okay, a rubber-stamped 'Cop-Out' is my official response. It is my father's 'nowhere' that I can handle, not my mother's 'somewhere'. (Mitchell 2001: 75)

As suggested by this quote, Eiji has learned to cope with his parental issues by keeping them at a 'safe distance' from his immediate reality. However, from a Lacanian point of view, the function of this 'strategy of avoidance' is more complex than that: when taking into consideration Lacan's reality/Real distinction the strategy of turning away from the subject of his parents cannot so easily be identified as a 'cop-out', a form of simply 'disconnecting from reality', on the part of Eiji. On the contrary, given what Lacan referred to as the 'precariousness' of reality in its relation to the Real, Eiji's very experience of reality can be seen to depend on the fact that issues surrounding his parents are in some way suppressed or made irrelevant: in so far as they resist proper assimilation into Eiji's symbolic universe, his parents emerge as traumatic 'kernels of the Real' that impede his very (symbolic) access to reality. This same structure of the Real resisting symbolization and affecting the perception of reality is key to understanding the position of his dead sister in Eiji's memory. Once Eiji reflects that in his memories, "Parts of Anju are too bright, parts of Anju are so dark she isn't even [t]here" (Mitchell 2001: 47), which clearly suggests that his sister, having acquired the status of Real through her death, no longer fits into the allotted space of Eiji's 'normal', symbolized memories and instead persists either in the strange, uncanny mode of 'too real' or as a disturbing void in Eiji's symbolic universe.

If the Real is what has no place in the 'reality' of the symbolic, working to 'derealize' it, it is not surprising that the privileged scene of its occurrence is the 'unreality' of dreams, as Lacan famously suggested in his section on trauma in

Seminar XI, "Tuché and Automaton". In it, Lacan argues that a traumatic encounter with the Real experienced in 'reality', which is essentially a *missed* encounter in the first instance, not fully grasped when it occurred, inevitably returns to haunt us later on, erupting in terrible scenarios in our dreams and nightmares, so that, in one of Lacan's famous quips, we awaken into reality as an escape from the Real, to escape the horror of the trauma we encountered in the dream.[12] Mitchell explores this theme of the return of the traumatic Real in the dream throughout the numerous dreams Eiji has of his sister, in which various scenarios of her death and its circumstances are repeatedly enacted, prompting Eiji to awaken precisely before the dreaded moment of her death is about to (re)occur.

The theme of nightmares returning us to our repressed psychic truths is taken up in a different way in the chapter entitled "Reclaimed Land", where Eiji, kidnapped by a yakuza gang, learns from one of the yakuza members that nightmares are "our wilder ancestors returning to reclaim land, […] sent by who, or what, we *really* are, underneath" (Mitchell 2011: 190). This idea of our *real* being having a ghastly, traumatic character, spelled out to us by our nightmares, strictly corresponds to the Lacanian assertion of our waking reality being merely a 'cloak' beneath which lurks the Real of our being that was covered over for our (social) reality to emerge, the repressed Real-Thing of our pre-linguistic existence which, like all things repressed, makes its return as trauma, 'speaking itself' in the netherworld of our fantasies and dreams. The theme of our repressed origin in the Real as trauma is fully developed in the novel's subsequent chapter, "Study of Tales", where Eiji is shown to awaken after his nightmarish spree with the yakuza in the house of a writer of fantastic tales. One of these tales, which Eiji finds and reads as he recovers in the writer's house, metonymically relates both to Eiji's quest for his origins and the trauma of his sister's death. This surrealistic tale describes the search of an anthropomorphic "Goatwriter" for the "truly untold tale", and ends with Goatwriter's drowning in a pool where he was told he would find the source of the tale. Recognizing the fable of Goatwriter as a tale about the search for origins, Simpson has suggested that "Goatwriter's obsessive quest for the originary 'truly untold tale' acts as a warning [to Eiji] that to pursue a quest for origins to the limits is actually to embrace death; death is the only truly untold tale, a tale only fully understood by an experience that cannot be narrated" (2011: 59).

4. The 'Ninth Dream' and the traversing of the fantasy

On a brighter note, it is important to note that the finding of the 'truly untold tale' is something close to what Lacan called *la traversée du fantasme*, the 'going-through, traversing of the fantasy', which, as remains to be shown, epitomizes the

thematic core of the novel as a whole. In Lacan's theory, the traversing of the fantasy is the painful road the analysand must travel in order to reach the 'psychoanalytic cure'. It is a process in which the subject's fantasies, which regulated his access to reality, are brought to their zero-point by being traced to their unassimilable point of reference, to the void (of the Real) around which they were fundamentally organized. For Lacan, this traumatic experience of the void that effectively lies at the heart of the subject's entire symbolic reality, the void of the Real no longer veiled by fantasmatic formations (an experience, which indeed equals "subjective destitution", the momentary disintegration of the subject's identity), is crucial for therapeutic change: in order for the subject to reconstitute his fantasy-frame —the implication here being that, *even after* the psychoanalytic process, fantasy will remain the subject's only access to reality, though analysis can help him attain a 'sounder' fantasy-frame than the one previously available to him— he must first pass through his fantasies and experience that there is nothing behind them, nothing but the traumatic Real —the 'truly untold tale', as it were, that is present only as the radical absence of all symbolic meaning. It is only when the subject has thus 'exposed', and, by implication, transcended, his fantasmatic network, only when he is momentarily 'awakened' from the fantasies that had sustained his experience of reality up to that point, that the slate is clean for the actual therapeutic work, for the reconstitution of his fantasy-frame that allows the subject to regain access to reality on new terms.[13]

The closest the novel comes to effectively spelling out the idea of the 'traverse of the fantasy' that is its structural anchor is at the end of Chapter eight, when the 'meaning' of the '*ninth dream'* is finally revealed: in the novel, Eiji learns it from John Lennon himself. In a cameo appearance in one of Eiji's final dreams, the musician explains to Eiji the meaning of the title of his song "#9dream" with the words: "The ninth dream begins after every ending" (2001: 398). Implicitly, the 'ninth dream' —when read with Lacan as the therapeutic watershed that follows after the traverse of one's fantasy— figures at various pivotal points in the novel, each time indicating the momentary disintegration and subsequent reconfiguration of Eiji's fantasy-frame. Regarding the fantasy-frame sustaining Eiji's melancholic attachment to his dead sister, which Eiji comes to 'substitute' with his inchoate romance with Ai (the waitress in the café he met upon his arrival in Tokyo, a girl that in many ways resembles his sister), the moment of the 'ninth dream' is effected by a revealing dream Eiji has of his sister and Ai, which makes him realize that it is now time to let Anju go in favor of exploring his romantic feelings for his friend (see Mitchell 2011: 402-404).[14] It is crucial that Eiji himself decodes his dream in this way, even discussing its meaning with Ai, demonstrating that he has now 'made conscious' and, thus, 'transcended' his fantasmatic attachment to his sister. Only now, this raises the question of whether he is ready to move on, not to some

'true' reality but rather to a new fantasy-network that will coordinate the way he desires his new 'object'. Clearly, the step toward this new fantasy-frame is pivotal for Eiji's coming-of-age experience, as it indicates that Eiji is thus moving away from a sense of self premised on loss and melancholic attachment and toward realizing his potential as a subject separate from his 'twinned self', as a young adult who is capable of forming intimate relationships beyond his family context. Simpson has argued this point in a similar way (2011: 50).

In regard to Eiji's other major task of tackling and transcending the fantasy-frame through which he conceived of his parents (and so to overcome his feelings of loss and resentment), the main 'analytic' part of this work is arguably accomplished in the immersive realm of cyberspace, where Eiji's quest takes him in the Chapter "Video Games". This chapter sees Eiji playing several interactive virtual reality games with electronic versions of his parents, in which he has fights and conversations with his parents, mysteries surrounding his parentage are unravelled, and, as Simpson has perspicaciously noted, "Eiji plays out his anxieties, loss and guilt" (2011: 65). From a Lacanian point of view, Eiji's engagement with his parental issues through the medium of cyberspace can thus, again, be seen as a process coextensive with the 'going-through' of fantasy: the cyberspace games enable Eiji not only to externalize his unconscious fantasies and aggressions, and so to experience and respond to conflicts and emotions with which he never had the opportunity to deal in reality (in the sense of what Freud called 'working through'), but in playing out his fantasies, in literally treating them in a playful, self-ironic way, he achieves a minimum of reflective distance towards them; he becomes *aware* of his fantasies *as he stages them*, thus, effectively undermining the hold they exert over him.[15]

With the 'analytic' part of his process towards working out his parental issues thus largely accomplished, it is quite appropriate that the actual meeting with his parents pending in the novel takes an utterly unspectacular, anticlimactic form when it does occur: the chance meeting with his father, via what is described as "a cart trick that Tokyo has performed" (Mitchell 2001: 370), lasts a mere page of text and involves Eiji's recognition that he is no longer interested in getting to know the man, which signifies, as Boulter has aptly remarked, "the end of the fantasmatic idea of the father" (2011: 129); and the meeting with his mother, effected by Eiji in an attempt at reconciliation, soon results in both agreeing on a new relationship beyond the realm of traditional family ties, suggesting that Eiji has, by that point, abandoned the dysfunctional mother-son framework previously in place (as has his mother, apparently).[16]

The 'ninth dream', the point at which all fantasy and potential chance for a new beginning ends, is last and most powerfully in evidence just prior to the novel's

conclusion, when, in a final twist of plot, a catastrophic 'intrusion of the Real' throws Eiji's entire symbolic universe out of joint, brutally awakening him from his dreams and plunging him into the gaping hole of traumatic nothingness. Eiji, back in his island home at the end of the novel, in the midst of dreaming a creationist dream which interweaves the mythic origins of Japan with the death of his sister, is abruptly awakened by a radio announcement that a massive earthquake has struck the Tokyo region. Faced with the terrible Real of the natural disaster, Eiji is thus awakened to a reality in which, as *number9dream*'s Lennon puts it, apropos of the 'ninth dream' in the Random House edition of the book, "all dreams and all meanings appear to be dead and gone". This is where Eiji's imagination takes him, in the novel's final passage:

> I would give anything to be dreaming right now. Anything. Are the airwaves and cables jammed because half the phone users in the country are trying to call the capital, or because Tokyo is now a landscape of rubble under clouds of cement dust? […] I imagine a pane of glass exploding next to Ai's face, or a steel girder crashing through her piano. I imagine a thousand things. I grab my bag, slide down the hallway, scrunch my feet into my trainers, and scrape open the stubborn door. And I begin running. (Mitchell 2001: 418)

As this final passage suggests, Eiji, at the end of his coming-of-age journey, is not only finally awake to his identity as an adult who now needs to reach out and help others, but he is likewise alerted to how fantasy is the ultimate support and horizon of his sense of reality: thrown back to the zero-point of his symbolic universe by the intrusion of the contingent, traumatic Real, which momentarily disrupts the orderly flow of symbolization and causes his very sense of reality to snap, Eiji implicitly understands the 'ontological' lesson of Lacanian theory: fantasy ensures our access to reality; it is a world-making, reality-generating practice, enabling us to escape/tame the excessive nature of the 'raw' Real that would otherwise overwhelm us. This is testified by Eiji's desperate, self-aware attempts to 'picture', to actively 'imagine' the situation in Tokyo before uttering his final words, "And I begin running". Indeed, Eiji's "running" at this point may well indicate his first steps toward reconstituting his fantasy-frame to cope with the Real of the catastrophe. However, how this new 'world-making' quest may be accomplished by Eiji is left for the reader to imagine; Mitchell chooses to end the narrative at the point of the protagonist's 'ninth dream', the space of a momentarily absent or suspended fantasy-frame, represented typographically by the blank pages that constitute the ninth and last chapter of the novel.

In *number9dream*, Mitchell both relies on the literary form of the *Bildungsroman* and at the same time transforms it. By 'ontologizing' the quest, Mitchell moves the nineteenth-century genre away from its traditional preoccupation with depicting subjects in the process of acquiring knowledge of worlds (to which they

seek to adjust) and toward becoming a space for exploring practices of *making* subjects and worlds, a space in which the creative potential of fantasy, far from being reducible to postmodernist linguistic play, is taken as seriously as it is in the work of Lacan and Žižek. In an article in the *New Statesman*, the latter stated that, "[t]o choose between 'either accepting reality or choosing fantasy' is wrong: if we really want to change or escape our social reality, the first thing to do is change our fantasies that make us fit this reality" (2010). Žižek's witty inversion of the classic Marxist doctrine that social change can only be made possible through a change of the material conditions is, indeed, perhaps a fitting starting point from which to readdress/reformulate the final question raised by *number9dream*: from the vantage point of the analysis undertaken here, if we assume that fantasy is the very basis of social and individual reality (rather than their embellishment) and, thus, the very starting point of every change, then the question apropos of Eiji's success in passing from youth to manhood is not "whether Eiji can or will ever stop dreaming," as Simpson had suggested, but rather how he will continue dreaming: how, having 'traversed' the fantasies that sustained his life as he knew it, Eiji will go on re-fashioning his dreams and fantasies so as to make them sustain and, indeed, open the door to his new identity as a rational and responsible adult. The future may be unwritten for Eiji, as Mitchell's blank ninth chapter obviously suggests, but as far as Mitchell is concerned, from a Žižekian point of view, his 'transformation' of the *Bildungsroman*, of the art form *par excellence* of dealing with social reality, suggests that he is well on the way to establishing himself as a 'writer who is transforming the world', as he was called in his *Time 100* profile.

Notes

[1]. Implicitly, this relies on the notion that "the journey is one of the most common metaphors for individual maturation", as has been argued by Franco Moretti in his seminal study of the *Bildungsroman*, *The Way of the World* (1987: 93).

[2]. For readings and reviews of *number9dream* as a *Bildungsroman*, see especially Simpson's essay and also Roe's and McFarlane's reviews of *number9dream*.

[3]. Here, I take my cue from Simpson's definition of Eiji's quest (2011: 51).

[4]. The volume *David Mitchell: Critical Essays* (2011) resulted from the first Mitchell Conference which took place at the University of St Andrews in 2009.

[5]. Simpson here refers to Hutcheon's article "Beginning to Theorize Postmodernism", in which Hutcheon proposed that postmodern forms "use and abuse, install and then destabilize convention in parodic ways" (1987: 10).

[6]. In her book *The Politics of Postmodernism*, Linda Hutcheon writes that as "the postmodern moment has passed", "[p]ost-postmodernism needs a new label of its own and [she] challenge[s] readers to find it —and name it for the twenty-first century" (2002: 181; in Boxall 2007: 59).

[7]. Simpson discerns in *number9dream* "a sense of ontological uncertainty" (2011: 53), but her analysis goes on to focus on the novel's epistemological concerns, such as Eiji's unreliability as a narrator, the self-reflective status that storytelling takes on in the narrative, and the meaning of structures of doubling and substitution for Eiji's quest. In a similar fashion, Childs and Green refer to *number9dream* in terms of "a model of ontological instability where multiple imaginary dimensions interpenetrate each other" (2011: 41), but choose not to pursue this idea any further. An interesting additional perspective on this issue is introduced by Gerd Bayer, who draws on Geoffrey Hartman to argue that the omnipresence of invented realities in *number9dream* leads to something that Hartman describes as "a general weakening of the sense of reality" (in Bayer 2014: 130). Tellingly, Bayer points out that this "derealization" is used in *number9dream* as a potential strategy to engage with traumatic experience —something that effectively links *number9dream* to the broader context of post-postmodern literature dealing with questions of trauma. Drawing on Michael Rothberg's notion of "traumatic realism" as detailed in his book of the same name (see Bayer 2014: 131), Bayer's approach shares with my own the view that the various modes of 'derealization' used in *number9dream*, such as the encroaching of virtual game realities on Eiji's actual reality, the dreamlike return of Eiji's lost memories, and the manifold fantasies in which he indulges throughout the novel, fit better with the fact of traumatic extremity than any conventionally realistic form of representation might. I will return to this point in the part of this essay discussing the role of trauma in *number9dream* through the theories of Lacan and Žižek.

[8]. Preferably applied by Žižek to cinema, ideas of quantum theory pervade his work. See particularly his 2001 book on Polish filmmaker Krzysztof Kieślowski (and the debate *Between Theory and Post-Theory* in recent film studies), *The Fright of Real Tears*, to which my understanding of quantum theory is largely indebted.

[9]. The first sustained engagements with the characteristics and concerns of the fiction of the new millennium of which Mitchell is part are offered by Peter Boxall's book on *Twenty-First-Century Fiction* (2013) and the volume of essays on *Twenty-First Century Fiction* edited by Siân Adiseshia and Rupert Hildyard (2013).

[10]. Lacan here takes the vase in Heidegger's essay "Das Ding" as the prototype of such creation 'ex nihilo', a vase defined as an object "created around […] emptiness" (Lacan 1997*:* 121).

[11]. See Lacan's famous definition of the "encounter with the Real" which "in so far as it is essentially the missed encounter" presents itself to psychoanalytic practice "in the form of the trauma" (1998: 55).

[12]. See Lacan 1998: 55 ff.

[13]. For Lacan's notion of the traverse of fantasy see his *Seminar XI* (1998: 273).

[14]. See Simpson (2011) for a detailed discussion of the complex processes of duplication and substitution in the novel between Anju and Ai.

[15]. For more detailed engagements with the psychoanalytical-philosophical implications of cyberspace on which my argument here relies see Žižek's essays "The Cyberspace Real" and "Is it Possible to Traverse the Fantasy in Cyberspace?" (1999).

[16]. Discussing Eiji's growing willingness to move beyond the family narrative from the point of view of Freud's concept of the 'family romance', Bayer (2014) has offered a compelling analysis of the importance —and potential threat— of patriarchal hierarchies for Eiji's process of maturation. Bayer perceptively shows in his essay how these hierarchies are present in *number9dream* both in Eiji's core family and at the national level of a historical Japan which Eiji's great-uncle, as Eiji finds out in the chapter Kai Ten, had died for in a suicide mission during World World II.

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9/11 AND THE POWER OF THE NETWORK SOCIETY IN ALEJANDRO GONZÁLEZ IÑÁRRITU'S *BABEL*

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September 11, 2001 changed the course of contemporary history in more than one sense, including the revitalization of the so-called "war on terrorism". For Craig Calhoun, 9/11 is the date on which the "non-cosmopolitan side of globalization struck back" (2002: 871). Given that most of the terrorists were Arabs who had studied in the West, the attacks unveiled a dark side to globalization in which flows of people, money, weapons and drugs suddenly became a challenge to security and state sovereignty (871). As Calhoun puts it, "the terrorist acts were framed as an attack on America rather than an attack on humanity" (870). The events precipitated a new state-centered politics based on the idea of a 'just war', which made military war on terrorism 'inevitable' and justified, crushing the cosmopolitan concerns that, in the view of many, had started to flourish by the late 1990s (870). The coming down of the Berlin Wall in 1989 had questioned the development of militarism, and undermined the opposition between East and West in favor of a more cosmopolitan focus on human interconnectedness that challenged the hegemony of the nation-state. As Gerard Delanty emphasizes, the awareness of global interdependence in the post-Cold War made cosmopolitanism all the more urgent (2009: 98). Crucially, Vertovec and Cohen (2002) explored the multiple facets of cosmopolitanism as a descriptive social category and as a normative concept focusing on the struggles for global justice and the construction of a new world order. Today, although such ideas seem to be wearing thin after

September 11 and the war in Iraq (Stevenson 2011: 243) interest in cosmopolitanism as a transformative perspective has not declined (Rovisco and Nowicka 2011: 1). In fact, cosmopolitanism is increasingly regarded as a key analytical tool for studying a variety of outlooks and ethico-political practices, especially since Beck and Sznaider (2006) proposed going beyond the limitations of methodological nationalism by adopting more complex and global perspectives.

Alejandro González Iñárritu's third feature film, *Babel* (2006), is global in terms of production and release. An international co-production between France, Mexico and the United States, it was first shown at the Cannes Film Festival and later at a number of other international festivals. It features seven languages —English, French, Spanish, Berber, Arabic, Japanese and sign language— and four settings —the US, Mexico, Japan and Morocco— in which, as in other multi-protagonist films, a number of characters are connected by a global thread. *Babel* may be seen as both a post-9/11 movie and as a filmic counterpart to Calhoun's insights in that it adopts a cosmopolitan stance for understanding the complexities of the global network society. The film brings to the fore the fact that the war against terrorism, promoted by one nation-state, affects remote places, where innocent people are criminalized as scapegoats for the sake of the protection of more privileged citizens. Hence, it problematizes non-cosmopolitan forms of domination and subordination in the current network society.

Some critics have analyzed *Babel* in relation to Manuel Castells's concept of the "network society", that is, one "whose social structure is made of networks powered by microelectronics-based information and communication technologies" —by social structure, he understands "the organizational arrangements of humans in relations of production, consumption, reproduction, experience, and power expressed in meaningful communication coded by culture" (2004: 3). For example, Paul Kerr explores the film's social relations of production, drawing on Castells's assumption that the work process tends to be globally integrated while labor is locally fragmented. For Kerr, "the film package, *Babel*, was constructed by globalized, casualized labor, and assembled by international agencies and companies which circulate capital —in much the same way as the circulating object, the Winchester, changes hands in the film" (2010: 39-40). In another example, Celestino Deleyto and Maria del Mar Azcona view *Babel* as a powerful fictionalization of the network society, characterized by the two emergent social forms of time and space: 'timeless time' and the 'space of flows'. The film's narration is simultaneously governed by 'traditional time', that is, linear, irreversible and measurable chronology, and 'timeless time', a new conceptualization of temporality that gives us immediate access to events happening in any part of the global network society. Similarly, the 'space of places', characterized by geographical

location and physical proximity, is superseded by the intangible space of flows —of information, capital, work and technology— across continents (2010: 51, 66-67). In this article, I propose an analysis of *Babel*'s critique of unequal power relations in the global network society, in particular, after the 9/11 attacks. The film makes extensive use of formal strategies that encourage the viewer to reflect about non-cosmopolitan positions of domination and subordination in the network-society of the information era. I will draw on Castells's belief that, although a network-based society is ideally a non-centered form of social structure, it is also a source of dramatic reorganization of power relationships.

Babel narrates four stories that take place in three different continents over a five-day span. The film scrambles the chronology of these storylines by means of a regular pattern that divides the film into twenty-four sections. The opening section, set in the Moroccan Atlas, introduces a goatherd, Abdullah (Mustapha Rachidi), and his two teenage sons, Ahmed (Said Tarchani) and Yussef (Boubker Ali El Caid). We witness the transaction of a rifle between Abdullah and his neighbor, Hassan (Abdelkader Bara), who was once given the gun as an act of gratitude. Hassan gives the rifle to his two teenage sons, who decide to test it, first on some rocks and then on a moving bus. They realize they have hit the bus, and run away, at which moment the second section starts, taking us to San Diego, where an undocumented Mexican nanny, called Amelia (Adriana Barraza), is in charge of two siblings, Mike (Nathan Gamble) and Debbie (Elle Fanning). The events of this storyline shuttle from San Diego to a Mexican village close to Tijuana on the other side of the US-Mexico border. The third fragment, also set in Morocco, revolves around a married couple from the United States, Richard (Brad Pitt) and Susan (Cate Blanchett), who happen to be Mike and Debbie's parents. While on a tourist bus, Susan is shot, and the incident is misinterpreted as an act of terror. The fourth section takes spectators to Tokyo and revolves around Chieko (Rinko Kikuchi), a deaf-mute teenage girl. Apparently unrelated to the other stories, we later find out that Chieko's father, Yasujiro (Kôji Yakusho), gave the same rifle that has now wounded Susan to his Moroccan hunting guide as a present at some point in the past. The fifth section returns to Morocco, where Ahmed and Yussef are running home after having unintentionally shot Susan. This order (Morocco-San Diego/Tijuana, Morocco, Tokyo) is almost strictly followed until the end of the film, resulting in a complex, fragmented and multi-focal film (see Deleyto and Azcona 2010: 50-56).

By means of its multi-protagonist narrative, *Babel* depicts the global reach of the accidental shooting of a United States citizen in Morocco in order to exemplify the devastating effects of the sovereign prerogatives of certain countries, specifically the US, in a global world increasingly driven by fear of terror after 9/11. As Ezra

and Rowden argue, "the rhetorical deployment and exploitation of September 11 and the subsequent Iraq war by political officials and some elements of the American media created a popularizing discourse that turned all US citizens into potential victims and all foreigners into potential victimizers" (2006: 11). In *Babel*, the shooting incident is rapidly labeled as a terrorist act by the United States although, as the Moroccan media claim, the country has been free from terrorist activity for many years. Yet, the connection between the global security network and the international media system is highly effective in quickly spreading the misconception, putting extreme pressure on the Moroccan authorities. Fearing the damage that the international crisis could cause to the economy of the country, they abuse their own subjects, ignoring human rights. As the film shows, diverse forms of domination are ascribed to certain nation-states and their privileged subjects, and treatment by law enforcement authorities under international pressure is uneven. In contrast with the abusive practices endured by the family of goatherds in Morocco and the Mexican undocumented immigrant, the United States and Japanese citizens are treated respectfully. Notably, the suggestion of terrorist links by the US Government is enough to shut down the air space in the area, so that Susan can be evacuated. As Ulrich Beck states, since the global and the local are "mutually implicating principles", global processes "transform the quality of the social and the political *inside* nation-state societies" (2002: 17).

The unbalanced logic of power governing present-day network society is a key theme in *Babel*, and it runs parallel to the film's uneven network structure. In her analysis of multi-protagonist films, Azcona draws on Deleuze and Guattari's "acentered structure" of "the rhizome" as the structure that best represents so-called mosaic films or network narratives like *Babel*. As she explains, because these movies lack a narrative center, they potentially disrupt the hierarchical organization reflected in conventional movies —which tend to privilege one character over the others (2010: 21). In the past decade, a number of multi-protagonist films —such as *Traffic* (2000), *Crash* (2004) and *Syriana* (2005)— speculated about the emergent network society, which was being theorized in the social sciences (Wellman 1999; Castells, 2009; Van Dijk, 2006). In these films, the network morphology and the proliferation of points of view it offers tend to counter the inequalities they expound. While *Babel* roughly conforms to this logic, its presumably even structure disguises unequal power relations at its basis. As the narration unfolds, the apparent structural and narrative balance is put to the test and, gradually, the tourists' (Richard and Susan's) storyline takes shape as the central and dominant one, mirroring the film's central concern with power dynamics. Therefore, against the apparently decentralized narrative conventions of ensemble movies, the shooting incident becomes the focal event in *Babel*, and the storyline that deals with it, together with its protagonists, are given more

prominence. In other words, although the four-part structure of the film, as expected, appears to be balanced due to scrupulous compliance with established turns and an even distribution of screen time, the structure turns out to be one-sided for a number of reasons that I aim to explain next.

Apart from the higher visibility of the two internationally acclaimed stars playing the US tourists in Morocco (Brad Pitt and Cate Blanchett), at a structural level, one key feature that makes the tourists' storyline superior is its high interconnectedness with the others. Richard and Susan's narrative strand has a higher "networking power". Castells coins this term to refer to "the power of the actors and organizations included in the networks that constitute the core of the global network society over human collectives or individuals who are *not* included in these global networks" (2009: 42). James S. Coleman refers to a similar kind of power as "social capital": in the network society, the relations between the nodes increase the social capital, facilitating productive activity and "making possible the achievement of certain ends that in its absence would not be possible" (1988: S98). For Mark Buchanan, although the network society is in principle a non-centered structure, it is actually organized through central hubs that dominate network activity. In this sense, he argues that the Internet and the World Wide Web have few elements with a huge number of links, and that this is symptomatic of greater power (2002: 36). As John Urry exemplifies, a small number of nodes, such as Microsoft, Google, Yahoo, CNN, BBC have a very large number of links, and, therefore, control the web. The web is, for him, an "aristocratic network", where those who are connected become ever more connected, their power being increased over time (2007: 215).

In *Babel*, as in the network-based society it represents, switches are relevant sources of power, and Richard and Susan's storyline proves more powerful because it is the only one related to all the other stories. Susan's shooting is causally connected with the events of the Moroccan (Ahmed and Yussef's) narrative strand; it triggers the action of Amelia's narrative, and also infiltrates the Moroccan and Japanese media. None of the other narrative strands is bound to all the rest. For example, Chieko's plotline is faintly linked to the Moroccan story through the transaction of the rifle, and infiltrated by Richard and Susan's strand through the media but it does not interact with Amelia's. In turn, the Moroccan line of action is tied only by coincidence to Richard and Susan's and to Chieko's storylines but it is not directly bound to the Mexican one. Finally, this narrative thread is not connected with the Japanese or with the Moroccan plotline, being attached solely to Richard and Susan's. Hence, the centrality of this storyline is grounded on its higher connectivity, exerting potential influence on the other narrative strands.

Positions of structural dominance and subordination are further qualified by the nature and direction of the connections in the network narrative. As in many multi-protagonist films, in *Babel*, the four storylines are initially presented as independent, and they become gradually interconnected. Yet, the links between narrative strands are not always of the same nature nor do they all have the same relevance. For example, while the Japanese plotline is bound to the two stories that take place in Morocco, its attachment to them is very weak. They are barely hooked up by the slender causal link provided by what David Bordwell calls a "circulating object" (2006: 97): the rifle that is given as a sign of gratitude is sold to Abdullah and later accidentally wounds Susan. It is an "attenuated link" (99), to use Bordwell's terminology, since the interconnectedness is governed by chaos theory, in the shape of the so-called 'butterfly effect'. This impression of chance is reinforced when some of the characters involved in the shooting fleetingly appear in the Japanese news. Although this plotline shares key themes with the others, it mostly serves to establish parallels and contrasts between characters, and causal connections are minimized. Thus, the interconnectedness of the Tokyo line of action is fairly inferred as coincidental and ephemeral.

In the lines that follow, I will explore how the level of connection of the tourists' storyline is not only characterized by a larger number of links but also by more consistent narrative ties than those of the three others. Firstly, in a film in which most people are remotely bound by little more than chance, the attachment between Richard and Susan and the characters in Amelia's storyline stands out as the most solid: they live in the same house, Amelia is entrusted with their employers' home and children, and Richard and Susan are Mike and Debbie's parents. Secondly, while many narrative links between the plotlines are based on sheer accident, these two stories are interconnected by causal coherence through a number of telephone conversations between Richard and Amelia, in which he compels her to stay at home with his children the same day her son is getting married. The repetition of one of the telephone calls from different points of view invites the spectators to interpret these conversations as pivotal, to weigh up the scenes from both points of view, and to trace the connections and build structural hypotheses about the nature of the relationship between the two narrative strands. While multi-protagonist films usually depend on chance, and not on traditional causality, to interconnect their narrative-strands (Bordwell 2006: 93, 100; Azcona 2010: 37), I will try to show here that *Babel* deviates slightly from this logic: the rifle may get the ball rolling but Amelia's fate is governed not just by random chance but by a direct order from her employer. This is also indicative of normalized positions of domination and subordination both in the employers' house and, globally, in other parts of the world.

The fact that one of Richard's telephone calls to Amelia is shown twice and from two different points of view urges us to think about and examine the characters' motives and needs. This speculation is symptomatic of the fact that they have choices and a certain amount of control over the events. It points to principles of causality, together with a certain share of responsibility on the part of the characters for the consequences of their actions. Is Richard's request that Amelia stay at home with Mike and Debbie on her son's wedding day inevitable? Is his inflexible attitude towards her a major cause bringing about the near death of Amelia and the children on the border? What options are available to Amelia after Richard's request? Is her decision to go on a one-day trip with the children irresponsible or imprudent? For Azcona, although network narratives seem to be just built out of ephemeral or attenuated links, there often seems to be a place for reflection on the "power of the individual" for the responsibilities behind apparently randomly caused acts (2010: 35). This is also the case in *Babel*. Susan's shooting in Morocco is clearly marked as an accident, even if it is one that brings light to the contradictions of a global situation in which children are sent off to work with weapons. Amelia's decision to take Mike and Debbie to her son's wedding in Mexico may be motivated by random events (Susan's accident, in turn caused by the transaction of the rifle, and the fact that Susan's sister cannot make it to San Diego in time) but is a conscious decision on her part (we see her trying to leave the children with a friend before deciding to travel to Mexico with them).

Since the telephone call is repeated in both storylines from different perspectives, we are encouraged to think that what happened later on the border could have been avoided if the characters had acted differently and, therefore, some kind of responsibility is ascribed to them. Moreover, the fact that the first phone call opens Amelia's plotline and closes Richard and Susan's indicates chronological contiguity between the two narrative strands, further supporting the hypothesis of a cause and effect logic, and departing from the randomness of the rifle, the circulating object that characterizes some connections in *Babel*. Ultimately, the cause-effect nexus between the two narratives suggests structural subordination of the Mexican storyline to Richard and Susan's. Since the events of this plotline influence to a great extent what happens in Amelia's, the latter can be considered to be an appendage or a prolongation of the former.

The repetition of the phone call plays a key role in the articulation of the overarching theme of power relations, hinting that non-cosmopolitan dynamics embedded in everyday dialogue underlie the characters' behavior, bringing about disastrous events. Wanting to know who is responsible for the tragic events on the border, spectators are prompted to wonder how the characters could have acted differently, given that, in the second version of the call, we have more knowledge about their

motivations and the effects of their choices and actions. The calls in Amelia's plotline point to her subordinate status and degree of vulnerability. Our first impression is grounded on Richard's authoritative tone, in contrast with the nanny's subservient attitude, and on the fact that the employee is not allowed to defend her position, since Richard hangs up on her. In this scene, we tend to identify with Amelia: although we barely know her, she has been presented as a loving and thoughtful person when we see her tenderly playing with the children who are enjoying their time with her. As Deleyto and Azcona argue, this portrayal of the Mexican nanny as nurturing and protective is enhanced by the warm colors and lighting of the house, including Amelia's red T-shirt (2010: 101). As the phone call unfolds, we only see her image, and feel, therefore, closer to her than to the anonymous, authoritative voice at the other end of the line.

While the movie criticizes Richard's unwillingness to genuinely engage with the nanny in the first version of the first call, it maneuvers for the opposite effect in the second —at the end of Richard and Susan's story— when we get his point of view. His responsibility is minimized this time because we know that he has been living an extreme situation trying to save Susan's life, and that he has been pushed to his limits. In this case, we get a close-up of his smiling but tearful face as he speaks to his son; and we can hear a more humanized voice, this time unmediated by technology. We are, thus, invited to sympathize with his role of suffering victim. Yet, even if the movie tends to exonerate Richard in the second version, the many dimensions of the calls in their different versions crucially point to the lack of cosmopolitan interconnectedness in the network society. The film does not give us answers about who is responsible for the events that follow the interaction but asks us to reflect on it. It is hinted that Richard has at least some responsibility, even though something akin to despair has influenced his inflexible and authoritative behavior towards Amelia.

Richard's domination over his employee not only parallels the superiority of his storyline over Amelia's but also the overarching theme of unequal power dynamics in the global network society portrayed through the film. In this sense, the one-way communication between Richard and Amelia mirrors her later attempts to be listened to by other characters like the Border Patrol agent and the deportation officer. In other acts of communication in *Babel*, the emphasis on the contemptuous attitude of law-enforcing agents towards a number of distant people —namely Amelia, Santiago and the Moroccan protagonists— hints that there are global grounds for the unfortunate experiences of some characters (beyond those merely attributable to individual wrong choices). For example, the viewer is invited to suture together Amelia's unidirectional conversations and the US State Department's unilateral management of the shooting. Likewise, the abuse of the

Moroccan characters is symptomatic of human rights violations against Islamic suspects pursued in relation to the 9/11 events when, after having declared solidarity with the US people in fighting terrorism, the protection of human rights in Morocco was actually weakened. Clearly, the expanded executive powers in a global conflict become the unifying global force binding the suffering of distant others. *Babel* critiques the fact that the principle of sovereignty should take precedence over the prevention of human suffering. The film calls for a cosmopolitan consciousness that, as Nick Stevenson would say, reminds global humanity of the ways in which we are morally interconnected with one another, while seeking to struggle for a form of politics that aims to accommodate difference (2011: 249).

In other words, the management of the shooting incident in the film serves to exemplify how the United States' economic, political and military supremacy facilitated a nation-centered response to the 9/11 attacks, instead of promoting transnational politics based on a more cosmopolitan understanding of the other. In *Babel*, one-sided preoccupation with security causes unfounded fears of terrorism and brings chaos to the networked, interdependent nation-states all over. For example, Amelia's ill treatment on the border is articulated as a consequence of the war on terror resulting in more severe immigration laws, as part of the global chain of narrative cause and effect. Thus, it can be argued that the United States' one-sided management of the shooting is at the basis of all the plotlines because it is, to a very large extent, deemed responsible for their resolution. Recreating these dynamics, instead of the centerless narratives of other multi-protagonist films, the structure of *Babel* places Richard and Susan's predicament at the center of the network narrative.

The domination and pervasiveness of the tourists' plotline is further highlighted by the two infiltrations of the shooting event in the Tokyo storyline, functioning as the nexus between the two stories. The first intrusion takes place while Chieko is tediously channel surfing, and a news item about the shooting filters into a random succession of local programs. The scene has a key structural function based on certain expectations and responses rooted in the network movies' generic conventions. For the viewers that are familiar with these films, the intersection of characters from different storylines seems inevitable just because we have been following them from the start: the more the narration focuses on their separate lives, the more we expect relevant encounters among them. Then, when people start to meet, even by chance, we feel what Bordwell calls a "satisfying omniscience" (2006: 99). Since the first intrusion in the TV news linking the tourists' and the Tokyo storylines is the first indication that this narrative strand is attached to the multi-protagonist structure, it makes us experience the rewarding omniscience

that Bordwell describes. This reward validates Richard and Susan's plotline as central for its ability to provide the evidence that helps us make sense of the film's structure and plot.

A similar intrusion is repeated later in the Tokyo plotline, further reinforcing the role of Richard and Susan's narrative as pervasive and a determining factor in the film. While the Japanese police officer is reading the hand-written note that Chieko has given him in the previous fragment of the Tokyo storyline, we see Susan's face on the Japanese international news and we learn about the outcome of Richard and Susan's story. The contrast between the secrecy of Chieko's note, which to our frustration we are never able to read, and Richard and Susan's conspicuously happy ending reinforces the hypothesis that, in *Babel*'s unbalanced structure, the US protagonists are more worthy of attention than any other characters in the movie. Yet, the officer's uninterested look at the television set, together with Chieko's look of boredom while channel surfing earlier in the narrative, problematizes the omnipresence of the shooting incident and the prominence given to its protagonists.

The blatant infiltrations of the shooting incident in the Japanese news is a representation of what Castells calls "the power of the switch", or the ability of dominant actors and institutions to connect different networks, promoting their cooperation by sharing common goals (2009: 45, 51). In *Babel*, the pervasiveness of the shooting —which points to post-9/11 paranoia about security and the subsequent military operations— and its prominence in the media is a representation of this logic of power. The power of the switch between the security network and the comprehensive media networks resides in its apparent capacity to suppress time —as evoked by the random succession of programs in Chieko's channel surfing scene— and in the capability of the shooting event to obliterate space. The subordination of the Moroccan characters that inhabit the periphery of the network society is visually enhanced when the shooting permeates through the Japanese news across a rapid, random succession of local programs. The Moroccan characters' faces do not fit in and become defamiliarized inside Chieko's bedroom, replete as it is with her personal belongings and pictures. The news beams Yussef and Abdullah's close-ups to this digital tapestry on the Japanese TV, visually representing the space of flows, "made of places connected by electronically powered communication networks through which flows of information […] circulate and interact" (Castells 2009: 34). Notably, Yussef and Abdullah's local selves are only global when they become secondary actors in the news of Susan's shooting. Their identities are unimportant until they are linked to the presumed terrorist attack of an 'American' tourist. The film emphasizes their insignificance even more when, later in a different sequence of the Tokyo story, the TV news narrates a 'happy ending' for the US citizen's narrative strand, while ignoring the

fates of Yussef and Abdullah. Yet, since the movie has previously invited us to engage with the disgrace of the humble Moroccan characters, it also calls our attention to the subordination and the oblivion affecting the lives of the people who are peripheral to the network society.

The way in which the film constructs temporality also contributes to Susan and Richard's prominence. As has already been mentioned, Deleyto and Azcona see the film's narration as simultaneously governed by two types of temporality: traditional time and timeless time. They argue that the film's temporal arrangement mirrors timeless time when chronological time is suppressed, and sequencing is cancelled and reversed. Timeless time is exemplified by the links between fragments, evoking a sense of immediacy between events happening in remote places (2010: 50-52). I want to show that timeless time is also marked by the recurrent events connecting narrative strands —Richard's telephone calls to Amelia, and the double intrusion of their narrative into the Tokyo plotline— and that this also contributes to making Richard and Susan's strand more pivotal. As has been mentioned earlier, the repetition of scenes is a generic clue that marks them as highly informative, encouraging us to think about interweaving meanings or building structural hypothesis about the network organization of the film. Furthermore, the repeated scenes in *Babel* give us information about the actual temporal order between the different storylines. For example, the telephone calls between Richard and Amelia reveal in retrospect that the Mexican story takes place five days later, chronologically starting after Susan has been evacuated from Tazarine and gone into hospital, and not simultaneously, as the actual arrangement of segments seems to indicate. Similarly, in the Tokyo storyline, the TV news makes us realize that this has been brought forward with respect to the action set in Morocco. After the segment in which we see Abdullah and Yussef's faces on Chieko's television, the Moroccan segment that follows shows the kids hiding the rifle under a rock in the Atlas Mountains (in Yussef and Abdulah's plotline the Moroccan goatherd and his sons have not been captured by the Moroccan police yet). In *Babel*'s arrangement, the events on the TV news in Tokyo are broadcast prior to their actual happening in the Moroccan strand. Hence, the recurrent, binding scenes prove to be focal in that they raise awareness about the temporal structure of the film, based on timeless time: they disrupt previous hypotheses about the film's temporal construction. Since those pivotal scenes revolve around the shooting, they further reinforce the preeminence of this event, and the centrality and omnipresence of Richard and Susan's storyline.

Therefore, Richard and Susan's relevance and domination in the network society run parallel to the structural supremacy of their storyline and its evocation of timeless time because in the film, as in the network society, timeless time indicates

power. For Castells, timeless time is the result of the annihilation of time in the networks of the space of flows, and dominant functions are organized in networks that belong to a space of flows, which ties them up around the world (2009: 20, 34). In *Babel*, the dominant position of Richard, Susan and the US State Department in the aftermath of the shooting is symptomatic of timeless time, especially when the introduction of dialogue is not synchronized with the matching shots. This is most obvious when telecommunications are involved, for instance, when the voice broadcasting the news is heard before correlative images appear, overlapping with the previous shot. In another example, before Susan is evacuated, we can hear a dialogue from a telephone conversation between Richard and somebody from the US State Department. The metallic voice abruptly overlaps with an extreme close-up of Richard and Susan as they come to terms with their past in the intimate space of Anwar's (Mohamed Akhzam) humble home. This shot is followed by a series of quick shots frantically portraying Susan's evacuation in a helicopter while the voice at the end of the line announces that a helicopter should arrive soon and Richard desperately asks: "how long?" He saturates his time to the limit, struggling to stop the biological time that governs Susan's pulse and imposes a temporal limit on her life. In another sequence in Tazarine, the chronological sequence is suppressed when Richard's authoritative voice, demanding from a Moroccan Police Officer an ambulance "now", is previous to the men's actual meeting, while the officer is still seen approaching Anwar's house.

By stressing Richard and Susan's privileged status as white, wealthy, United States citizens in comparison to other characters and the centrality of their narrative strand, *Babel* speculates about and criticizes unequal relations of power across nations and the distinct consequences across borders. The interest that Richard and Susan arouse is underlined by the use of visual and acoustic contrasts and parallelisms. In the closing section of the film, we see the barren Atlas Mountains in Morocco, where the frightened, unarmed, teenage Ahmed has been shot dead by the Moroccan Police. Yussef stares at his brother's body while it is being removed, a long shot zooming-in to a close-up on Yussef emphasizing that he is virtually the only witness of the killing, that Ahmed has died anonymously and unnoticed. In a brief flashback, Yussef nostalgically recalls happy moments playing with his brother in the wind. The music becomes softer, slows down and almost stops, evoking the void left by Ahmed. The motif of the wind that allows the boys' innocent play in the flashback visually connects with the next shot, narrating Susan's evacuation from Tazarine, the wind now produced by a Red Cross helicopter. Hence, the sad meanings associated with the natural wind of Ahmed and Yussef's game contrast with the meanings of hope but also inequality associated with the powerful artificial wind produced by a helicopter which will save Susan's life. The inescapable strong wind spread by the Red Cross global network blows

mercilessly over the anonymous Tazarine bodies, humbly bending down as they try to protect themselves from it. The quick shots render endless examples of similar gestures of people covering their eyes with their hands in order to protect them from the unyielding, penetrating dust, its mighty pervasiveness stressed by the incisive repetition of a few staves from the soundtrack.

This sequence dramatizes the overwhelming of the local by the global. At the same time, the music repeats itself in a spiral of increasingly higher volume, indicating that this is the climax of the film. The media emphasize Susan's nationality suggesting that she will be saved because so many efforts have been devoted to this end, given that she is a privileged citizen from the core of the global security network. At the opposite end of the scale, Moroccan Abdullah, his sons and his neighbors suffer ill treatment by the Moroccan Police, who are trying to keep under control what has become an international crisis. The wind motif linking the two narratives and the use of framing, together with editing and music, underline the contrast between the unequal outcomes of the two tragedies and the relatively uneven interest that they arouse.

These scenes echo others describing Amelia's subordinate position, when she is treated as mere disposable labor by Richard, and later humiliated by the Border Patrol Agent and the deportation officer. The ruthlessness of the Sonoran Desert, metonymically associated with the immensity and severity of the Atlas Mountains in the Moroccan storyline evoke transnational forms of violence in the network society. In *Babel*, the global reach of the shooting and its consequences problematize the non-cosmopolitan, sovereign control of security in order to fight a complex matter concerning the world at large. The film also suggests that the United States finds legitimation in defining security as the supreme value due its dominant position in the global network society, and to the interpretation of the September 2001 events as an attack on 'America'. It is made clear that the sovereignty of the nation-state and the security of its citizens take precedence over the suffering of strangers. *Babel* denounces that, in the wake of 9/11 attacks, the nation-state has become a transnational source of legitimate violence in the global network society.

As discussed, the management and global reach of the war on terrorism is at the basis of the four storylines. We can argue that what actually connects the four narrative strands is a critique of the sovereignty of one nation-state in matters of security, which is gradually shaped as the cause of subsequent global effects. Hence, the viewer is compelled to interweave, and establish causal connections between, the events following Susan's shooting and its pervasiveness throughout the other storylines. For example, Amelia's tragic border-crossing story is presented as a consequence of the shooting, together with Richard's one-sided and inflexible behavior, echoing the US authorities' management of Susan's wrongly labeled

terrorist attack, and the way they actually handled the 9/11 events. This logic is reminiscent of the practices of control and exclusion set up on the US-Mexico border after the 9/11 attacks. These exclusionary protocols go against the notion of "cosmopolitan hospitality", an ethical attitude already proposed by Immanuel Kant in the 18th century as "the right of a stranger not to be treated with hostility when he arrives on someone else's territory" (1991: 105). In *Babel*, the viewer is compelled to think about the intertwining structural and narrative layers and the events that lead to Amelia's deportation, together with Ahmed's death and the likely terrible ending for his family in Morocco. Multiple connections lead us to deduce that the unfortunate consequences that some characters suffer are not explained as an apparent converging-fates strategy. While some scenes are riddled with coincidence, misled by the circulating-object device of the rifle and the conventionalized role of chance, the functions of the links between storylines, repetitions highlighting varying points of view, and thematic connections emphasize a causal logic grounded on unbalanced global power dynamics. The uneven structure of *Babel* mirrors positions of domination and subordination enabling one nation-state to define the goals and values in the global war on terror.

In conclusion, this analysis deconstructs *Babel*'s deviant structure as a parallel artifact of the film's thematic critique of state-centered politics in the current network society. The multi-protagonist structure metaphorically embodies the power system of the emergent network society, where dominant functions are organized in networks. In consonance with the unequal network society that *Babel* represents, the centrality and superiority of Richard and Susan's narrative strand resides in its capacity to influence the other three due to its higher interconnectedness —roughly based on the number and nature of its links— and to its networking power, granting a good prospect for programming priorities and values. *Babel* supports the view that global forms of conflict, including the war on terrorism, pose profound challenges, given the potentiality of the global network society to become the site of conflict. The film defends the cosmopolitan need to interrogate the nation-state as the basic unit of political activity. Instead, *Babel* promotes more balanced, transnational political practices grounded on a cosmopolitan understanding of humanity at large.

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THE CRUELTY OF KIN: REJECTION AND ABJECTION IN REBECCA BROWN'S REPRESENTATIONS OF PARENT-CHILD RELATIONSHIPS

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1. Introduction

The work of the contemporary lesbian author Rebecca Brown can be read as a dramatization of the *chosen* nature of biological kinship ties —ties that are, in popular belief as in academic circles, still often considered "natural" and, therefore, dependable. The power of the idealization of a historical and natural biological kinship is apparent from the widespread "popular nostalgia for […] breadwinner-homemaker nuclear family life" (Stacey 1996: 9) or the "contemporary romanticization" of those "happy, homogenous families that we 'remember' from the 1950s" (Coontz 1992: 29, 31), which continue to shape people's expectations and hopes for family life. Such romanticized images wield an enormous influence, perhaps understandably so, given the vulnerability of many present-day family arrangements. Some theorists even believe "[i]t is through the families we live *by* that we achieve the transcendence that compensates for the families we live *with*" (John Gilles in Stacey 1996: 87). This idealized form of kinship is, of course, generally reproductive and heterosexual (thus also creating a default assumption of heterosexuality for the gay and lesbian children who grow up in these families and internalize their values). We should note here that Brown's fictional engagement with this topic has been influenced by her experiences "coming of age as a gay person in the late seventies and eighties" (personal interview). Her background

obviously differs from that of contemporary LGBT youth: at least in the West, recent times have seen a rise in public attention to gay marriage and reproduction. Brown acknowledges that the idea that "gay people are having families" is "more respected and seen by others" now (personal interview). Yet these recent developments should not be glorified or overestimated. Brown knows that "the idea of 'it's all easy now'" is particularly powerful in America and tends to obliterate continuing, shameful social injustices. Her observation is valid in the realm of kinship, where gays and lesbians are not always "respect[ed] as parents" while they are "actually doing some serious heavy lifting for the culture" (e.g. by adopting "AIDS babies"), but also in the cultural sphere. "Lesbian authors", for instance, "are out there, but it's like our culture hides them", Brown thinks (personal interview).

The type of kinship that continues to be idealized despite recent homopositive (or at least "homoneutral") attitudes is considered natural because it is seen as the result of the biological phenomenon of heterosexual procreation. At least since David Schneider, however, whose name is widely associated with the "death of kinship" in anthropology (Franklin and McKinnon 2001: 4), academic thinking on this topic has been forced to admit the circularity of such argumentations

> The notion of a "base in nature" creates a self-justifying and untestable definition of kinship: "kinship" as a sociocultural phenomenon is […] defined as entailing those "natural" or "biological" facts which it is at the same time said to be "rooted in" or "based on". (Schneider in Franklin and McKinnon 2001: 2)

By drawing out such circularity, Schneider has exposed kinship as an artificial construct of anthropologists eager to establish a universal standard for people's social organizations. In addition, queer theory has a history of problematizing kinship —think of Kath Weston's early intervention in these issues with *Families We Choose: Lesbians, Gays, Kinship* (1991). In the public imagination, though, an idealized version of the heterosexual family continues to reign supreme, still including assumptions about the naturalness and autonomy of, as well as people's emotional well-being in, the nuclear-family unit. Despite important shifts in mainstream acknowledgement of gay and lesbian families, biological kinship is still often thought to be "naturally given", as opposed to the chosen and, therefore, "pretended" families of gays and lesbians. Feminist philosopher Cheshire Calhoun, for instance, even notes that merely "protecting [queers] against hate crimes may be interpreted as dangerously close to attacking the family" (2000: 153). She points to the 1990 Hate Crime Statistics Act —modified only in 2009— that covers crimes committed because of the victim's sexual orientation. Meant to "encourage the well-being, financial security, and health of the American family", the Act nevertheless explicitly states that "[n]othing in this Act shall be construed,

nor shall any funds appropriated to carry out the purpose of the Act be used, to promote or encourage homosexuality" (in Calhoun 2000: 153).

People are supposed to lack choice as to the selection of relatives they (have to) relate to —you can choose your friends, but you can't choose your family, or so they say— which theoretically offers them a unique level of security. However, Brown's de-idealized or demythologized depictions of biological kinship serve to remind us of the fact that people have the choice to imaginatively construct, or refuse, biology as the groundwork for their intimate kin relationships. The homophobic parents she depicts, for instance, obviously feel free to denounce the "natural" bond mothers and fathers are believed to share with their own "flesh and blood". They deny their homosexual offspring the sanctuary from the harsh outside world a family home is supposed to provide. The institution of "home", in these cases, redoubling the shunning strategies of society at large, perpetuates the stigmatization of gays and lesbians, so that queer kids can find themselves subjected to homophobia almost everywhere they turn. Brown further contests the naturalness of biological kinship through horrifying descriptions of what is thought to be a natural female destiny, namely childbirth, and through portrayals of her mother characters' lack of attachment to their babies. Presenting children as abjects, Brown also steers clear of the passivity of the motherly "vessel" that is taken for granted in standard theoretical accounts of abjection, which inevitably relegate the *mother's* body to the realm of the abject.

When babies grow bigger in Brown's oeuvre, moreover, they frequently turn out to be veritable monsters, so that to love them involves enormous amounts of what Arlie Hochschild refers to as "emotion work" on the part of their poor mothers (1983: 7). Enlightenment thinkers like Jean-Jacques Rousseau have been a crucial influence in the process of investing kids with innocence and helplessness, but, according to sociologist Viviana A. Zelizer, in the American context the romanticization of childhood only came about between the late 1800s and the 1930s. Around the turn of the century, legal changes removed many children from the workplace and children were consequently endowed with sentimental (rather than monetary) value —a situation that further entailed "a cultural process of sacralization of children's lives" (Zelizer 1985: 11). The influence of the ensuing images of children's idealized "natural goodness" can be felt to the present day, as these notions are supposed to move adult (political) decision makers into creating a safe future world "for our children", even if in reality this often amounts to an excuse for defending reactionary measures. The safeguarding of the future rights of this ideal child citizen generally happens at the expense of the protection or even the creation of rights for present homosexual (or other non-heteronormative) citizens, whose "sterile" sexuality is supposed to signal the end of futurity, and

whose company is deemed dangerous and damaging for the vulnerable child that is growing up. In her writings, Brown will be seen to oppose this ideology, which Lee Edelman has termed "reproductive futurism" (2004: 2), by radically embracing an incompatibility of homosexuals and children. Portraying the latter as monsters, she divests the dogmatic machinery of reproductive futurism (as well as the political agents appealing to it) of the beneficiary it so desperately needs to remain operative: the innocent child-saint.

The image of the monster that has appeared in the previous paragraphs is significant, in that it is still part and parcel of the way lesbians are presented for instance in popular horror films and fictions, which build on more general societal and cultural clichés about the lesbian as performing "the role of the breaker of social and sexual taboos that is conventionally assigned to the monster" (Palmer 1999: 13). The monstrous has therefore frequently been appropriated in "lesbian/feminist revision[s]" as "a signifier of female power" (101). Think, for instance, of eccentric figures like Winterson's Dog-Woman in *Sexing the Cherry* or Villanelle in *The Passion* —even though the latter's monstrosity is quite subtle, residing as it does in the secret of her webbed feet. At times Brown, like Winterson in *Sexing the Cherry*, focuses on the "monstrous […] produced at the border between human and inhuman" (Creed 1994: 11). For instance in *The Dogs* (1998), the anonymous female narrator gives birth to a puppy and shares her bed with a certain "Miss Dog". Yet Brown also extends the realm of the lesbian monstrous when she portrays her women-loving heroines as having "monstrous kids" (Brown 1998: 89).

The demonization of kids is not radically new; in a 1986 book chapter titled "The American Nightmare", Robin Wood drew on Marcuse to theorize the vilification of children in the American horror film of the seventies as an aftereffect of the "surplus repression" required to turn all citizens "into monogamous heterosexual bourgeois patriarchal capitalists" (71), as befits members of "a society built on monogamy and the family" (80). Yet Brown's evocation of this theme in her fiction does assume heightened importance in the contemporary context of homonormalization. This ideology, which is promoted in assimilationist gay subcultures, promises inclusion into the mainstream to those who do not stray too far from the ordinary, such as monogamous same-sex couples or —as we will see in the theories of Corinne Hayden and Gillian Dunne— gender-conforming lesbians who opt for biological motherhood. Brown herself has named "the assimilationist stuff" one of the most disappointing aspects of contemporary queer culture, emphasizing that "[w]e aren't all exactly alike". "I don't like the taming of queer culture", she goes on to add. "Why don't we get a little bit more out there maybe?" (Mickelson 2009).

Before, however, exploring my claims about Brown's representations of parent-child relationships at greater length, I should probably devote a brief paragraph to introducing this lesser-known writer to unfamiliar readers. Rebecca Brown (1956 –) is a lesbian author, based in Seattle, whose oeuvre comprises a dozen works of a wide generic diversity: with *The Dogs* she has written "A Modern Bestiary"; for *Woman in Ill-Fitting Wig* (2005) she chose the format of prose poems and collaborated with the painter Nancy Kiefer; and her most recent work, *American Romances* (2009), consists of a variety of (fictional) essays. Brown is most famous for her autobiographically inspired and emotionally intense novel-in-stories *The Gifts of the Body* (1994), narrated by a homecare worker assisting people with AIDS, which earned her several awards, including a Lambda Literary Award. Note, finally, that the author whose work I am discussing here is not to be confused with the Rebecca Brown who is a homophobic religious conservative writer of books on topics such as Satanism.

2. Familial homophobia

Brown is very much aware of the recurrent societal idealization of the family, typically understood as a middle-class, intact nuclear unit consisting of a husband (a biologically male breadwinner) and a wife (a biologically female, economically dependent homemaker and childrearer), who are legally married and who have dependent children, approximately two, and an obligatory pet —a unit of loving and caring relationships that naturally shelters its members and provides them with emotional and physical comfort. Brown reveals how this "ideological code" (Bernstein and Reimann 2001: 3), embedded legally and socially in a plethora of institutions, as well as psychologically in most people's minds, is especially hard to escape. Throughout her oeuvre, she engages with the concept of "family mythology", which can be defined as

> […] an image to live up to, an image shaping the desire of the individual living in a social group. This myth or image —whatever its content may be for a specific group— dominates lived reality, even though it can exist in conflict with it and can be ruled by different interests. (Hirsch 1997: 8)

One of many examples is to be found in *The Haunted House* ([1986] 2007), Brown's novel exploring the continual impact of a traumatic past on a lesbian woman's life, in which the narrator Robin is given to fantasizing about perfect kin in a "comfortable old family home", while her own familial situation is far less idyllic. In Robin's dreams, her "handsome, confident young brother, now at State U, beams with pride and tells the American TV public he wants to be a doctor". Her mother, predictably dressed in a "blue-checked dress and apron", is performing

her wifely duties, so their cozy home is enveloped in the "smell [of] the just-baked freshness of the apple pie Mom has cooling on the kitchen windowsill". The narrator's father, in turn, is a proud "middle-American, all-American Pop". In reality, however, her soon-to-be-divorced parents always "ignore one another completely" (Brown 2007: 18), her dad spending his days on the couch with "his sweaty glass of whiskey" (20). Here the biological family is exposed as a unit that is far from perfect, while its continual attraction (the narrator's idea that "Every family wants to be like us" [19] is part and parcel of her fantasy) threatens to stigmatize those unable to live up to it.

Moreover, the biological family unit, as the locus of a child's social identity formation, generally presents heterosexuality as the only available relational option, which makes the family just another one of those institutions directly involved with underwriting "the heterosexual assumption", the "all-embracing […] presumption in favour of heterosexuality" (Weeks et al. 2001: 41). *The Haunted House* once more provides us with a striking example of the performative and discursive workings of heteronormativity, also allowing us to throw light on the processes of (heterosexual) identity development which begin as soon as children are born into their nuclear families. First, it is important to point out the essential vulnerability of these small children who are immediately heterosexualized: the narrator's mother enumerates the caring activities she performed when Robin and her brother were still very young and, consequently, helpless. Childcare is, tellingly, a maternal activity in *The Haunted House*.

> I made you little mittens so you couldn't scratch yourself in your sleep. I watched you sleep. I sat in a chair next to your beds and waited for you to turn and kick the covers. I pulled the blankets over you again. I held your head when you were sick. I woke up when you wanted a glass of water. I held your sweet warm head when you drank. (Brown 2007: 144)

In addition to being highly vulnerable, children have particular desires that function as "key forces in shaping identity" (Howard 2000: 385); to stick to *The Haunted House*, Robin's mother discusses her children's "tug of need and love, the brutal love of need" (Brown 2007: 145). Judith Howard, drawing on Lauren Langman, mentions a few such needs, like wanting "to seek attachments to others; the pursuit of recognition and dignity", and "avoiding fear and anxiety" (2000: 385). These guarantee the creation of proper citizens: combined with the relative powerlessness characterizing infancy, desires for closeness and the avoidance of anxiety make children amenable to "the moulding of cultural prompting" (Jamieson 1998: 119) or the assumption of a proper identity. This ensues via socialization, "the transmission of behavior, roles, attitudes and beliefs to the next generation [by] direct prescription, by example and by implicit expectation"

(Weinreich 1978: 18). Norbert Elias' concept of "habitus" is relevant here: as Jeffrey Weeks helpfully explains, it refers to those "aspects of a personality that are not inherent or innate, but are acquired in the course of development: the thinking, feeling and believing that are learnt from early childhood, so that they become ingrained as a second nature" (2011: 77). Assuming an identity, then, takes place through an internalization of societal values and norms as passed on to the child by the significant others it identifies with. Weeks, Brian Heaphy, and Catherine Donovan aptly summarize the matter as follows:

> […] the private arenas of early home and family life have a key role to play in informing individuals with a sense of what are appropriate and inappropriate ways of being. First home is a strategic space where habits are learned and values instilled. […] [F]amily and home are likely to follow modes of operation that are structured in line with particular social and cultural values. (2001: 79)

Such values, which children absorb and, as a result, apply "naturally" (which is to say, unthinkingly), reproduce the social structure to which they belong and thereby may come to seem "primordial" principles (Todd 2005: 433). Many of Brown's narratives, by contrast, expose such seemingly natural givens as social constructs.

One of the most striking sets of behaviors to be internalized as a "natural given" is that of heterosexuality. The fact that identity formation in the family traditionally supposes a heterosexual outcome is exemplified by the likelihood of readers being surprised when, in *The Haunted House*, it turns out that Robin comes home not with a boyfriend but with a girl instead. Her alcoholic father teaches "Robbie" how to mix drinks, remarking that, "until [her] boyfriends grow up", she will need "Coke for rum and Coke" rather than serving rum straight (Brown 2007: 43). Like the narrator's father, then, many readers at this point will assume Robin to be "straight", yet after two pages (which cover several years of the narrator's life), they learn the error of this assumption: "I'm visiting friends from college whom I haven't seen in years. We joke, we tell my lover Carrie that we all met 'in the trenches'" (45). Readers —especially if they happen to be themselves heterosexual— quickly realize that they, like Robin's father, had expected her to get a boyfriend, which reveals how frequently socialization equals heterosexualization, and how the standard family predominantly functions as "a site where normalizing rules of gender and sexual conduct and performance are taught on a daily basis" (Cantú 2001: 113). As Hayden rightly concludes, "heterosexuality, gender, and kinship are mutually constituted" (1995: 43).

Yet Brown not only takes issue with the default assumption of heterosexuality in heteronormative family life; her oeuvre also devotes repeated attention to the painful severance that can occur when this assumption is disrupted in the act of coming out in "the family unit", which Palmer describes as a regular site of

concealment or discrimination for gays and lesbians (1999: 11). One of Brown's former colleagues at the Master of Fine Arts Program in Creative Writing at Goddard College (Vermont), the lesbian novelist and playwright Sarah Schulman, claims that "disapproval by a member of the family in some way or another" is the sole experience most homosexuals have in common. Yet, she maintains, it is "least spoken about", because it is so painful (De Moor and Gydé 2002: 35; my translation). Familial homophobia continues to be, indeed, "one of our ugliest social secrets" (Walters 2001: 354). Brown agrees that aversion towards homosexuality within the family is "little documented in literature, especially when compared to themes such as coming-out and AIDS". She notes that Jeanette Winterson's *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit* and Rita Mae Brown's *Rubyfruit Jungle*, two of the most successful and best-selling lesbian novels from the 1970s and 1980s, were remarkable writings on being cast out by your own family. "However, both books are comedies, and this subject has not been given similar treatment as a tragedy in our literature", she adds (De Moor and Gydé 2002: 35; my translation). With a fair share of her own work, Brown can be said to attempt to fill part of this gap, and to demonstrate how the family is often a loaded concept, and a loath-laden place, for gays and lesbians. In *The Gifts of the Body*, for instance, one of the nameless narrator's clients, an elderly woman, recounts how her husband John was unable to come to terms with their son Joe's homosexuality and how, when John died, "[t]here were things left unresolved. He hadn't seen Joe in ages. And he'd only met Tony [i.e. Joe's lover] that once" (Brown 1994: 158). Homophobia clearly impeded the full acceptance of Joe as a family member; his father refused to speak to him after Joe's love relationship with Tony made his homosexuality an undeniable reality.

In one of Brown's latest stories, "The Music Teacher" (2010) (online publication only, at the Richard Hugo House website), which revolves around a gay teacher's inability to come out and the importance of his example for the lesbian narrator and her school mate Sam, the latter's parents even send their son to the military academy because of his homosexuality. Rumor has it that "he had gotten into some horrible kind of trouble" and that he is "a huge disappointment […] to his family". "Sam was also their only son, which made it even worse", as the narrator paraphrases popular opinion (Brown 2010). Such exclusions from the family as Sam experiences clearly challenge what Schulman calls the "private/public dichotomy on which society's safety net depends". Queers frequently slip through this net which expects the family to shelter an individual whom the larger community treats cruelly, and which expects society, in turn, to be a person's refuge from possible familial abuse. Towards gay boys like Sam, though, both "the family and the larger society enact the identical structures of exclusion and diminishment", so "the individual has no place of escape" (Schulman 2009: 14).

The chances of the larger community protecting Sam from his family —influential "Texas royalty", to make matters worse— are very slim indeed (Brown 2010).

Such negative parental responses to the disclosure or discovery of a child's homosexuality are likely to mentally damage her or him. One of the more influential gay theorists, David Halperin, judiciously warns us about using the term "internalized homophobia" too readily, because it may amount to an excuse for continuing to associate homosexuals with "psychopathology", and because attention to homosexuals' self-hatred risks shifting the focus away from heterosexuals' homo-hatred (2007: 35-36). Nevertheless, the psychologically damaging effects when gays and lesbians internalize their environments' negative views of their sexuality cannot be glossed over either. "Aspects of the Novel", an essay in which Brown creatively engages with E.M. Forster's work of the same title, demonstrates that we should not be too quick to dismiss internalized homophobia as merely one of those "pop-psychological clichés" (Halperin 2007: 43). The narrator of this story from Brown's 2006 collection *The Last Time I Saw You* seems to have incorporated the familial homophobia she probably encountered throughout her youth when she says:

> *Maybe some of us do not deserve to breathe. But also aren't worth, as my mother used to say, "the dynamite it would take to blow you up".*
>
> *NB: I do not wish to suggest that any of this was in any way at all her (my mother's) fault. My mother was a very good human being* […]. *I don't know where in Jesus' name I ever came from. She didn't deserve what happened.* (Brown 2006: 70)

Blaming family members for having "caused" an individual's homosexuality — usually through inappropriate upbringing— is a common phenomenon, as becomes painfully clear to the narrator of "Aspects of the Novel", whose mother was apparently faulted for her daughter's lesbianism. Weston acknowledges how homophobes who blame relatives for a lesbian woman's or a gay man's sexuality continue to deny adulthood or maturity to this person by acting as if they were still in command of her or his "self-definition". Such aetiological scenarios for a person's homosexuality, often inspired and supported by decades of American popularized strands of psychoanalysis, exert a continual attraction for homophobes who believe that "the power to do implies the power to undo" (Weston 1991: 70).

Even those parents in Brown's oeuvre who are somewhat more tolerant of their child's homosexuality still tend to *reconfirm* the kinship bond they have with their lesbian daughter or gay son, rather than to assume its natural continuation after she or he comes out to them. Weston detects a "specter of terminability of kinship ties in the very of act of affirming a solidarity that endures" in exclamations like "You're still my son! You're still my daughter! I still love you!" (1995: 96). Such striking disavowals-in-affirmations occur also in "A Good Man", Brown's moving

AIDS narrative from the 1993 short story collection *Annie Oakley's Girl* which focuses on the anonymous lesbian narrator's close bond with her friend Jim. After the latter's death of AIDS, Jim's father says, "There were things about Jim it took us a long time to understand, *but* he was a good son" (Brown 1993: 134; my italics). Symptomatically, moreover, despite the acceptance his parents eventually displayed, Jim's friends want to get to his apartment before his mother and father do, "in case there's anything we need to 'straighten up'". The narrator adds that they do not "expect to find anything shocking", but still she thinks that "if we were to run across something, even a magazine or a poster, it might be nicer if the Carlsons didn't see it" (138). Katrien De Moor calls the practice of "straightening up" a "commonplace post-mortem care gesture" that recurs in many AIDS narratives. The verb refers to straightforward cleaning up as well as "straightening" in the sense of removing "'explicit' gay signals" so as not to upset heterosexual parents (De Moor 2004: 89). Thus Brown reveals that, even when the relationship between gay sons or lesbian daughters and their parents is reasonably sound, it does not therefore measure up to the familial contact these parents (would) maintain with heterosexual offspring. Schulman shrewdly detects a "coping mechanism" in homosexuals' pretense that their families are "fine". She explains that, "when you ask for details, this means, basically, that the gay person has not been completely excluded from family events. Or that their partner, if they have one, is allowed in the house". Even if such acts do not bespeak explicit homophobia, the fact remains that few homosexuals have the feeling that "their personhood, lives, and feelings" are as valuable as those of heterosexual family members. But because many gays and lesbians know of others whose families are much more prejudiced —just as Jim is among the more fortunate in Brown's work— they often deem themselves, with their "continued compromised inclusion" in their biological families, unbelievably lucky (Schulman 2009: 19). This is why Weston calls familial "acceptance" a "residual category" that covers every stance lying between reluctant tolerance of, and affirmative pride in, a relative's homosexuality (1991: 62).

Brown's literary depictions of the disruptions of biological kinship ties due to a daughter's or a son's homosexuality are thus crucial as well as socially valuable both in view of the taboo that still surrounds familial homophobia and given the fact that, in Schulman's words, "how gays and lesbians are treated IN families is far more influential on the quality of individual lives and the larger social order than how we are treated AS families" (2009: 1). Such representations help to show, furthermore, how biological kinship is by no means "natural" or, to put it somewhat differently, how sharing biogenetic material does not automatically create a bond worthy of the term "kinship". Coming out to relatives proves to be a test for the unqualified love and continuing affection that is supposed to typify

biological kin relations, because, even when a break does not in fact ensue, the fear that it *might very well have* is shared by almost all gays and lesbians. Regardless of "the outcome of disclosure", they share a "recognition of the potential for the termination of ostensibly indissoluble ties" (Weston 1995: 96). For homosexuals, many of whom at least *consider* coming out, the unconditional love that is stereotypically perceived to characterize and symbolize biological kinship loses much of its "unconditional" or "naturally given" quality. Straight relatives, in turn, may equally be disowned by their families, yet such a rejection typically happens in individual cases —as a reaction to particular acts— rather than on the basis of something as essential to a person's identity as their sexuality and gender.

Because for gays and lesbians (be they out to their relatives or not), rejection is a danger that lurks beneath the surface of every family gathering, homosexuals understandably have been among those to call attention most frequently to the element of "choice" that is at the heart of kinship ties routinely supposed to be grounded on the undeniable facts of nature and biology. With Weston, we may conclude that

> In the specific context of coming out, blood ties may be reduced conceptually to mere material substance with little bearing on future kinship, making the enduring quality of kin ties something to be established in practice through verbal affirmations and signs of love. The drama and emotional anticipation hinges on the unresolved issue of whether solidarity will endure as the familial character of a tie comes into question. (1991: 77-8)

3. Representations of children. Childbirths and newborn babies: Scenes of ultimate abjection

In addition to pointing up the chosen nature of biological kinship by means of portrayals of familial homophobia, Brown's work repeatedly dissolves the supposed naturalness of family relationships through grotesque representations of childbirth (typically regarded as a woman's "natural calling"), after which her lesbian mother characters are frequently seen to lack the love for their newborn babies that is just as stereotypically thought to come spontaneously. Instead of the "natural development from gendered womanhood to pregnancy and motherhood" that ostensibly constitutes "female fulfillment" (Berlant 1997: 99), Brown's oeuvre presents readers with descriptions that are closer to the horror movie genre, as *The Dogs* makes eloquently clear. Offering its readers "dog births" rather than childbirths, Brown's "modern bestiary" turns scenes of childbearing into monstrous spectacles; as Creed has convincingly argued, the monstrous typically "signifies the boundary between the human and the non-human", in this case, the

dog (1993: 5). *The Dogs* is alternately realistic and fantastic, featuring dogs that are sometimes actually present and at other times probably imagined by the narrator, who fears she is losing her mind.[1] When the narrator's pet, Miss Dog, gives birth to her puppies, the narrator's entire apartment

> smells horrible. Like blood and sweat and shit. […] At first I can barely make [her] out but then horribly, awfully, I do. Miss Dog is on the bed. [...] The sheets are bloody and black around her. Her belly's up, her legs are spread, and there in the hole between them, is a head. I try to blink the sight away but I can't. Miss Dog is writhing. […] Her teeth are bared and gnashing and drool's dripping out and she's making horrible rumbling noises like the girl in *The Exorcist*. […] Her body is wracked like she is deformed, like her insides are coming out. (Brown 1998: 53-55)

A little later, the narrator herself has to endure a similar "exorcism" but, conspicuously, she gives birth to a dog *and* she does this via her mouth, where "it hurts like crazy" (58). Brown thus once again demythologizes and defamiliarizes the biological in her work, occupying it in clearly fantastic ways here.

Rosemary Jackson calls attention to the fact that fantasy is not "inherently transgressive", but she avows that its "subversive function" can be uncovered when we go beyond a "merely *thematic*" to a "*structuralist*" reading of fantasy. Thus the fantastic can become "an art of estrangement" which directs "attention to the relative nature of the […] categories [by which we organize experience]" and which "moves towards a dismantling of the real" (1981: 175). These traits pertain to the fantastical as it is put to use by a writer like Brown, who once described her task as an author as follows: "You want to make art, you need to make art because of some basic discontent or discomfort with the world. You need to reimagine or refashion a world that is an alternative to or a respite from the awful one you inhabit" (Stadler 1999: 7-8). Judith Butler's theorizations of the fantastic are appropriate in this context too. She argues that fantasy, which is not "equated with what is not real, but rather with what is not *yet* real, what is possible or futural", has the vital "task of (re)thinking futurity" (1990: 105). She adds that what fits "the description of the real" is actually "contingent, contrived" (106) so that the "failure of the mimetic function", for instance in fanciful works like *The Dogs*, "has its own political uses" (1993: 10). Biological "kinship" in Brown's bestiary is obviously artificial rather than natural, and the dystopian quality of the reality thus created is clearly heightened and, thereby, widely revealed.

Moreover, giving birth quite literally becomes an animalistic act in *The Dogs*. Brown's excessive, Rabelaisian images of the body in labor are "grotesque", to evoke Mikhail Bakhtin's term for representations characterized by an emphasis on "the body as a whole and o[n] the limits of this whole" (1984: 315) through a preoccupation with "that which protrudes from the body" (316), "that which

leads […] into the body's depths" (318), or that which is associated with "inner life" and emergence from the body (such as "defecation", "pregnancy, childbirth" [320-321]):

> […] there's this incredible pain in my throat, like ripping apart, like I'm on fire then I hear this rumbling low inside me, then I'm sputtering and gagging […]. There's a scrape like a rake and this thing prods up to the top of my throat. I shove in my fist to keep it down. […] I feel it tearing up through me and it heaves itself up and out like a concrete vomit projectile. I choke and gag. […] My lips and cheeks have stretched apart and my skin is ripped. There's blood everywhere. […] I see a long black dripping stick sticking out of my mouth. […] My insides push and my bloody broken throat and mouth are stretched again and there's another paw and I pull and it squeezes out in a pool of muck. (Brown 1998: 57-59)

After this horrifying experience, the narrator calls her body "[t]he place from whence the waste, the nothing came" (59), which already more than hints at her negative attitude towards her infant offspring.

Brown indeed violates a taboo by having the narrator turn away from her "baby", despite its look of "pure, adoring love". When her offspring searches for its mother's body, she pushes it away to "see it tremble, newly cold" (Brown 1998: 59). This shocking gesture stems from the fact that she deems the infant a punishment, as is also suggested by the title of the chapter recounting its horrible birth, "HOLE: in which is illustrated Justice". Both Miss Dog and the narrator feel they are transformed into mere receptacles through their pregnancies and childbirths; the narrator even refers to her companion animal as a "vessel" (56). The view that having children may turn women —or female dogs, for that matter— into cogs in a (procreative) machine is taken up again in *The Last Time I Saw You*. The narrator of the latter collection metafictionally refers to *The Dogs* after saying "doggedly", by means of a casual aside: "Hey! there's a little in-joke there for any old reader friend who may still be with me". Though not explicitly in the context of pregnancy, the narrator there does compare her younger self to a "possessable passive vessel" (Brown 2006: 28). With such imagery, Brown may be referring to the classic view of women as passive receptacles that can be traced back all the way to Plato. Butler summarizes Plato's "received notions" (1999: 53) on the subject as follows:

> *This receptacle* […] *is not a metaphor based on likeness to a human form, but a disfiguration that emerges at the boundaries of the human both as its very condition and as the insistent threat of its deformation; it cannot take a form, a morphe, and in that sense, it cannot be a body.* (1993: 41)

Such images install the feminine as the prerequisite for human procreation while simultaneously *excluding* it from the human as such, as well as from active

participation in the formation of the beings who are then merely "produced through it", so to speak (Brown 1993: 42). Despite the obvious fact that both men and women contribute equally to their offspring's biogenetic structure, ideas of activity and "biological creativity" historically and ideologically remain bound up with the male input in procreation, so that the theory of female receptivity — and thus, a "symbolic asymmetry" in ideas of reproduction— persists (Hayden 1995: 51). Rather than "a femininity that makes a contribution to reproduction", Butler summarizes, "we have a phallic Form that reproduces only and always further versions of itself, and does this through the feminine, but with no assistance from her" (1993: 42).

As a result of such patriarchal thinking, the feminine is permanently excluded from oppositions like "form" versus "matter": as Butler paraphrases Plato's view, a woman "will neither be the one nor the other, but the permanent and unchangeable condition of both" (1993: 42). This view of the maternal bears an interesting resemblance to Butler's definition of the abject, that prerequisite for the subject which is nevertheless denied a position in the opposition between subject and object. Abjects are "those who do not enjoy the status of the subject, but whose living under the sign of the 'unlivable' is required to circumscribe the domain of the subject" (Butler 1993: 3). When Julia Kristeva developed the concept of abjection in *Powers of Horror*, she defined it as "the impossible [that] constitutes its [i.e. the subject's] very *being*" (1982: 5). So for her, too, abjects "threaten *at the same time* that they constitute the self's proper borders" (Keltner 2011: 44). Unsurprisingly, then, the maternal body is explicitly located in the realm of the abject in Kristeva's theory, where (one type of) abjection is specifically "understood as an expulsion or rejection of the mother". It is a method used by the child —which, before its entry into language, is fused with its mother and therefore sees her as a part of itself— to ensure the necessary differentiation from its mother. Abjection creates "a border that must be established for a subject or ego to emerge" (Barrett 2011: 70). The growth of the ego, from this perspective, consists of

> the development of "healthy" narcissism that permits love of the m/other as separate from the self; in other words it establishes social relations and social bonding while *at the same time* accommodating the immediate identification that occurred prior to object loss. This is made possible by an anterior process of expulsion of the archaic mother (the thing or the abject). (Barrett 2011: 73)

Another way of formulating this is that the child has to pursue a "struggle against what, having been the mother, will turn into an abject" (Kristeva 1982: 13). To conclude with Kristeva, the "maternal space can come into being […] only as an *abject*" (1986: 257).

Such psychoanalytically driven accounts that "make the maternal *vessel* coalesce with the abject" (Beardsworth 2004: 92; my italics) frequently limit themselves, however, to the perspective of the child, the central character that has to struggle against a fusion with its "container", the mother. The latter's standpoint is not commonly considered, and her function is thereby reduced to that of the supposed vessel from which the child must free itself. She is, to invoke Kristeva once again, the child's "natural mansion" (1982: 13). I would argue that Brown's oeuvre interestingly avoids the resulting diminishment and passivity of the mother figure by turning the tables and portraying the newborn child, rather than the maternal body, as abject. Thus Brown can be said to translate the image of an infant as "an extension of [the] self", as some mothers see their children (Skolnick 1973: 65), into the terms of abjection normally reserved for the mother. When we seek to apply Kristeva's own account of abject material substances like feces or menstrual blood to the baby as it is perceived by Brown's average mother character, we start to understand that the figure of the baby is something —neither subject nor object— that the mother violently ejects but can never entirely cast out because it is so much part of her. Kristeva calls the abject "something rejected from which one does not part" (1982: 2). It is something of the mother's own —"My flesh and blood", is the narrator's clichéd way of putting it (Brown 1998: 59)— that she deems dirty and disgusting, and for which she feels distaste, horror, and "revolt" (Kristeva 1982: 45). The narrator of *The Dogs* is typical in that she turns away from her baby, which she regards as "waste" (Brown 1998: 59).

Kristeva stresses that abjection refers not only to that which is unclean: "filth is not a quality in itself, but applies only to what relates to a *boundary*" (1982: 69). Abjection is, above all, what "disturbs identity" or what "does not respect borders" (Kristeva 1982: 4), in the sense that the boundary between self and abject is continually threatened. As a result, abjection carries two basic significations. In its positive sense, which often speaks from theorizations that consider the child's point of view and see the mother as abject, abjection is precisely what allows an ego to emerge through a process that establishes the necessary borders between mother and child —here, processes of abjection are what Kristeva calls "safeguards" (1982: 2). Brown, however, works with the more negative implication that the rejection of the repulsive abject (in her case, the infant) can never be complete and that "abjection emerges when the borders between subject and [abject] are threatened or break down" (Keltner 2011: 45). To transpose this once more to the relationship between Brown's mothers and their babies, as depicted in *The Dogs*, for instance, the former are at risk of being reduced to mere "vessel[s]" that bore the latter and are afraid of never being able to "get away" from their progeny (Brown 1998: 56, 74) —her oeuvre presents women, and bitches, who are "drain[ed]" by their offspring (56). So, whereas Kristeva analyzes "the subject's fear of his very own

identity sinking irretrievably into the mother" (1982: 64), Brown repeatedly shows how the latter's identity is equally in jeopardy.

4. "When Children Are Monsters": Opposing reproductive futurism

While the newborn babies Brown portrays are often abjects that their mothers seek to eject and are disgusted by, children's repulsive qualities seem only to increase along with their age in Brown's writings, as the toddlers and small children she portrays frequently turn out to be horrible. Brown explores what happens "when children are monsters", as she entitled her review of Doris Lessing's *Ben, in the World* for the Seattle newspaper *The Stranger*. It is, for instance, telling that the lesbian narrator of *The Dogs*, metafictionally working on a setting for her tale, invents children to create a cheerful atmosphere, yet does not want them anywhere near: "far enough away so I don't have to see or talk to them, I hear the delightful shouts and cries and yips of little children". She adds that surely "[e]very one of them" must be "an angel" (Brown 1998: 52). Readers cannot fail to hear the sarcasm in the last remark, especially given the narrator's experiences with her own "monstrous kids" (89). They devour her when she cannot offer them food (62) and they "bite till they drew blood" (74). In this they resemble the female narrator's kids in *The Children's Crusade* (1989), Brown's earlier book that relates the acrimonious divorce of the narrator's parents: "the monstrous little shits have cleaned us out. Of our hearts and our homes and our lives and both our cheque books", the narrator laments (Brown 1989: 115). She knows her children's "greedy mouths, their sucking lips, their sticky hands they rub in anticipation" all too well (112), yet nobody else sees them as they are or notices, as the narrator puts it, "the dripping shit the children shit" (116).

Here, Arlie Hochschild's notion of "emotion work" provides us with a useful tool for uncovering the effort that is required to make a family work —or, as is the case in *The Children's Crusade* and *The Dogs*, the energy that is wasted on unsuccessfully trying to make a family "work". Far from being a spontaneously loving and natural bond, the family is a demanding unit that entails an enormous amount of what we might call "construction work". A variety of (difficult and demanding) expressive activities fall under the umbrella of "emotion work", like establishing or developing relationships, mending them after quarrels, recognizing, anticipating, and empathizing with the feelings of others, comforting and trying to understand them. Throughout, such labor is combined with the "morally compelling demands to share, give up, or exchange", with the work involved in the "invariably precarious transformation of duty into authentic emotional motivation", as well as with the

possibility of experiencing a demoralizing difference between expectations and reality (Peletz 2001: 434). Hochschild explains how "the subterranean work of placing an acceptable inner face on ambivalence is actually all the more crucial [in the family]" (1983: 68), where for example "parental love […] is so important to security and sometimes so difficult to sustain" (69). The mother role indeed involves an unbearable amount of "emotion work" for the narrators of *The Dogs* and *The Children's Crusade*. It is safe to say that many of Brown's mother characters, as in the latter novel, suffer emotionally and materially, robbed of their "hearts", "homes", and "cheque books" (Brown 1989: 115).

Brown's narrators not only suffer at the hands of their kids; sometimes they themselves become children who are far from innocent or sweet. For instance, Robin, the adolescent narrator of *The Haunted House* we have already met, miraculously transforms into a drooling six-year-old when her mother does not show up at the airport after Robin's yearlong trip to Italy. The servant her mom eventually sends to pick Robin up sees a little girl who is, like "Shirley Temple", "just too adorable for words". But Brown immediately disrupts the illusion of purity and lovability usually haloing children —or, in Edelman's words, "the sacralization of childhood" (2004: 121)— by having the narrator "snap": "Forcrissake, it took you long enough", and "snarl": "Cut the crap buddy, […] just offer me a piece of candy and I'll get in your car with you" (Brown 1986: 94-95). Robin's initial "cuteness", like that of most of Brown's child characters, was undoubtedly "studied" rather than genuine (50). Edelman extends this observation to children in general, asserting that they are well-versed in "the ideological labor of cuteness" (2004: 137).

Even though children may "look like child saints, not the nasty knee-high hoods they are" (as the narrator from *The Children's Crusade* discovers [Brown 1989: 115]), and even though people think "the voices of the children [are] full of hope, the bright sounds of the future, and so forth" (to cite the narrator of Brown's fictionalized autobiography *The End of Youth* [2003: 117]) her oeuvre repeatedly exposes these clichés as mere illusions. Moreover, the "national anthem" evoked in Brown's quotes —"that children are our future" (Edelman 2004: 143)— is frequently used to diminish queers, who are still often figured as non-procreative and thus regarded as a threat to the future of family and nation characteristically embodied by the icon of the vulnerable child. Butler's observation on "the deathlike quality of those loves for which there is no viable and livable place in culture" is thus valid in more than one sense (2000: 24) —although it should be kept in mind that, while her assertion is compelling in the context of Brown's work, this claim is not automatically equally legitimate everywhere today, given the visibility and (at least partial) acceptance of gay

and lesbian marriage and reproduction in many Western contexts. Heterosexuals —or, as the narrator of "A Good Man" tellingly labels them in *Annie Oakley's Girl*: "breeder[s]" (Brown 1993: 110)— are still frequently valued because they supposedly carry the sole responsibility for a better future. Following this line of thought, they alone are capable of perpetuating the human race by obeying the "logic of reproductive temporality" (Halberstam 2005: 4). Brown invokes the familiar opposition between life-giving heterosexuality and "barren" homosexuality in "Nancy Booth, Wherever You Are", a story from *The End of Youth* that recounts the young narrator's love for one of her counselors at girl scout camp. The narrator characterizes her straight girl scout leaders as "long-haired counselors who were going to have kids" (Brown 2003: 40) and contrasts them with the butch staff members who "would never, as far as anyone could imagine, have babies of their own" and whom she therefore envisions as "women without families" (38).

In scenarios created in the popular mind, such as those voiced by the narrator of "Nancy Booth", gays and lesbians simply do not have babies —"straight is to gay as family is to no family", Dennis Altman famously asserted (1979: 47). Hence homophobic statements like François Abadie's, the ex-mayor of Lourdes who notoriously expressed his disgust at "the gravediggers of society, those who care nothing [for] the future: homosexuals" (in Edelman 2004: 74). Such claims have led Edelman to the astute observation that "the queer comes to figure the bar to every realization of futurity" (2004: 4) and, thus, to stand for the "destructor" of the child. As a result of this attitude, anxiety about the future of children frequently forestalls more tolerance for queers. Lauren Berlant considers the fantasies of the world people think they are creating for their offspring, or for future children in general, extremely compelling motivations for their actions (1997: 261). Because kids are usually —though obviously not in Brown's oeuvre— constructed as "innocent of knowledge, agency, and accountability", they are invested with "ethical claims on the adult political agents" and often provide these agents with an excuse for reactionary measures (Berlant 1997: 6). Unable to speak for themselves, children become "the representative's fondest dream" (Haraway 1992: 311). Berlant imputes American "reactionary culture" to the fact that the country's inhabitants invest all their efforts in "a future American, both incipient and pre-historical": the American child (1997: 6). The protection of the future rights of this ideal citizen comes at the cost, arguably, of the installation or safeguarding of the present-day rights of a number of flesh-and-blood (gay and lesbian) citizens.

The idea of the saintly child as our hope for the future to which everything has to be sacrificed in an ever-deferred futurity is an ideology that Joshua Gamson evokes

by means of his "'what about the children?' mantra" (2001: 80), and that Edelman has described in these terms:

> […] the image of the Child invariably shapes the logic within which the political itself must be thought. That logic compels us […] to submit to the framing of political debate […] as defined by [the terms of] reproductive futurism: terms that impose an ideological limit on political discourse as such, preserving in the process the absolute privilege of heteronormativity by rendering unthinkable […] the possibility of a queer resistance to this organizing principle of communal relations. (2004: 2)

This view of "the Child as the preeminent emblem of the motivating end" and "the telos of the social order" (Edelman 2004: 13, 11), even in a secularized society, is exactly what Brown appears to be opposing through her representations of monstrous kids. I would argue that in much of her work she refuses to waste precious energy and self-esteem in trying to prove how child-friendly homosexuals are, as Schulman thinks many gays and lesbians have been in the habit of doing, "[e]ven to the point of feeling that [they] have to have children to be fully human, or to be treated as fully human by [their] family and government" (2009: 7). The theories of Hayden or Dunne, who applaud the fact that lesbian mothers are considered *mothers* rather than lesbians, can be seen as prime examples of this assimilationist approach: Hayden promotes "biological motherhood [to] re-naturalize a lesbian's womanhood" (1995: 55), while Dunne trusts that "the presence of children helps make intelligible a lifestyle that can appear strange and 'other' to heterosexual observers" (2000: 31). Thus these theories threaten to turn the *freedom* and *choice* of lesbian women —to have kids, in this case— into instruments in the service of (homo)normality or normativity, rather than deploying these concepts as the means with which to question or oppose such ideological regimes.

Brown's work can be said to counter possibly futile or re-excluding strategies like having children to gain mainstream tolerance, which, for obvious reasons, still does not amount to a complete acceptance of lesbians *as lesbians*. Rather than participating in the widespread conservative anxiety over "what happens to the child, the child, the poor child, martyred figure of an ostensibly selfish or dogged social progressivism" (Butler 2002: 21), she radically takes another direction, signaling how "*queerness* names the side of those *not* 'fighting for the children,' the side outside the consensus by which all politics confirms the absolute value of reproductive futurism" (Edelman 2004: 3). Brown embraces, through representations of "the fascism of the baby's face" (Edelman 2004: 151), the stigmatic notion that homosexuality is incompatible with childrearing, thereby effectively depriving the ideology of reproductive futurism of the beneficiary it so desperately needs to remain operative: the innocent child-saint.

5. Conclusion

We have seen how Brown is very much aware of the idealization of the biological family, for instance when she lets the narrator of *The Haunted House* indulge in romanticized portrayals of a loving family life, only to subsequently disrupt them with images of her actual, and far less rosy, familial situation. In anthropological theorizations of biological kinship such as Schneider's, famously defining ties between biological relatives as bonds of "diffuse, enduring solidarity" (1980: 61), the emphasis is mainly on the connection kinship is thought to ensure. This, Susan Franklin and Catherine McKinnon realize, "has often led to a neglect […] of acts of disconnection or rupture" (2001: 18). Brown may be said to redress the balance by focusing precisely on those aspects of biological kinship that bring to the fore the violence or cruelty at its core. Moreover, the experiences Brown portrays frequently highlight the element of selectivity that is equally part of "blood" ties. Through topics like familial homophobia and the absence of a natural bond between mothers and their children, Brown exposes the chosen nature of biological kinship. Her work, then, offers an opportunity to rethink the biology in biological kinship as a cultural construct —albeit an exceptionally authoritative one— that is, as described by Schneider, employed in various "symbolic" ways to demarcate relations (1980: 38). Clearly, nothing in the naturalized bonds of biology guarantees enduring solidarity or a feeling of inevitable kinship between relatives.

Brown's de-idealized and demythologized depictions of parent-child relationships further allow us to expose the passivity that is naturally expected of the mother, who is typically reduced to her body, which then gains meaning solely as a home and carrier for her baby. Such feminine passiveness continues to hold sway in popular thought as in academic theories on abjection that transform the infant into an agent who has to rid her or himself of the oppressive bond with its to-be-abjected motherly "container". In Brown's work, by contrast, the baby can more accurately be aligned with the abject: her lesbian mother characters frequently, and rightly, perceive their infants as filthy or disgusting and as a threat to their identities. Unsurprisingly perhaps, the somewhat older children figuring in Brown's oeuvre are far from innocent either. Brown typically represents child monsters who are in many ways undeserving of our protection or our efforts to sacrifice anything to create a better future for their sake. So her work goes against the installation and perpetuation of "reproductive futurism", an ideology that thrives on images of the vulnerable child, which Brown refuses to supply. Insisting rather on "the negativity that pierces the fantasy screen of futurity" (Edelman 2004: 31) by depicting lesbians who buckle under children's reigns of terror, Brown's work seems to exclaim, in Edelman's consciously provocative terms, "Fuck the social order and the Child in whose name we're collectively terrorized" (2004: 29).

Notes

[1]. Brown underwrites this opposition between reality and fantasy via a conspicuous stylistic contrast between long, rather maximalist sentences signaling self-delusion and minimal syntactical structures in which the I-narrator gains insight into the fact that she is using language to obscure the truth —after all, the dogs are not the only thing the narrator fantasizes about. One of the most obvious examples of this stylistic mechanism occurs in a Little Red Riding Hood-like scene in which she is about to visit her grandmother. The narrator uses long, winding sentences to try and push the reality of the latter's illness to the back of her mind, but her chatter is brought to an abrupt end by means of a short sentence expressing a desire for honesty: "We will walk in the garden and look at all her lovely vegetables and herbs and flowers and the pond and she'll be looking strong and great and tell me how good it is to see me and she'll be fine and strong and lucid and coherent and continent and —Who am I trying to kid?" (Brown 1998: 30) Thus the thematic alternation between fantasy and reality that characterizes *The Dogs* as a whole also informs the stylistic aspects of Brown's bestiary.

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Reviews

IS THIS A CULTURE OF TRAUMA? AN INTERDISCIPLINARY PERSPECTIVE

Jessica Aliaga Lavrijsen and Michael Bick, eds.
Oxford: UK Inter-Disciplinary Perspective, 2013.

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Since the late 1980s the interest in what we call Trauma Studies has increased exponentially. Although it originated in the context of research on the Holocaust (Kaplan 2005: 1), it has developed from being an isolated branch of psychology to becoming an extraordinarily useful tool for critical analysis in the humanities. The collection of essays included in *Is this a Culture of Trauma? An Interdisciplinary Perspective* offer us a complete and insightful vision of the latest trends related to the study of trauma under very different perspectives.

In March 2012 researchers and professionals from more than a dozen countries met in Prague at the 2nd Global Conference on Trauma, "Trauma: Theory and Practice". The event was organized by reputed film critic and academic Dr. Colette Balmain and Inter-disciplinary.net program founder and director Dr. Rob Fisher. Inter-disciplinary.net, which is responsible for this volume, is a global network that encourages dynamic research and publishing. The conference was a great success because it gave scholars from different fields the opportunity to present their particular research work on trauma. *Is this a Culture of Trauma?* gives proof of these different but complementary approaches by presenting the reader with a myriad of research lines that are currently active and intrinsically linked to Trauma Studies. Zaragoza University lecturer Dr. Jessica Aliaga Lavrijsen and Salem University researcher Michael Bick —both of them engaged participants at the conference— are the editors of this collection of the best research papers that were presented at the conference.

The structure of *Is this a Culture of Trauma?* is very similar to the conference's panels: twenty-five research articles assembled in seven different thematic units: Individual Trauma (Case Studies and Memoirs), Collective Trauma (History and Nation), Postcolonial Trauma, War Trauma and Genocide, Trauma in Film, Healing Trauma and Theorising Trauma. However, this organization into themes is not pigeonholing at all. As suggested in the Introduction to the volume, there are recurrent topics that appear throughout the book in different sections, such as the possibility or impossibility of an adequate representation of trauma, or the literary lens usually adopted when approaching trauma.

Another element that runs through the entire volume is the constant reference in most contributions to the same great key trauma theorists. This provides abundant evidence of the multiple possibilities of Trauma Studies as a critical tool, since this common theoretical background is embraced to approach sometimes divergent research interests. Among the most recurrently mentioned authors and works we find Kaplan's *Trauma Culture* (2005), LaCapra's *Writing History, Writing Trauma* (2001), Herman's *Trauma and Recovery* (1992), Caruth's *Unclaimed Experience* (1996), Sontag's *Regarding the Pain of Others* (2003), Laub's "Art and Trauma" (1997), and Whitehead's *Trauma Fiction* (2004), indeed the "Founding Mothers" —with the exception of Dominic LaCapra and Dori Laub, they all are women— of Trauma Studies.[1] The use that the contributors to the volume —many of them young researchers— make of these referential authors is excellent. It shows that Trauma Studies are sufficiently multidisciplinary and versatile to broach a range of topics as broad as that found in the volume. The interdisciplinary character of *Is this a Culture of Trauma?* is certainly one of its biggest assets.

The book is not exempt from contradictions, which is as it should be, because these contradictions are intrinsic to the concept of trauma itself. As Susan Sontag proclaimed, "Photographs of an atrocity may give rise to opposing responses. A call for peace. A cry for revenge" (2003: 11). One of these contradictions very much present in the book is when some essays argue in favor of voicing trauma and the need for language to express it in order to finally overcome it if possible. Hayden White already reflected on this question when he observed in terms borrowed from Sartre's *Nausea* that "Life or reality as lived is inherently chaotic or meaningless, and it is transformed retrospectively into a meaningful story only when told in a narrative" (in LaCapra 2001: 17). We can see this line of thought for example in Filiz Çelik's contribution about the interviews of the Dersim Massacre victims' children and grandchildren, in which a "conspiracy of silence" has left the trauma unresolved since 1937-38.[2] "Keeping silent about trauma is a major mechanism of its transmission", Çelik points out in his article (2013: 71). This same argumentation is followed by Catherine Ann Collins in her essay about

'the disappeared' in Pinochet's Chile, in which poetry is put forward as a way of giving those who have been silenced their voice back. Of great interest too is Collins' denunciation of the ways in which collective memory contrives to pass off as normal the indifference to the plight of others that allowed Pinochet's crimes to take place. This line of reasoning is the same as that already underlined by Sontag when she remarked that "Remembering is an ethical act" (2003: 115). On the other hand, other essays included in the volume defend the inability of language to express and resolve trauma. For example, both Emily Dickinson and Wilfred Bradford assert in their respective essays that the body, rather than language, is more representative of and connected to traumatic experience. The need for language to express trauma and its paradoxical inability to do so are broached by other contributors. Aliaga Lavrijesen, in her essay on female Scottish trauma fiction, shows for example how Janice Galloway in *The Trick is to Keep Breathing* (1989) makes use of graphical modes such as incomplete sentences, notes in the margins, and other postmodern experimental techniques to represent the narrator's trauma. Ewald Mengel, in his piece about trauma and art in contemporary South African fiction, highlights the important role of non-discursive art forms such as painting, music, sculpting and quilting to represent trauma in South African trauma novels. Following this same approach, Evgenia Troshikhina extols in his contribution the benefits of sandplay therapy for the healing of trauma.

Another relevant motif that runs through the whole volume is "repetition" in different guises: intergenerational trauma transmission when children who were victims of abuse become abuse perpetrators when adults, as in those case studies analyzed by Dorota Dyjakon, Agnieska Widera-Wysoczanska, Christian Perring and Clara Mucci; re-enacting trauma as the only way to survive, as posited by Aparajita Nanda; reappearance of trauma in the form of mythical and traditional stories that indirectly make trauma repeat itself until it is confronted head on, which is wonderfully explored by Patricia San José Rico; the cyclical repetitive nature of national and gender trauma, as explained by Michael Bick when analyzing Patricia Powell's novel *The Pagoda*; the important role of performance and the replication of the experience in trauma therapy, as explored by Oliver and Peter Bray; and the small community courts of reconciliation in Rwanda as an alternative judicial system to promote trauma recovery, as analyzed by Moara Crivelente.

Trauma theorist Judith Herman, in her groundbreaking work *Trauma and Recovery: From Domestic Violence to Political Terror* (1992), approached individual trauma in a broader political frame by exploring the parallels between private and public terrors as no one else had done before. This inherent relationship between individual and collective trauma is also a constant in *Is this a Culture of Trauma?* For example, Bálint Urbán, in his analysis of José Eduardo Agualusa's *The Book of*

Chameleons, shows how one of the female protagonists literally carries the wounds of Angolan history on her body in the form of scars inflicted in the civil war. Indeed, these scars link individual body trauma —once again, a non-linguistic representation— to the national history of post-colonial Angola. Bridget Haylock, in her exploration of Australian colonial writer Barbara Baynton's novel *Human Toll* (1907), also approaches the traumatic inheritance of female embodiment, which is signified by the "colonised female body", to quote Haylock (2013: 194). Both Aliaga Lavrijsen's and Bick's contributions point to this same intersection of individual trauma, postcolonial history and the female body. Finally, Magda R. Atieh and Ghada Mohammad address how trauma in non-combatant women is represented in Middle Eastern and African literatures by rewriting the traditional definition of victimhood.

While a conclusion to the collection of essays in *Is this a Culture of Trauma?* would have given the work a brilliant closure —the volume ends with the last contribution—, the editors give some clues in the book's introduction regarding the current dangers of this explosion of trauma research work. As Kaplan already noted, to approach everything as traumatic or at least potentially traumatic would lead to the "fossilisation of the concept" (2005: 25). Indeed, as Aliaga herself remarks, "Seeing trauma everywhere contradicts the very uniqueness and ineffability of the traumatic event" (2013: x). In order to avoid this generalizing trend, the editors suggest that Trauma Studies should be used as a critical tool rather than as a label to be attached to everything. What is beyond doubt however is that this collection of essays gives full evidence of the multiple possibilities of using trauma theory as an analytical instrument applicable to very different fields.

Notes

[1]. Although these authors are undoubtedly the leading scholars in Trauma Studies, there are some names I miss in the volume, especially Maurice Blanchot and his inspiring *The Writing of the Disaster* (1980). Perhaps his absence is due to the early date of his work on trauma, 1980, in contrast to the other authors' key works that were published in the late 1990s and early 2000s.

[2]. The Dersim Massacre involved the murder of forty thousand Kurds —estimations vary— at the hands of Turkish military forces in 1937 and 1938 in Dersim, now called Tunceli Province. Around three thousand Kurds were also deported from Dersim due to the same conflict.

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DAVID FOSTER WALLACE'S *INFINITE JEST:* A READER'S GUIDE

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If there is a contemporary American novel that warrants a 'reader's guide', David Foster Wallace's *Infinite Jest* is an obvious contender. Its 1104 pages of fragmented narrative, chronological jumps, stylistic experimentation and copious endnotes might seem manageable to those who have already braved other guidebook-spawning heavyweights like *In Search of Lost Time*, *Ulysses*, or *Gravity's Rainbow*, but less seasoned readers are sure to welcome some orientation in Wallace's linguistic labyrinth. Stephen Burn's attempt to provide such guidance is a spirited one, not least because he refuses to match the voluminosity of his source material. Weighing in at 121 pages, the present volume is slim in size, but dense in information. Its concentrated character is due in large part to the considerable amount of preparatory work that it is built on: in a welcome deviation from common editorial practice, Burn seized the opportunity to dramatically modify the structure and content of the *Guide* for its second edition. In fact, calling the current version a "second edition" does not do justice to the author's efforts. Rather than merely updating and expanding his study, he has utterly transformed it to reflect not only the evolution of his own research, but also the developments in Wallace scholarship that have taken place since the first publication of his guidebook in 2003. These changes are so radical and compelling that even readers of the first edition can invest in the second one without fear of excessive repetition or disappointment.

The first visible change are the cuts: an introduction to Wallace's biography and a summary of *Infinite Jest*'s initial reception have been replaced by a shorter, tabular chronology of Wallace's life and work and a more comprehensive assessment of his influence on contemporary American literature. This is both a welcome and a necessary modification, reflecting the increase in autobiographical information made available about Wallace as well as changes in the United States' literary landscape in the wake of the author's suicide in 2008. Furthermore, an epilogue has been added, containing brief discussions of the books by Wallace that have been published since *Infinite Jest*. This change is less compelling since the section seems somewhat out of place in a book that advertises itself as a guide to Wallace's *magnum opus* and not as a survey of his oeuvre as a whole. Given what he achieves in the rest of the book, one might wish that Burn had reserved these pages for additional insights into the novel itself, but since he has set himself the task of placing the novel in "a larger literary and cultural matrix", this attempt to connect *Infinite Jest* with the later work is understandable (Burn 2012: x). However, such connections are really only established in the section on *The Pale King*; the remaining overviews of Wallace's 'millennial fictions' are too restrictively focused on their individual subjects to qualify as integral parts of a guide to *Infinite Jest*.

Setting aside this minor problem, one has to appreciate the central achievement of Burn's book, namely its illumination of *Infinite Jest*'s key themes, such as freedom, technology, language, the persistence of the past into the present, and the contingency of the self on the other. Burn's achievement here is to connect these themes to cogent analyses of Wallace's texts and the structures that inform them. In order to demonstrate how form and content are inseparable in the author's work, Burn provides a compelling interpretation of Wallace's short story "A Radically Condensed History of Postindustrial Life" —a veritable miniature composed of only of two paragraphs amounting to no more than 79 words. Despite its brevity, Burn manages to develop not only the spatial and aural dimensions of Wallace's work but also its relationship to mathematics, metafiction, and the deep structures that "enable or limit thought" itself (Burn 2012: 19).

Burn's reading of this 'microfiction' is indicative of his general approach, which seeks to explain the gargantuan whole through reduction to its constituent parts. Reader-friendliness, here, is the result of sustained interpretative effort. That a wealth of insight can be drawn even from a text as short as the "Radically Condensed History" points not only to Burn's considerable powers of interpretive synthesis but also to one of his central contentions about Wallace's work. The latter, Burn argues, is predicated on a "layered aesthetic" —a term he uses to emphasize the openness of Wallace's texts to multiple, but not necessarily conflicting, interpretations (Burn 2012: 21). This attentiveness to the

multidimensionality of the author's work in general and *Infinite Jest* in particular effectively liberates Burn's *Guide* from the all-too-narrow focus on irony and the postmodernist heritage that characterize early readings of the novel and continue to inform a significant part of Wallace scholarship, often at the expense of more unorthodox and autonomous perspectives. Since Wallace himself had established these issues as reference points for his work in a series of paratextual statements that Adam Kelly has since dubbed the "essay-interview nexus", such a concentration of critical attention amounts to a surrender to the author's own position (Kelly 2010). As a scholar who has consistently refused to take authorial word for gospel, Burn is well-equipped to resist the dominant strains in Wallace scholarship, and in the *Guide*, he proves adept at synthesizing the insights of earlier interpretations, even as he alerts the reader to their deficiencies.

However, Burn is not completely immune to the lure of Wallace's own assumptions, which seem to have a way of insinuating themselves into the metadiscourses that aim to explain his work. At the end of the *Guide*'s second chapter, Burn uncharacteristically succumbs to a flight of adulatory rhetoric that presents *Infinite Jest* as "an echo sounding exercise designed to measure the depth of the modern self during the twilight hours of modern identity" (Burn 2012: 32). This notion is problematic not so much because of the flamboyantly poetic register employed to convey it, but rather because it unproblematically accepts two tenets that would warrant further examination: first, that the modern self is best understood according to a depth model of the psyche, and second, that the period from *Infinite Jest*'s publication up to the current cultural moment is indeed best described as a prolonged crisis in human identity. In effect, Burn's formulation closely echoes Wallace's belief that "there are things about the contemporary U.S. that make it distinctively hard to be a real human being", suggesting that Wallace's framing of his own work haunts even those who attempt to remain unbiased (Wallace 2012: 26).

Aside from this one atypical lapse, Burn displays a wariness of interpretive pitfalls and end-all explanations that serves him well: he manages to steer clear of an undue reduction of *Infinite Jest* to any single theme or thesis. Instead, Burn understands the book as ultimately resisting both narrative and interpretive closure. 'Conclusions' are rejected both in the sense that the novel's plot is never resolved in any traditional manner and in the sense that there can never be one exclusive and exhaustive interpretation that accounts for all the text's elements.

Yet even as Burn presents *Infinite Jest* as a novel that "eludes total mapping" (Burn 2012: 34), he takes pains to provide the reader with the necessary tools to navigate a book that its author, in a telling simile, had described as "a very pretty pane of glass that had been dropped off the twentieth story of a building" (Caro 2012:

53). Piecing together the chronological shards, Burn enables even first-time readers of *Infinite Jest* to appreciate its intricate construction and track the exchanges and interactions that take place between its many characters. In particular, it is no small feat that Burn manages to clarify the trajectory of the lethal film that lends the book its title, especially when the narration itself does its utmost to confuse the details of the who, when and where of its circulation.

Providing such orientation is probably a guidebook's most important function, yet Burn's *Guide* also successfully manages to convey a sense of the philosophical concerns and intertextual allusions that pervade *Infinite Jest*. Often these two meet, as when "the search for an adequate understanding of the self", which Burn views as one of the text's dominant themes, is filtered through an engagement with the philosophy of mind as handed down through Descartes and his twentieth-century behaviorist detractor Gilbert Ryle (Burn 2012: 45). Burn's account of how materialist descriptions of the self resonate throughout *Infinite Jest* represents a highlight of his study. Clearly, a book that explores athletics and addiction as ways of behavioral and cognitive conditioning needs to be located within the contexts of neuroscience and biomedicalization, and the *Guide* does an outstanding job of tracing such cultural and philosophical underpinnings.

That a number of its other concerns, like *Infinite Jest*'s mythic patterns or temporal economy, cannot be discussed in detail here for reasons of brevity indicates the vast scope of this slender book, which can be highly recommended to anyone interested in the work of David Foster Wallace and its relations to twentieth-century literature, philosophy, and science.

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CHUCK PALAHNIUK: *FIGHT CLUB, INVISIBLE MONSTERS, CHOKE*

Francisco Collado-Rodríguez, ed.
London & New York: Bloomsbury, 2013.

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Francisco Collado-Rodríguez's edited collection of essays on Chuck Palahniuk's fiction adds to the growing academic interest in the writer's work and, following on from likeminded compendiums published by Cynthia Kuhn & Lace Rubin and by Jeffrey Sartain in 2009, intends to broaden the focus of earlier studies which gave almost exclusive attention to Palahniuk's debut novel, *Fight Club* (1996). Although the three essays that constitute Part I of Collado-Rodríguez's collection are still dedicated to exploring the now well-trodden path of *Fight Club* analysis, the editor opens up and simultaneously demarcates the scope of the discussion by focusing an equal number of essays on Palahniuk's 1999 work, *Invisible Monsters* (Part II) and his fourth novel from 2001, *Choke* (Part III). Such a concentration of attention on Palahniuk's early fiction makes sense —in fact, Collado-Rodríguez insists that the three novels chosen for study are "highly representative of the writer's particular style and insights" (1)— and yet the absence of any commentaries dedicated to *Survivor* (1999), Palahniuk's second published work, seems rather anomalous. Indeed, *Survivo*r is something of an elephant in the room, its omission never explained by Collado-Rodríguez, who only comments that it "garnered acclaim among readers and critics, helping to reinforce Palahniuk's position in the category of cult writer" (2).

James R. Giles's essay "Violence, Spaces, and a Fragmenting Consciousness in *Fight Club*" explores the narrator's problematic identity in relation to the Oedipal

Complex, a theme that has already received critical attention in the work of Paul J. Kennett (2005), and René Girard's notion of "sacred violence". Although there is nothing particularly innovative about these conceptual anchors, Giles goes on to consider the importance of narrative space in the novel, utilising Henri Lefebvre's Marxist reading to enhance his understanding of how *Fight Club* displays a great deal of "spatial complexity" (39). This is a worthwhile idea and Giles provides an interesting analysis of how physical and mental or fantasised spaces operate in the novel.

In the second chapter, "The Avatars of Masculinity: How Not to be a Man", Eduardo Mendieta draws on a range of philosophical concepts, from Nietzsche´s *Übermensch* to Plato's cave, in order to explore the idea that *Fight Club*'s narrator is a parodic Zarathustra, a false American prophet for the consumer age. Despite being flawed by frequent typing mistakes and occasional banality —"who is… 'everyman'?" Mendieta asks at one point, before answering "Everyman is everyone" (52)— the essay offers some insights into the problematic nature of modern masculinity as elaborated in Palahniuk's fiction.

According to Laurie Vickroy in "Body Contact: Acting Out is the Best Defense in *Fight Club*", trauma is a key element which manifests itself thematically and at the level of narrative throughout Palahniuk's first novel. In a highly engaging reading, she suggests that trauma is fundamentally problematic from the perspective of stereotypical masculinity as it "necessitates acknowledging helplessness" (61-62). Rather than doing so, Tyler Durden becomes a way for the narrator to "act out", as opposed to accepting, his traumatic experiences. Furthermore, Vickroy argues that the unstable and shifting identities created by Palahniuk not only indicate the fragmented nature of postmodern male subjectivity but are also symptomatic of the dehumanisation so prevalent in contemporary existence.

Part II begins with Andrew Slade's innovative reading of Palahniuk's *Invisible Monsters* by suggesting that it exemplifies the "perverse sublime" (81). Drawing on Freudian and Lacanian theory, Slade contends that the search for authenticity is a key element of this and other works by Palahniuk and it is precisely its lack in *Invisible Monsters*, as manifested in Shannon McFarland's obsession with her transgender brother, that points to how fetishism may become elevated to "the grandeur of the sublime" (86).

Echoing the earlier chapter by Vickroy, Richard Viskovic and Eluned Summers-Bremner focus their interpretation of *Invisible Monsters* on the issue of trauma and suggest an important connection between traumatic events and "the alienation and inauthenticity of modern life" (113). The authors make a key observation when they comment on how the discontinuity of Palahniuk's narrative foregrounds the lived experience of trauma from the perspective of the suffering subject.

Furthermore, they argue that the ambiguity of Shane's possible abuse by his father is a central narrative device which gestures towards the true nature of (unremembered/unspoken) trauma.

In the final essay on Palahniuk's third novel, Sonia Baelo-Allué offers an inventive consideration of *Invisible Monsters* from the point of view of genre, suggesting that it can be read as an unconventional hybrid between blank fiction and road story. Building upon the previous discussion of trauma, Baelo-Allué argues that the narrator's detached expression of her "fragmented…broken and chaotic life" (123) is typical of blank fiction's narrative disconnectedness and its focus on the alienation of modern consumer culture. She continues by suggesting that, as befitting a novel concerned with the search for identity, Palahniuk utilises the conventions of the traditional American road story but also, ultimately, subverts them when Shannon accepts the fundamental instability of her subjectivity, "a liquid, fluid sense of self" (134).

Part III of the collection focuses on Palahniuk's 2001 novel, *Choke*, and all three contributors draw upon the author's rewriting of the Oedipal Complex as a key theoretical concept on which to base their analyses. The first of these, Jesse Kavadlo's "Chuck Palahniuk's Edible Complex", considers the use of repetition as a key narrative device to indicate Victor's ontological blockage (as manifested in his repeated choking). Indeed, Kavadlo believes that *Choke* is deeply concerned with the act of narration itself through its construction, manipulation and transformation of the protagonist's identity.

Writing in "Anger, Anguish and Art: *Choke*", David Cowart attempts to locate Palahniuk's text in a cultural context that is both contemporaneous and historical. Providing a dizzying array of references to everything from Pliny the Elder to Wile E. Coyote, which often appears to be straining to be a little too knowing, he argues that *Choke* anticipates "a return to the rhetoric of sincerity" (174) that would be ushered in with the events of 9/11. However, despite its occasional pretentious excesses, Cowart's article provides an interesting analysis of the symbolic role of Dunsboro, the historical theme park where Victor works in the novel.

In the final essay on *Choke*, Nieves Pascual forwards an interesting reading based on Freudian theory to suggest that sodomy is the unspoken, narrative "hole" (176) at the centre of Victor's story. She argues that this unrepresented act is not only prevalent in the text's use of metaphors —its frequent references to ingestion for example— but also at the level of narrative through the use of devices such as repetition, condensation and fragmentation. Indeed, for Pascual, "sodomy is the text's ultimate signifier" (192), despite the fact that *Choke* never overtly engages with the issue of Victor's homosexuality.

Collado-Rodríguez's collection of critical essays adds further depth to the literature on Palahniuk's work that has developed since the millennium by providing a series of analyses that are linked by their common concern for themes such as trauma, identity and postmodern aesthetics. Although perhaps of particular interest to those with a psychoanalytical bent, at their best, many of the articles in this collection provide dynamic readings of *Fight Club*, *Invisible Monsters* and *Choke* which further the case for viewing Palahniuk as a writer of serious literary merit despite the controversy that many of these novels attract.

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LOS ESTUDIOS CULTURALES EN ESPAÑA. EXPLORACIONES TEÓRICO-CONCEPTUALES DESDE EL LÍMITE DISCIPLINAR

Chantal Cornut-Gentille D'Arcy
Valencia: Aduana Vieja, 2013.
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In an often quoted Q&A session following a lecture on the practice of cultural studies, the late Stuart Hall, one of the most influential intellectuals of recent decades, deviated from academic etiquette to passionately assert that "cultural studies isn't every damn thing" (1992: 292). Hall was speaking about the conditions of the institutionalization of cultural studies in the United States, and his impassioned outburst reveals that, while the spaces gained for cultural studies in academia surely contributed to the survival of an originally fringe movement, the particular conditions and constraints of these spaces threaten to rob cultural studies of its cutting edge.

Institutionalization is thus no occasion for complacency. Quite the reverse, institutionalization calls for a more critical stance towards the work academics do and the institutions that harbor their work, and, in Hall's words, it "requires a much more careful job of trying to define what [our] project is" (1992: 292). This job has been taken up by different cultural studies theorists since. Three come to mind as I think of Stuart Hall's flare-up: Cary Nelson acknowledges the apparent success of cultural studies in the United States but goes on to apologetically conclude that no recent cultural movement in the academy has been "taken up so shallowly, so opportunistically, so unreflectively, and so ahistorically" (1996: 274). For Mikko Lehtonen, who has elaborated on the pressure institutionalization places upon cultural studies (2009), the academic context obstructs the political

work and the critical self-assessment that drive cultural studies. With its fiefdoms, its unspoken norms, and its tacit forms of knowledge, Lehtonen notes, the University has proved an adverse environment for cultural studies. More recently, Graeme Turner has also warned against the risks of aligning the development of cultural studies with the interests of the University. In his book *What's Become of Cultural Studies?*, he bemoans the "increasing complacency about cultural studies' usefulness, applications and effects" (2012: 2) and laments that its original concern with the public good and the distribution of power has been replaced by derivative analyses of the latest cultural sensation.

Judging from Dr. Chantal Cornut-Gentille D'Arcy's book *Los estudios culturales en España. Exploraciones teórico-conceptuales desde el límite disciplinar*, this scenario only partly resembles the situation in Spain. It seems that here cultural studies has suffered the downside of institutionalization without ever reaping any of its rewards. As Dr. Cornut-Gentille illustrates, when cultural studies managed to overcome the cultural isolation of Spain, it encountered obstacles on two related fronts. It hit upon the stuffiness of a bureaucratized University that regarded its multidisciplinary approach as an antagonistic force that might lead to a denaturalization of the rigid disciplinary organization of the Spanish University. At the same time, it was belittled —sometimes viciously— by scholars who claimed that the sociocultural analysis it assumed had always been well served by their formulaic take on academic work and that, therefore, there was no real need for any of the innovations that emanated from the cultural studies project.

This being the case, in Spain, cultural studies was condemned to an incongruous situation. Powerless to find a place in the University that was consistent with its self-reflexive position and with its political involvement, but disinclined, likewise, to sever all ties with academia if it was to survive and have an impact on society, cultural studies failed to deal in a consistent manner with the conceptual challenges it encountered. Following the imperative of a disciplinary environment that works to produce value only in the form of disciples, jobs, funding and self-promotion, cultural studies became either a sort of multipurpose, power-friendly label adopted by indiscriminating university teachers who simply continued doing what they had been doing all along or a hodgepodge of shoddy, conformist, and irrelevant studies of popular expressions of culture. In brief, save for a few exceptions, in Spain, cultural studies has manifested itself in the form of undemanding, complacent, and cartoonish versions of what it was destined to be. Do not get me wrong, the aforementioned cultural studies theorists are hardly the messianic type, and cultural studies is an open and flexible intellectual project. Yet, it must also be vehemently stressed that, at its very core, cultural studies has always been marked by the struggle to produce a different and more complex knowledge of social processes

than traditional disciplines could provide, by its serious engagement with progressive politics, and by the belief that ideas and academic work matter outside the walls of the University. Take it or leave it, but cultural studies is not every damn thing.

These are, in a few words, the issues Dr. Chantal Cornut-Gentille D'Arcy wrestles with in *Los estudios culturales en España*. Written in Spanish, for it was commissioned by a cultural studies group in the Department of Philosophy at the University of Valencia, the book comprises five chapters that fall into two distinct parts. The first part offers a complex analysis of the difficult history of cultural studies in Spain. Dr. Cornut-Gentille begins by establishing an analogy between the exclusion of women from academic life described by Virginia Woolf in *A Room of One's Own* early in the 20th century and the circumstances of cultural studies practitioners in Spain. She then looks at the disappointing results of the process of European Convergence. In both cases she offers a piercing though discouraging perspective on the situation of the Spanish University in general and of cultural studies in particular in the present context of globalization and liberalization of capital and resources. Dr. Cornut-Gentille's commitment to the field of cultural studies is beyond any doubt. As a founding member of IBACS (Iberian Association of Cultural Studies), she pioneered the introduction of cultural studies in Spain, and thus there are few people with the experience and the moral legitimacy to offer better judgments on the difficulties cultural studies has faced and on its present situation. The three chapters included in the second part are case studies that address the questions and the strategies that have characterized cultural studies, with a special focus on gender, race, class, and popular culture. The first of these chapters, for example, discusses witch hunts and the persecution of women, but it moves beyond dominant paradigms to incorporate anthropology, sociology, psychology, sexuality and philosophy in an attempt to better reinterpret the contexts of women's experience of oppression and offer a more complex understanding of gender relations, gender-related violence, and the practices through which these attitudes persist today. The following chapter focuses on TV comedy to illustrate how the concepts of articulation and radical contextualization help to bring to light the racial tensions that have remained silenced in British society. Similarly, the last chapter illustrates how a hybrid and flexible understanding of film genre that borrows its concepts from chaos theory sheds new light on how class issues are addressed in British film. However, what I find of particular interest is how all these chapters build up to a composite illustration of what cultural studies is and the possibilities it provides as a field of cultural inquiry, and how they demonstrate that the methodologies we adopt and the positions we assume determine the kind and the significance of the work we do.

So, what exactly is cultural studies, anyway? As it arises from *Los estudios culturales en España*, cultural studies is a conjunctional, cross-disciplinary mode of inquiry which intends to make the world a better place. But cultural studies is also about pedagogy and the position that academics choose to take up in the production and circulation of knowledge as it relates to the activities of power. Cultural studies has taken from Antonio Gramsci a view that knowledge is not the accumulation of data, but rather the activity of producing accurate, complex and contextual analyses of social processes and power relations, and a view of the intellectual as the person who takes on the responsibility of making this knowledge known to the general public.

Cultural studies contends that the world is more complex and more inequitable than we often care to believe and that, therefore, it cannot be approached from the hyperspecialized niches of traditional disciplines or by means of outmoded methodologies. As French philosopher Edgar Morin has demonstrated at length (2011), traditional forms of knowledge hinge on principles of disjunction and abstraction; they depend on established disciplines and on the tacit or consensual patrolling of disciplinary self-similarity. But working within inherited disciplines creates a distorted or mutilated view of reality, because disciplinary work legislates what is proper and improper knowledge, strives for homogeneity, and ignores everything that would jeopardize the consistency of the category. Cultural studies, on the contrary, attempts both to overcome the limitations of this way of dealing with culture and to engage effectively with issues of power and justice. It refuses to segregate cultural elements into isolated categories or be itself circumscribed by inherited disciplines. Instead, as Dr. Cornut-Gentille underscores, cultural studies works by relationality and contextualization, for it rests on the belief that no single discipline or cultural manifestation can capture the complex nexus of power at any one moment. While traditional academic work seeks to inscribe itself in institutional disciplines, and is comfortable with the limitations of this way of going about things, cultural studies assumes that no element of everyday life can be isolated from the complex set of relations that interpenetrate it and make it what it is. Therefore, cultural studies confers upon itself the freedom to work across and between disciplines, borrowing freely but rigorously from all of them in an attempt to produce a more complex kind of knowledge and bring to light the relations that a more traditional understanding of culture and cultural analysis leaves unarticulated.

Faced with the sterility of a complacent and visionless academia that, Raymond Williams tells us (1986), had abandoned social debate for the so-called science of language, cultural studies attempts to effectively put the focus back on society. As Russell Jacoby (1999) or Chris Hedges (2010), for example, have explained,

cultural and literary critics renounced questions of values and social justice; they withdrew into their institutions and secured the gates with thorny theoretical models and intricate, self-referential lingo. Cultural studies intends to demystify this retreat into the walls of the University and to defetishize theory; it intends to win back the control academics had surrendered to theory in an attempt both to address socially pertinent questions and to reach a wider audience; it puts public values above textual analysis and treats the text (or any other cultural expression, for that matter), not as an end in itself, but as an instrument to gain a more complex understanding of reality (of social relations, of exploitation, of the relations between culture and politics, etc.) that might change our attitudes, perturb the workings of power, and enrich social life.

Cultural studies, Dr. Cornut-Gentille says, does not subscribe to the straitjacket of traditional institutional disciplines and, thus, it cannot be properly apprehended by following our inherited ideas of what a discipline is. Yet, this unconventionality does not mean that "every damn thing" that departs from the rigid methodological procedures of traditional disciplines is cultural studies. Cultural studies may lack a Grand Theory but it has been thoroughly theorized in the light of real challenges posed by society (and by academia) at specific conjunctures, and so a cultural approach that ignores the history and the particulars of this ongoing theorization process is necessarily something other than cultural studies; it may choose, as Stuart Hall once put it, to march under the banner of cultural studies, but that does not make it cultural studies. It has been nearly two months since Hall passed away and the misunderstanding, the trivialization and the institutional disparagement of the cultural project he helped to develop (as well as the manifest absence of barely any notice of Hall's death in the mainstream Spanish media or of any response to date from cultural institutions in Spain) testify to the importance and the contemporaneity of the debates on the nature of knowledge and on the role of the academic that books like this ignite.

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A SCOTTISH NATIONAL CANON? PROCESS OF LITERARY CANON FORMATION IN SCOTLAND

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*A Scottish National Canon? Processes of Literary Canon Formation in Scotlan*d, by Stefanie Preus, has just been published when the debate on the Scottish canon is gaining new strength. The latest newsletter of the Association for Scottish Literary Studies started with an article by Alan Riach on the terrain of life: "the arts are maps" that both represent and interpret the world (2011: 1). In his article, titled "Why Study Scottish Literature?", Riach asks: "What are the important things about Scottish literature you have to know about, to get a sense of the shape of the terrain, the character of the country, its national history, its music, languages, the major writers?" (2011: 3). It must be noted here that Riach's rhetorical questions follow a long tradition of questioning titles in the field of Scottish studies. As Preuss herself contends, this abundant questioning sometimes expresses "an awareness of the difficulties of defining the subject" (2012: 235). It is true that it is a question that should be raised, especially in the case of Scotland, as the recent attempts at canonization of what has been defined as a "stateless nation" show divergent opinions; but what the exact question to be posed is and how to frame it might be a difficult and debatable issue itself.

The second article in the 2011 ASLS newsletter, "A Curriculum for Scotland" by William Hershaw, comments on the debate that the Curriculum for Excellence[1] has given rise to in Scotland (2011: 6-7), and illustrates that the issue of canonicity is still a very controversial one in twenty-first century Scotland, especially in view

of the fact that there is no national curriculum in Scottish schools, and that it is left to the individual teacher to choose the texts that will be studied in English classes (Preuss 2012: 80-85). In both articles mentioned, the tensions regarding Scottish culture are made evident: national identity and the literary canon are being reformulated. The main question to be answered is: how are they being reformulated?

Several international conferences, such as ESSE 2012, have devoted seminars and papers to the issue of literary canon(s) in the last few years. For example, the seminar convened by Carla Sassi and Bashabi Frazer, titled "Literary canon(s) for the Atlantic Archipelago: towards a de-centring of English Studies", proposed a revision of the paradigm for the study of "English literature" as a constellation of social, political and cultural structures, globally connected and yet truly autonomous and authentically local. In this seminar, different positions were held, from nationalistic approaches to more internationalistic ones, showing the academia's diversity of insights on the topic of canonicity. As we shall see, Preuss's study provides "wide-ranging insights into the canonisation of an emergent [Scottish] literature" and explores how the different literary institutions in Scotland attempt "to construct a Scottish national canon in order to promote Scottish national identity" (2012: 384).

However, by using the rhetorical question —"Why Study Scottish Literature?"—, Riach, like Preuss,[2] not only shows an awareness of the difficulty of tackling the Scottish literary canon, but also enters an intertextual relationship with other articles and books that have dealt with the Scottish canon, such as William MacNeile Dixon's "What is Scottish Poetry?" (1910); T.S. Eliot's "Was there a Scottish Literature?" (1919);[3] or more recent ones, such as Cameron Harris's article "How Scottish Is the Scottish Curriculum? And Does It Matter?" (1997); Eleanor Bell's *Questioning Scotland: Literature, Nationalism, Postmodernism* (2004); Carla Sassi's *Why Scottish Literature Matters?* (2005); Allan Riach's "What is Scottish Literature?" (2008) and "Why Study Scottish Literature?" (2011); Gordon Millar's "Do *The Member* and *Miss Marjoribanks* Have a Place in a Canon of Scottish Literature?" (2008), etc. The number of titles in form of rhetorical questions in Scottish studies is astonishing. So, by establishing this intertextual bond, all these texts actively contribute to a certain canon formation, since, as Preuss explains in her subchapter 8.2 "Strategies of Authorial and Textual Canon Formation in Scotland", some authors "use intertextual references to exert influence on canon politics" (2012: 300-301). Moreover, by using these (auto) referential strategies, these authors also contribute to inscribing themselves into the (academic) canon formed by previous works of the same type. Therefore, it could be argued that the question mark in those titles invites an affirmative reply,

rather that really questioning those topics. However, the relationship between all these above-mentioned titles, even if they form some sort of academic canon, is not without its problems.

Preuss's deep critical awareness of the different strategies of canon formation —described by Pierre Bordieu as "a competition for consecration waged in an intellectual world dominated by the competition between the authorities which claim the monopoly of cultural legitimacy" (in Preuss 2012: 25)—, which include the institutional basis for evaluations of the literary canon, makes it almost impossible for me to try to write an innocent review on this book. Because, as she contends, using John Guillory's words, any judgement that a work is great "does nothing in itself to preserve that work, unless that judgement is made in certain institutional context, a setting in which it is possible to insure the reproduction of the work, its continual reintroduction to generations of readers" (Preuss 2012: 25). Therefore, my awareness of my own active role (being a non-Scottish academic working on Scottish literature and now writing a review on canon formation for an academic journal) in the (academic and non-academic) canon-formation process has been sharpened, so I cannot fall into the trap of praising this work —which is great—, but must rather focus on how it contributes, by means of the analysis of the complex and interrelated processes of canon formation, to the contemporary debate on the importance of the establishment of a Scottish canon.

The present study is well documented —more than thirty pages of extensive bibliography are included (pp. 349-381)— and combines the specific information about the Scottish context, both of historic events and of present-day political and institutional policies, as well as of the international or transnational context that influences canon formation. The analysis is clearly organised: a necessary introduction for the non-Scottish reader, followed by some theoretical pre-considerations on the canon formation of a stateless nation, leads the reader to a well-structured and exhaustive analysis of the different elements and strategies at work in canon formation: secondary education (chapter 3); higher education and academia (chapter 4); literary histories (chapter 5); literary anthologies (chapter 6); publishing industry (chapter 7) and, finally, Scottish authors and their texts (chapter 8). Furthermore, many and varied examples are used to support her thesis. There is also an exhaustive description of the different state of affairs in Scotland after the Union, and criticism of certain previous studies for lack of thoroughness or a misleading approach or a mistaken point of departure. Preuss is especially critical of those studies that ignore Scottish historical and political specificities and/or that make use of some watered-down postcolonial criticism, such as Marilyn Reizbaum's "Canonical Double Cross: Scottish and Irish Women's Writing" (1992) (Preuss 2012: 17). She likewise criticises the collections of articles

that use the term *canon* "to point out the relevance of their contents […] without discussing the composition of the canon or canon conceptions", such as the collection *Re-Visioning Scotland: New Readings of the Cultural Canon* (2008), edited by Lyndsay Lunan, Kirsty A. Macdonald and Carla Sassi (Preuss 2012: 18); as well as those essays with "an uncritical and unreflective normative description of canons", such as Robert Crawford's "Bakhtin and Scotlands" (1994) (Preuss 2012: 19). Without discrediting the above-mentioned studies —which I personally consider illuminating—, it is true that the article by Preuss under consideration is unique in its aim and approach.

Besides having given me a renewed critical awareness as a non-Scottish academic studying contemporary Scottish literature (228), this book has also provided me with some insights into my role as founder of a small independent publishing house in Spain, which has published some Scottish works, with a small subsidy from Creative Scotland —the former Scottish Arts Council—,[4] just as Alasdair Gray received a subsidy for *Lanark* as is stated in one of the many footnotes in Gray's novel and explained by Preuss (2012: 319). Of great interest, too, is her explanation of the various formal and textual factors in the relation between the publishing industry and canon formation (in chapter 6); the political and economic factors that influence the publishing industry are analysed as well. It could be argued that Preuss's analysis ignores the workings of the smaller publishing houses that are flourishing in Scotland nowadays —Acair, Black and White, Crooked Cat, Dionysia, Dudu Nsombra, Luath, Olida, Pilrig, Ringwood, Two Ravens, etc.—, but it is also true that their impact on the Scottish canon might be too small to be taken into consideration in her analysis, with its space and time limitations. These same limitations might also explain the absence of an important element: the aesthetic dimension of canon formation. As Preuss herself states, this might be an interesting field for future studies that could "analyse the ways in which the texts of the Scottish core canon contributed to their own canonisation" (Preuss 2012: 341).

A Scottish National Canon?, carefully edited and printed by Winter, fulfils its aim of critically examining the different literary institutions in Scotland, the processes of canon formation, and of explaining how these are related to national identity formation. Besides, Preuss also provides wide-ranging insights into the canonisation of contemporary works in Scotland and might open up further debates on canon formation in other countries.

Notes

[1]. The national curriculum for Scottish schools. See more at: <http://www.educationscotland.gov.uk/thecurriculum/whatiscurriculumforexcellence/index.asp> (Anon.2012)

[2]. It is interesting to see that Preuss abandoned the question mark for the exclamation mark in her essay "Now That's What I Call a Scottish Canon!" (2011), perhaps falling into the same trap that she has met in others' studies: "the term canon is often used in studies on Scottish writing in order to legitimize the object of study" (Preuss 2012: 17).

[3]. Alan Riach was hairsplitting when he wrote an article entitled "Was there ever a British Literature?", published by the Association for Scottish Literary Studies in 2007, where he turned Eliot's question on its head to explore issues of origins and identity, language and culture, national and political allegiances.

[4]. Brian McCabe's *The other McCoy* was published in Spain as *El otro McCoy* in 2012.

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HOLLYWOOD ROMANTIC COMEDY OF THE FIFTIES, A CRITICAL STUDY OF A FILM GENRE

Manuela Ruiz
Lewinston: Edwin Mellen Press, 2013.
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Adapted from her doctoral thesis, this monograph by Manuela Ruiz is a valuable addition to the literature on the often-neglected and critically-deplored genre, romantic comedy. By concentrating her attention on films produced across a narrow, specific period of time in Hollywood, the 1950s, Ruiz also successfully helps to contest the notion that the decade's cultural products and the decade itself reflected some kind of monolithic conservatism and will to conformity.

Ruiz sets herself the task of reading her chosen corpus of texts within their historical contexts, and this provides one of the book's chief pleasures: discovering the meticulously compiled archive of contemporary material which supports the historicised readings of the films. In creating her historical backdrop, Ruiz has dug deep into the roots of American popular culture; she displays her finds elegantly and intelligently, relating the films analysed to changing discourses around three dominant strands of context: notions of success, in terms of both business and personal identity; concerns about suburbanisation and the effect of domesticity on both female and male subjects; and the rise of consumerism in that decade of plenitude.

Having these few core themes provides a useful structure to the investigation that follows, which otherwise might risk going off in too many different directions; by reflecting dominant issues of the period under study, it also testifies to the coherence of questions that were being asked in public life in the Fifties, even if the

films then show a variety of answers. Personal versus career success, home life, and consumerism, all combined with sex and the battles of the sexes, prove to be the recurrent topical anxieties and desires being dealt with, defused, or resolved through the film texts examined.

In fleshing out these core concerns, Ruiz draws on a wide range of printed material, borrowing from sources high-, low- and middle-brow, and in doing so presents the reader not only with the obvious publishing hits of the period like the second "Kinsey Report" (1953) and *Playboy*, but also more ephemeral items which nonetheless tapped into the *zeitgeist* just as did those better known artefacts. A 1958 *Handbook for Dating* is considered alongside data presented in the *American Sociological Review; Woman's Home Companion* and *Mademoiselle* provide findings, and lifestyle magazines *Harper's* and *LIFE* become sources, no less than finance weekly *Fortune* and the literary *Saturday Review*. In preparing this smorgasbord of references, I was reminded of Miriam Hansen's prescription for historical recovery, laid out in her exploration of narrative and silent cinema, *Babel and Babylon* (1994). Hansen explains her methods in the prelude to her chapters investigating the stardom of Rudolph Valentino; although Ruiz does not cite the book, her own echoes Hansen's attempt to provide as detailed a context as possible:

> reconstructing a possible horizon of reception for Valentino involves juggling different levels of material and bringing them to bear upon each other in a kind of methodological both/and of textual analysis and historiographic speculation. This means [...] tracing [...] the public discourse surrounding Valentino - reviews, interviews, studio publicity, articles in fan magazines and the general press, popular biographies —sources that at once document, manipulate and constitute his reception (Hansen 1994: 253).

Hansen's notion of the "horizon of reception", which acknowledges it can never fully recover the backdrop of any past text but strives nevertheless to capture as many of the sources of that backdrop as possible, can be seen employed in Ruiz's attempt to compile the "public discourse" around her three key themes, although it is interesting that the fan magazine, which might perhaps be expected to provide valuable insights into the ways the stars of her chosen films were employed to characterise topical debates, is one major source that is never employed. Nonetheless, many of her topical finds are fascinating in themselves (who would have guessed *How To Woo, Win And Keep Your Man* would be the title of an actual handbook rather than an alternative title for *How To Marry A Millionaire*…) and together build up a convincing picture of a society simultaneously obsessed with and terrified of changes in sexual mores, family structures, business patterns and gender roles.

Although following Hansen's lead in returning her objects of study to their contemporaneous socio-historical milieu, Ruiz substitutes for Hansen's focus on

the star, the wider genre of the romantic comedy. This attempt to use the microcosm of the specifically Fifties' romcom as a method of learning about the macrocosm of the genre itself is interesting but not unproblematic. This forms, in fact, one of the two main issues I have with the book. The other, lesser caveat is the periodisation in operation; while I can see that films of the decade can present a coherent topic for study, and would support the author's idea that 'the Fifties' exceeds the decade's more obvious delimiters, I am not convinced that the thirteen-year spread dealt with here is as homogenous as the frequent back-and-forth motion occasioned by the texts studied suggests. It is fair enough to be employing the thematic schema, but in doing so Ruiz groups together films from across the period without sufficient attention to their altered historical moment, *mingling* rather than *juxtaposing* texts from the beginning, middle and end of her selected time span, so that the section on gendered success stories begins with 1957's *Will Success Spoil Rock Hunter?*, goes back to 1953's *How To Marry A Millionaire* and then back further to 1950's *Father Of The Bride*. It might have been more useful to trace the developments of topical characters like the bachelor and the career girl, the white collar suburbanite husband and the domesticated housewife *chronologically* across the period as they became increasingly problematised and sexualised. Furthermore, the book makes no mention of the mid-century amelioration of the Hays Code. This omission elides the homogeny of the decade, making further problematic the book's reading of *The Seven Year Itch* (1955) alongside *Pillow Talk* (1959). The earlier film was predicated on the exclusivity of the male's entitlement to sexual fulfilment which the later one specifically contested. Dealing with them both without due attention to their specific and different contexts obscures their textual differences and the social changes they represent. Nevertheless, the matter of genre remains the larger problem, and in two interesting ways: in its scope and focus, and in its core texts. In her introduction Ruiz states her intention to make the object of her study the genre as a whole and confirms her aim of looking at the three key aspects she says mark out the genre:

> the presence of humour and laughter as a specific point of view [...] a narrative structure which articulates portraits of love, desire and sexuality that are historically and culturally specific and a space of fantasy and transformation [...] (2013: 35-36).

Despite this, the study which then follows provides much information and insight about the particular kind of romantic comedy flourishing in the 1950s but not much that can be extrapolated to the wider tenets of the genre. Ruiz is not attempting, then, as did Celestino Deleyto in his *Secret Life Of Romantic Comedy* (2009) to redraw the boundaries of the genre or even, daringly, to suggest that such boundaries can be dispensed with altogether. Rather than let this be a

problem, however, Ruiz should acknowledge her different scope, especially since what she is doing is equally rare. The book's investigation of the peculiar brand of romcom which obtained from the mid- Fifties to early Sixties is one of the very few extended studies on this since Alexander Walker's formative "Last American Massacre", written in the final years of the Sex Comedy's original cycle. Like Walker, Ruiz studies the character archetypes who engage in the repeated skirmishes in the Battle of the Sexes, and should be proud of the way her painstaking "historiographic speculation", to use Hansen's term, provides such a lively backdrop for the works explored. Although severely neglected by theorists, especially when compared to the screwball comedy, the Sex Comedy has arguably been even more influential on the tropes and characters of the romcom as it exists today, with its common hate-at-first-sight couples assuring the viewer, through the intensity of their dislike, that their eventual positive feelings for each other will be similarly passionate.

My final quibble is with the catchment of films grouped under heading of "romantic comedy". Ruiz includes in her study familiar works such as *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* alongside more neglected texts such *Father Of The Bride*, *Will Success Spoilt Rock Hunter?* and *The Thrill Of It All*, a move which lumps together an odd assortment of comedies taking paths to humour and resolution that are different than the usual boy-meets-loses-regains-girl template of the classic romantic comedy. Ruiz is generous enough to cite my own book on the topic and does not seem to disagree with my basic definition of the genre as a film which "has as its central narrative motor a quest for love, which portrays this quest in a light-hearted way and almost always to a successful conclusion" (Jeffers McDonald 2007: 9). This is not the template for about half the movies included in Ruiz' study, however. This is not to say that my definition could not be altered, expanded or overturned, but I would like to see some discussion about why, say, *Father Of The Bride* deserves to be defined as a romcom rather than just being included in the looser category of "comedy". Its hero, Stanley Banks (Spencer Tracy) does not seek new love, nor does he have to endure various comic exigencies to regain the lost love of his wife, as do characters in the films famously grouped by Stanley Cavell as "comedies of remarriage" (1981). The romance, which does have its ups and downs, spats and reconciliations, is between Stanley's daughter Kay and her partner, and is thus viewed at one remove by Stanley and the viewer. The comedy certainly does exist, although, as Ruiz skilfully draws out, it is of a rather cynical kind, with Stanley inviting the audience to agree with him that the hoopla and trappings of the upper-middle-class wedding are a waste of money and effort. Why then is the film being analysed alongside other texts which clearly do fit within the romcom grouping?

These latter points do not, however, negate the fact that there is much to enjoy and commend in this book. Working through it, the reader enters into a lively internal debate with the author over definitions, readings, influences, characters and performances, and comes away with assumptions challenged, and above all, with enthusiasm renewed for the films of this period, all too often neglected and here finally given the analysis and the perfectly filled-in backdrop which enables them to shine.

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MODERNISM, POSTMODERNISM, AND THE SHORT STORY IN ENGLISH. POSTMODERN STUDIES

Jorge Sacido, ed.
Rodopi: Amsterdam, New York, 2012.
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The present volume is an inspiring collection of essays which succeeds in engaging the reader in a thought-provoking discussion on issues which are presently at the core of literary and artistic debates, such as the definition and delimitations of the short story, as well as the ideas and problematics of modernist and postmodernist creation.

Even though the attempt to reach a satisfactory definition of these concepts, and in particular of the extent to which different features and creative principles can be ascribed to each of these narrative modes seems far from being an easy task, the book represents a masterful compilation of studies which shed valuable light on these issues and provides the tools for a coherent analysis of the short story as influenced —in varying degrees— by the main tenets that constitute the bases of modernist and postmodernist writing.

Hence, the volume, which is part of the *Postmodernist Studies* collection, is articulated into four thematically and chronologically arranged parts, preceded by a seven-page introduction which ushers the reader into the various concerns that will be dealt with in the book, as well as an introduction and an opening chapter which serves as a fitting complement to the introduction. This chapter brilliantly points out the fundamental theoretical notions that are later developed throughout the subsequent chapters and the different analyses they propose on the basis of a sample of short narratives. In this initial essay, Sacido provides such an accomplished

overview of the different approaches to the notions of short story, as well as of the possible conceptualizations of modernism and postmodernism that his book becomes an essential source of reference for any scholar or common reader aiming to clarify questions such as the place of epistemology and ontology within the discourse on the modern and the postmodern, the rethinking of subjectivity from the late nineteenth century and over the subsequent decades, or the problem of representation according to modernist and postmodernist aesthetics, along with the confluence of this representational task with postcolonial debates and the necessity of providing an answer to otherness and marginalization.

A particular strength of this volume is the coherence it evinces from its very opening. Hence, the idea of the short story as a dialogue with the social and cultural circumstances surrounding it, namely the varying needs for creation and representation, the vicissitudes determining its production within the literary market, or its adaptability to multiple forms of expression becomes, throughout the different studies that constitute this volume, a unifying argument, as Chapter One clearly states. Nonetheless, this is never in conflict with the multiplicity of voices and points of view Sacido's volume offers, as will be discussed.

Hence, the essays collected in Part I, fittingly headed "Refocusing Modernism through the Short Story", deal with the problematics of the idea of modernism when applied to some of the shorter fiction of authors such as Djuna Barnes or Wyndham Lewis and encourage a reconsideration both of the origins of Modernist aesthetics and of the characteristics associated with it. Thus, in "The Short Story and the Difficulty of Modernism", Adrian Hunter remarks on the necessity for a reassessment of the germ of the modernist short story. For him, it is to be traced back to the achievements of certain *fin-de-siècle* authors, such as Arthur Morrison, Henry James, or Frederick Wedmore, and their concerns with aspects such as plotlessness, open endings, or the conception of the short story as a genre in which "writers give less and ask more [from readers]" (Pain 1916: 45-46). The imperative of re-conceptualizing the notion of modernism is also central to the analysis carried out by José María Díaz. In "Allegory and Fragmentation in Lewis's *The Wild Body* and Barnes's *A Book*", he pays attention to issues such as fragmentation, the lack of an epiphanic resolution, or the construction of characters —which become created, as Díaz explains, not by means of their psychological traits, but rather as allegorical embodiments of these very qualities —in order to highlight how this emphasis on the psychological becomes symptomatic of a new dimension of the modernist short story which diverges from hegemonic modernism. As Díaz points out, these texts by Barnes and Lewis essentially propose a rejection of unified meaning and a reflection, instead, of a chaotic reality.

After this reassessment of the roots and foundational principles of modernism, the book engages more explicitly in a discussion on the interaction between modernism and postmodernism and the different ways in which these converge with the short story. The essays collected in Part II of the book, "The Subject Vanishes: Modernist Contraction, Postmodernist Effacement and the Short Story Genre", provide a variety of approaches to the specific concern with the role of the subject in those narratives. This enables the reader to reach a multidimensional understanding of the position of the subject as relocated by the short story from modernism and beyond. The arrangement of the articles in this part matches the sense of unity and consistency that characterizes the totality of the volume. Accordingly, in "Man in a Sidecar: Madness, Totality and Narrative Drive in the Short Story", Tim Armstrong argues how aspects such as trauma and shock or the feeling of alienation that pervade the modern self find a means of representation in the modernist and postmodernist short story through self-encapsulated subjects that often become incapable of transcending their conditions of trauma, madness, or isolation. Fred Botting, in "Stories, Spectres, and Screens" explores the condition of the subject in modern society and, consequently, in the short stories within the parameters of modernism and postmodernism. Botting agrees with Armstrong on the emphasis placed in these narratives upon the fragmentation and insubstantiality of the subject, which is recurrently recreated, as Botting notes, in gothic fiction from the twentieth century. In these texts, the resort to phantasmagoreality and ghostscreens, along with the sense of uncanniness inherent to these presences evinces the hollow identity of the subject and the concern in these texts with presenting a discontinuous and utterly defamiliarized existence.

This revision of the repositioning of the subject in modernist and postmodernist short stories is skillfully complemented by Paul March-Russell's reflections on the progressive displacement of the individual as accomplished particularly in the science fiction stories by Ballard. In "The Writing Machine: J.G. Ballard in Modern and Postmodern Short Story Theory", March-Russell focuses on the mechanistic conception of the subject distilled by these stories as the point of departure for his theorization of the genre as an ever-evolving form of writing which escapes tight definitions of the modern or the postmodern.

The enthralling debate in which the reader is involved throughout the volume gains further complexity through the contrasting vision that the essays in Part III, "The Subject Reappears: Postcolonial Conflict and the Other's Stories", offer with respect to the analyses and conclusions in the previous section, Part II. These essays point towards a different approach regarding the subject in those cases in which notions of race, nation, or communal identity come to the fore.

Thus, in "Posmodernist Tales from the Couch", Esther Sánchez-Pardo focuses on the work of Delany and Crane to explore the way in which these authors exploit the elements of in-betweenness, *flânerie* or psychological insights in order to challenge preconceived ideas that perpetuate boundaries and fragmentation and to celebrate multiplicity, as associated with either sexuality, language, history, or identity. In "Mind the Gap: Modernism in Salman Rushdie's Postmodernist Short Stories", J. Manuel Barbeito and María Lozano identify a type of modernist subjectivity in certain narratives by Rushdie traditionally classified as postmodernist. As they note, especially in the case of the stories collected in *East, West* —whose title strategically makes use of the comma as a means of representing division— Rushdie stresses the constitutive nature of the gap separating the colonies and the metropolis insofar as it becomes the locus from where subjectivity can be constructed on the basis of the very essence of its difference. This creation and reshaping from difference with respect to the normative is also the main focus of Manuela Palacios's study. In her essay, "One AnOther: Englishness in Contemporary Irish Fiction", she explores the encounter with the Other in a series of stories by Irish women in which it becomes evident that the gap between nations and identities remains unbridged. Nevertheless, as Palacios observes, it is precisely the non-compliance with normativity by the female protagonists of these texts and the construction of selfhood within the territory of that female Other that allows for the representation of a true identity.

A remarkable achievement of this volume is the up-to-date dialogue it establishes with present considerations and manifestations of the short story in English. Indeed, while discussions on modern and postmodern narrative tend to focus on a historical revision of a span of relatively recent literary production, Sacido's collection of essays concludes with a final chapter, "A Move against the Dinosaurs: The New Puritans and the Short Story", which examines the present state of the genre, as well as the latest tendencies in the writing of this fiction. In this essay, included in Part IV, "Short Notes from the Contemporary Underground", José Francisco Fernández assesses the work of a young generation of authors whose stories, published in anthologies such as *All Hail the New Puritans*, accurately contribute, according to Fernández, to determining the position of the short story nowadays, and at the same time to predicting to a certain extent the direction in which it seems to be moving. This final chapter provides an excellent closure to the book, inasmuch as it clearly puts forward one of the axial ideas around which the discussion in this multidimensional study spins: the open and fluid nature of the short story —a genre which eschews narrowness of definition and which transcends strictures of convention or delimitation within its own position at the margins. As Hunter notes:

> The interrogative story's "unfinished" economy, its failure literally to express, to extend itself to definition, determination or disclosure, becomes, under the rubric of a theory of "minor" literature, a positive aversion to the entailment of "power and law" that defines the "major" literature (2007: 40).

Sacido's collection of essays becomes, therefore, a fundamental work of reference central to any discussion not only on literary theory and history, but also on the status of cultural forms of representation. Its engagement in the exploration of the tendencies and directions in the fiction of both canonical authors and writers from younger generations opens up some fascinating paths for the analysis and reconsideration of short fiction within the debated paradigms of Modernist and Postmodernist discourses.

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Abstracts

THE MULTIDIRECTIONALITY OF MEMORY: NETWORKS OF TRAUMA IN POST-9/11 LITERATURE

Katharina Donn

9/11 fictional literature shows a striking propensity to conjure up other, historically older traumata and intertextual references in an associative framework which moreover introduces into the texts an oscillation between narrative representation and indexical reference, and which I will exemplify in a reading of Jonathan Safran Foer's *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close* and Art Spiegelman's *In the Shadow of No Towers*. Based on an understanding of trauma as a structure of reception rather than a phenomenon essentially linked to specific events, trauma in my approach emerges not only as an interpretational framework for dealing with the aesthetics and psychology of post-9/11 fiction, but also as an intercultural and diachronic link which fictional literature experiments with. Working with the model of multidirectional collective memory developed by Michael Rothberg, this specific quality of intertextuality and intergenerational dialogue gives rise to the impression that the memorialization of the terrorist attacks on September 11th 2001 functions in a more dynamic way than it at first glance appears to do. In this contemporary context, literary trauma therefore emerges not primarily as an un-representable void, but must rather be described in terms of a productive, albeit liminal in-between space of both individual and cultural remembering and aesthetic representation.

Keywords: 9/11, cultural memory, trauma, Jonathan Safran Foer, Art Spiegelman.

La ficción del 11 de septiembre muestra una propensión sorprendente a evocar otros traumas históricamente anteriores y referencias intertextuales en un marco asociativo que además introduce en los textos una oscilación entre representación narrativa y referencia indicial, y que ejemplificaré en el análisis de *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close* de Jonathan Safran Foer y *In the Shadow of No Towers* de Art Spiegelman. Basándome en una definición del trauma como una estructura de recepción más que en un fenómeno esencialmente unido a eventos específicos, en mi enfoque el trauma emerge no sólo como un marco de interpretación para tratar la estética y la psicología de la ficción tras el 11 de septiembre, sino también como un nexo intercultural y diacrónico con el que experimenta la literatura de ficción. Partiendo del modelo de memoria colectiva multidireccional desarrollado por Michael Rothberg, esta propiedad específica de intertextualidad y diálogo intergeneracional da lugar a la impresión de que la memorialización de los ataques terroristas del 11 de septiembre funciona de una forma más dinámica de lo que parece a primera vista. Por lo tanto, en este contexto contemporáneo, el trauma literario no emerge como un vacío primordialmente irrepresentable, sino que tiene que ser descrito como un espacio productivo, aunque intermedio y liminal, de recuerdo tanto individual como cultural y de representación estética.

Palabras clave: 11 de septiembre, memoria cultural, trauma, Jonathan Safran Foer, Art Spiegelman.

REIVINDICACIÓN DE LA CULTURA URBANA EN "THE ROLE OF NOTABLE SILENCES IN SCOTTISH HISTORY", DE A.L. KENNEDY

Irene González-Sampedro

Demanding recognition of a city culture has become, in recent decades, a social vindication against the established order. In this sense, A.L. Kennedy's "The Role of Notable Silences in Scottish History" offers a literary reinterpretation of Scottish national archetypes, often associated with a rural identity detached from the urban reality of Glaswegians. Moreover, one of the main peculiarities in Kennedy's writings is her disposition to articulate individual lives that subvert portrayals of Glasgow made by men such as James Kelman or Alasdair Gray. In order to question the cultural unity imposed over the city's population, I will focus on Foucault's analysis (1976) of social hierarchies and how they can be subverted to make visible everyday experiences taking place in the city through the plasticity of space (Rose 1999). In addition, I will analyze how bodies internalize social discourse (Grosz 1998) in the short story, as well as how urban practices transform the map of the city into a text (de Certeau 1984).

Keywords: urban culture, space, body, Glasgow, A.L. Kennedy.

Demandar que se reconozca la cultura procedente de la ciudad se ha convertido, en las últimas décadas, en una reivindicación social contra el orden establecido. En este sentido, "The Role of Notable Silences in Scottish History" de A.L. Kennedy ofrece una reinterpretación literaria de los arquetipos nacionales escoceses, con frecuencia asociados a una identidad rural desvinculada de la realidad urbana que se vive en Glasgow. Y lo hace articulando en una disposición inusual las vidas individuales que subvierten las descripciones de Glasgow hechas por hombres como James Kelman o Alasdair Gray. Para cuestionar la unidad cultural impuesta a la ciudadanía, me centraré en el análisis que hace Foucault (1976) de las jerarquías sociales y de cómo pueden subvertirse para hacer visibles, a través de la plasticidad de los espacios, las experiencias cotidianas que acontecen en la ciudad (Rose 1999). Además, analizaré el modo en que los cuerpos interiorizan el discurso social (Grosz 1998) y cómo las prácticas urbanas transforman el mapa real de la ciudad en un texto (de Certeau 1984).

Palabras clave: cultura urbana, espacio, cuerpo, Glasgow, A.L. Kennedy.

RICHARD FORD'S FRANK BASCOMBE AS AN AMERICAN EVERYMAN

Rubén Peinado Abarrio

The autodiegetic narrator of Richard Ford's Frank Bascombe trilogy —*The Sportswriter* (1986), *Independence Day* (1995) and *The Lay of the Land* (2006)— has been labeled by critics and commentators as a US everyman. Likewise, the character itself self-fashions as a common person able to embody significant cultural ideals and myths associated with the culture and history of the United States. Based on these considerations, the present article discusses and questions the representative qualities of this epitome of a mainstream version of Americanness. Frank Bascombe is a white, male, heterosexual, middle-class citizen in a regionally, ethnically and culturally diverse nation. Therefore, his self-assigned role as a common person repeatedly clashes with the social reality of the United States and at the same time leaves him yearning for a strong personality of his own.

Keywords: cultural identity, national myths, 'Americanness', contemporary narrative, US literature.

La crítica ha descrito al narrador autodiegético de la trilogía de Frank Bascombe de Richard Ford —compuesta por *The Sportswriter* (1986), *Independence Day* (1995) y *The Lay of the Land* (2006)— como un americano medio. Asimismo, el propio personaje se presenta como una persona común capaz de encarnar diversos mitos e ideales relacionados con la historia y la cultura de los Estados Unidos. En consecuencia, este artículo analiza y cuestiona la capacidad representativa de Frank Bascombe como epítome de la americanidad convencional. El protagonista de

Ford es un ciudadano blanco, varón, heterosexual y de clase media, que vive en una nación caracterizada por la diversidad regional, étnica y cultural. Por tanto, su autorrepresentación como persona estándar choca frecuentemente con la realidad social de los Estados Unidos, al tiempo que coloca a Frank en la posición de anhelar una personalidad propia definida con claridad.

Palabras clave: identidad cultural, mitos nacionales, americanidad, narrativa contemporánea, literatura estadounidense.

MEMORY MATTERS: ALICE MUNRO'S NARRATIVE HANDLING OF ALZHEIMER'S IN "THE BEAR CAME OVER THE MOUNTAIN" AND "IN SIGHT OF THE LAKE"

Begoña Simal

This essay analyzes two recent stories by Alice Munro, "The Bear Came Over the Mountain" (*Hateship, Friendship, Courtship, Loveship, Marriage*, 2001) and "In Sight of the Lake" (*Dear Life*, 2012). Both short stories attempt to fictionalize Alzheimer's disease, albeit in different ways. What the two narratives share is the fact that, in tracing the characters' attempts to cope with an increasingly obvious frailty of memory and dissolution of self, they both succeed in involving the reader in that very process of deterioration. Through her skilful handling of narrative time, linguistic ambiguity and epiphanic endings —including, in one case, anagnorisis— Munro gives us a taste of what it must feel like to be aware of the crumbling of the self, caused by Alzheimer's. Not only does Munro narrate, skillfully as ever, the gradual decline associated with the disease, but she also manages to involve readers in that process of gradual decline and disorientation, by playing on our expectations, pointing at the undecidable nature of language and of narrative itself, and debunking all the certainties we had treasured so far.

Keywords: Alice Munro, Alzheimer's, anagnorisis, ellipsis, narrative time.

Este artículo analiza dos relatos publicados recientemente por Alice Munro: "The Bear Came Over the Mountain" (*Hateship, Friendship, Courtship, Loveship, Marriage*, 2001) e "In Sight of the Lake" (*Dear Life*, 2012). Ambos relatos llevan la enfermedad de Alzheimer al terreno de la ficción, aunque de distinto modo. Lo que sí comparten las dos obras es el hecho de que, en su ánimo de describir cómo los personajes se enfrentan a la fragilidad de la memoria y la disolución del propio yo, cada vez más evidentes, ambas consiguen involucrar al público lector en ese mismo proceso de deterioro físico y mental. Munro alcanza a transmitir lo que debe sentir la persona aquejada de alzhéimer, en concreto ese "desmoronamiento" de la identidad que parece causar la enfermedad, y lo consigue gracias a un uso magistral del tiempo narrativo, de la ambigüedad lingüística y, en los momentos finales, de la epifanía literaria (incluso, en un caso, de la figura retórica de la

anagnórisis). Munro no sólo narra, magistralmente como es habitual en ella, el declive gradual que dicha enfermedad conlleva, sino que logra además implicar al público en esa desorientación y deterioro graduales, y lo hace jugando con nuestras expectativas, subrayando la naturaleza indeterminada, "indecidible", del propio lenguaje y del acto narrativo, y finalmente desmontando todas las certezas que habíamos albergado hasta ese momento.

Palabras clave: Alice Munro, *alzheimer*, anagnórisis, elipsis, tiempo narrativo.

TRAVERSING THE FANTASY IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY BILDUNGSROMAN: THE ONTOLOGICAL QUEST AND LACANIAN PSYCHOANALYSIS IN DAVID MITCHELL'S *NUMBER9DREAM*

Adina Sorian

David Mitchell's *number9dream* (2001) has been received as a 'postmodern *Bildungsroman*' that redefines the coming-of-age narrative through a postmodern frame. Useful as this definition may be in distinguishing Mitchell's novel from the traditional coming-of-age tale, most readings building on the notion of his fiction as 'postmodern' have tended to misconstrue or underestimate important aspects of his art. In this article I argue this point using the theories of Jacques Lacan, Slavoj Žižek, and Brian McHale. Taking my cue from McHale's understanding of postmodernist aesthetics hitherto not applied to *number9dream*, I analyze the novel from the point of view of its 'ontological' (as opposed to 'epistemological') *dominant*, defined here as the way in which *number9dream* prioritizes questions about the 'being' of its protagonist's world over those of how this world can be 'known'. Crucial in this context is fantasy, which Mitchell understands not as an escapist mode but, akin to Lacan and Žižek, as reality's 'support'. Rather than being subordinated to the 'reality principle', fantasy acts in *number9dream* as a driving and transforming agent in the protagonist's progress toward maturity: a process that entails the realization that the world he inhabits, rather than being ever-present, always emerges through his own 'fantasmatic' activities.

Keywords: David Mitchell, twenty-first century *Bildungsroman*, Lacanian psychoanalysis, fantasy, ontological quest.

La novela *number9dream* (2001) de David Mitchell se ha considerado un '*Bildungsroman* postmoderno' que redefine la novela de aprendizaje a través de un marco postmoderno. A pesar de lo útil que pueda ser esta definición para diferenciar la novela de Mitchell de la novela de aprendizaje tradicional, la mayoría de los análisis basados en la idea de que la ficción del autor es 'postmoderna' han tendido a malinterpretar o a infravalorar otros aspectos importantes de su estilo. En este artículo defiendo este punto de vista utilizando las teorías de Jacques Lacan, Slavoj Žižek, y Brian McHale. Basándome en la definición de la estética postmoderna de

McHale que hasta ahora no ha sido aplicada a *number9dream*, analizo la novela desde el punto de vista de su dominante 'ontológico' (en lugar de 'epistemológico'), definido aquí como la forma en la que *number9dream* da prioridad a cuestiones sobre el 'ser' del mundo de su protagonista en vez de aquellas concernientes a cómo este mundo puede ser 'conocido'. En este contexto es crucial la fantasía, lo que Mitchell entiende no como un modo escapista sino, de forma similar a Lacan y Žižek, como un 'apoyo' a la realidad. Más que estar subordinado al 'principio de realidad', la fantasía actúa en n*umber9dream* como un agente impulsor y transformador en el progreso del protagonista hacia la madurez: un proceso que implica el darse cuenta de que el mundo que habita, más que estar siempre presente, siempre emerge a través de su propias actividades 'fantasmáticas'.

Palabras clave: David Mitchell, *Bildungsroman* del siglo XXI, psicoanálisis lacaniano, fantasía, búsqueda ontológica.

9/11 AND THE POWER OF THE NETWORK SOCIETY IN ALEJANDRO GONZÁLEZ IÑÁRRITU'S *BABEL*

Rosa Urtiaga

In this article, I propose an analysis of *Babel*'s critique of unequal power relations in the global network society, in particular, after the 9/11 attacks. The events precipitated a new state-centered politics, which made military war on terror inevitable and justified, and which failed to tackle the cosmopolitan concerns that, in the view of many, had started to flourish by the late 1990s, in the wake of the cold war. I draw on Manuel Castells's belief that, although a network-based society is ideally a non-centered form of social structure, it is also a source of dramatic reorganization of power relationships. In this sense, my analysis suggests that *Babel* deviates from decentralized narrative conventions of ensemble movies, and that its uneven structure problematizes positions of domination and subordination in the global war on terror. In particular, *Babel*'s deviant structure is deconstructed as a parallel artifact of the film's thematic critique of non-cosmopolitan power relations in the global network society.

Keywords: network society, 9/11, power relations, cosmopolitanism, narrative structure.

En este artículo propongo analizar la crítica que hace *Babel* de las relaciones de poder desiguales en la sociedad red global, en particular, después del 11 de septiembre de 2001. Los ataques promovieron un nuevo modelo político centrado en el estado, según el cual la guerra contra el terrorismo se justificaba y se consideraba inevitable, dejando atrás las inquietudes cosmopolitas que, según la opinión de muchos, habían empezado a florecer a finales de los años noventa tras el fin de la guerra fría. Parto de la premisa de Manuel Castells de que aunque la

sociedad red es idealmente una estructura social descentralizada es, por otra parte, una fuente de reorganización drástica de relaciones de poder. En este sentido, mi análisis sugiere que *Babel* se desvía de la estructura descentralizada que marcan las convenciones de las películas corales, y que su desequilibrio formal cuestiona las posiciones de dominio y subordinación que se producen en la guerra global contra el terrorismo. En particular, la estructura poco convencional de *Babel* se perfila como una estrategia que, de forma paralela, denuncia la existencia de relaciones de poder no cosmopolitas en la sociedad red global.

Palabras clave: sociedad red; 11 de septiembre; relaciones de poder; cosmopolitismo; estructura narrativa.

THE CRUELTY OF KIN: REJECTION AND ABJECTION IN REBECCA BROWN'S REPRESENTATIONS OF PARENT-CHILD RELATIONSHIPS

Lies Xhonneux

The work of the contemporary lesbian author Rebecca Brown can be read as a dramatization of the chosen nature of biological kinship ties —ties that are, in popular belief as in academic circles, still often considered "natural" and, therefore, dependable. Focusing on familial homophobia brings to the fore this element of choice: several of Brown's lesbian protagonists find the "enduring solidarity" that anthropologist David Schneider famously attributed to the biological family radically contested. Brown further dissolves the naturalness of biological kinship through horrifying descriptions of childbirth, and through portrayals of her mother characters' lack of attachment to their babies. Presenting these infants as abjects, Brown also steers clear of the passivity of the motherly "vessel" that is apparent from standard theoretical accounts of abjection, which inevitably relegate the mother's body to the realm of the abject. Many of the babies of her lesbian protagonists, moreover, grow up to be monstrous kids. Thus Brown can be seen as contesting the idea of the saintly child as our hope for the future for which everything has to be done —an ideology Lee Edelman has termed "reproductive futurism", and which is frequently used against queers, whose sexuality is deemed incompatible with futurity.

Keywords: Rebecca Brown, biological kinship, familial homophobia, abjection, reproductive futurism.

La obra de Rebecca Brown, autora contemporánea y lesbiana, puede ser interpretada como una dramatización de la naturaleza elegida de los lazos biológicos de parentesco —lazos que todavía son a menudo considerados, tanto en la creencia popular como en los círculos académicos, "naturales" y, por lo tanto, fiables. El estudio de la homofobia familiar pone de relieve este elemento de

elección: varias de las protagonistas lesbianas de Brown están radicalmente en contra de la "solidaridad duradera" que el antropólogo David Schneider atribuyó famosamente a la familia biológica. Brown todavía va más lejos y disuelve lo natural de los lazos de parentesco a través de horribles descripciones de partos, y a través de representaciones de la falta de apego de las madres hacia sus bebés. Al presentar a estos bebés como abyectos, Brown se mantiene alejada de la pasividad del "recipiente" maternal que es aparente en las explicaciones teóricas más habituales de lo abyecto, y que inevitablemente relegan el cuerpo de la madre a la esfera de lo abyecto. Además, muchos de los bebés de sus protagonistas lesbianas crecen para convertirse en niños monstruosos. Por lo tanto, se puede interpretar que Brown se opone a la idea del niño santo como nuestra esperanza para el futuro por el que tiene que hacerse todo —una ideología que Lee Edelman ha llamado "futurismo reproductivo", y que se usa frecuentemente en contra de los homosexuales, cuya sexualidad se considera incompatible con lo futurible.

Palabras clave: Rebecca Brown, parentesco biológico, homofobia familiar, abyección, futurismo reproductivo.

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