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TOO VISIBLE: RACE, GENDER AND RESISTANCE IN THE CONSTRUCTION OF A CANADIAN IDENTITY IN THE POETRY OF HIMANI BANNERJI

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The South-Asian Canadian poet, writer and critic Himani Bannerji defines herself as an anti-racist Marxist feminist. Her Indian academic training and the impact that her migration to Canada caused on her made her analyze the condition of Canada as a postcolonial society. All her critical studies are a consequence of what she calls "how I was received in Canada" as a non-white woman. She studies and criticizes Canadian society from a Marxist, feminist and anti-racist perspective. Thus, both her academic and her poetic works have become a site of contestation and a weapon of social activism against racism, fascism and patriarchy. Being an analysis of Canada's postcolonial reality, her critical work has become a social response to the hypocrisies of the Canadian national state. The intention of this paper is to analyze the poetry of Himani Bannerji as a space where she puts in practice all her theories about race, gender and nationalism. This analysis tries to show how the words in her poetry construct a suitable place for immigrant and non-white individuals to develop their identities. She makes her poetry a space where all kinds of barriers are destroyed and where contestation and resistance are voiced.

In her essay *Geography Lessons*, part of a collection of essays called *The Dark Side of the Nation*, she gives a description of her first approach to Canadian society:

> 'Canada' then cannot be taken as a given. It is obviously a construction, a set of representations, embodying certain types of political and cultural communities and their operations. These communities were themselves constructed in agreement with

certain ideas regarding skin color, history, language (English/French) and other cultural signifiers —all of which may be subsumed under the ideological category "white". A 'Canada' constructed on this basis contains certain notions of nation, state, formation, and economy. Europeanness as "whiteness" thus translates into 'Canada' and provides it with its "imagined community". (2000: 64)

This passage summarizes the different concepts that Bannerji uses to define Canada. Canada is a place where the 'other' occupies a big part of this space but does not have as a result an important social role. As a postcolonial society Canada looks for a discourse and an ideology that will build up the Canadian nation. According to Himani Bannerji, the discourse of colonialism is what relates the Canadians (English/French) defined under the category of "whites" on the one hand, and the 'others' or 'non whites', those Bannerji calls "visible minorities", on the other.

Homi Bhabha develops a theory of colonial discourse in his book *The Location of Culture*. He defines it as an apparatus based on recognition and disavowal of racial/cultural/historical differences (1998: 70). This discourse creates through recognition and disavowal a space where individuals are subject to the production of different forms of knowledge in which surveillance is exercised. Originally the colonizer justifies his conquest and establishes systems of domination and power by a process of degeneration of the colonized population on the basis of racial origin. In the contemporary Canadian context, as in some of the contemporary postcolonial societies, the original practice of imperialistic nations has been transformed into a system of difference in relation to race, nation, religion, gender and culture. The Canadian Multiculturalism Act was passed on 21st July 1988. In it, the Canadian government recognized, among its most important points, multiculturalism as the fact that defines the culture and diversity of Canadian society. It concedes total freedom to all members of the Canadian community to preserve, enhance and share their cultural heritage. It posits multiculturalism as a fundamental characteristic of Canadian identity and ensures equal treatment to all members, including equality of employment opportunities for all. It also contemplates the assistance of ethno-cultural minority communities in the organisation of activities for overcoming any discrimination barrier related to race, national or ethnic origin (http://www.pch.gc.ca/progs/multi/policy/act_e.cfm). In his book *Encyclopaedia of Canadian Social Work*, Francis Joseph Turner states that nowadays in Canadian society race is considered just an arbitrary way of classifying groups of people, designed in Europe and taking account only of biological features. It is thus considered a category that lacks empirical support and justifies the domination of one group by another (2005: 313). At the centre of this idea, then, difference can be regarded as the strategy, the imperialistic weapon, used to keep the first colonizers, the "white Europeans", in power. In the same line,

Bhabha concludes: "despite the 'play' in the colonial system which is crucial to its exercise of power, colonial discourse produces the colonized as a social reality which is at once an 'other' and yet entirely knowable and visible" (1998: 70-71).

If Bhabha describes the 'other' as "entirely knowable and visible", Bannerji uses the term "visible minorities" to define the social imagining. She states that in the space of Canada, colonial discourse relates the 'whites' and the 'non whites' in a multicultural discourse. It is the consequence of the presence of 'others' who are recognized, visible and finally impossible to ignore. This multicultural discourse is the ideological construction of the Canadian nation based on difference and dependent on the concept of community. Community, affected by difference, becomes a structure in which it becomes very difficult to bring into the private and the personal. Bhabha describes the concept of community in these terms:

> In the metropolitan space it is the territory of the minority, threatening the claims of civility; in the transnational world it becomes the border-problem of the diasporic, the migrant, the refugee. (1998: 231)

In view of this obstacle, Bannerji explains in her essay that to imagine a community implies making a project in which difference could be valued. She also assumes that the source of this difference is just cultural difference. However, this obstacle is the consequence of a difference that has its roots in race.

It is at this point that multicultural discourse is born. As Bannerji mentions in her essay *The Paradox of Diversity* (1998) this multicultural discourse is based on difference, a difference that is created by the comparison and contrast of the possible 'Canadian' subjects:

> But colour was translated into the language of visibility. The New Canadian social and political subject was appellated "visible minority", stressing both the features of being non-white and therefore visible in a way whites are not, and being politically minor players. (2000: 30)

She coincides with Bhabha in this definition of the 'other' as a subject marked by his visibility in racial terms. Bhabha states that "the visibility of the racial/colonial Other is at once a *point* of identity" (1998: 81). As a mark of identity, Bannerji understands that skin colour is also a mark of tradition and culture and, in terms of nation construction, a tool of the political discourse of liberalism. The combination of these elements makes possible the cultural integration of colour divested of racism. Bannerji uses and interprets the concept of "visible minority" as a celebration of colour and difference, a brightness that makes possible the discourse of diversity as an alternative to the multicultural discourse. However, it seems that although the category of "visible minority" opens a new hope for

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integration, these "visible minorities" are the immigrants, newcomers, refugees, aliens, illegals, people of colour, multicultural communities who emigrated due to poverty. In spite of the Canadian Multicultural Act, these categories seem and feel to be excluded from society, in the light of Bannerji's texts. From this point of view, they may become important weapons in the hands of the state apparatus to modify the conditions of freedom and restrict the access to integration. Francis Joseph Turner talks about this in his book and states:

> Race-related concepts remain important for social work because historical perceptions about racial differences have been used to justify inequities and oppression of some persons and communities, from false notions about the inherent superiority of others. Systemic racism persists throughout Canadian society, often affecting the circumstances and life experiences of social clients, despite Canadian multicultural laws. (2005: 313)

Thus, it could be stated, visibility is transformed from brightness into darkness in the hands of the state. Visibility is what makes the minorities be seen and recognized and what makes them the support of cultural imperialism and white power. Nonetheless, invisibility is a consequence of visibility. This invisibility is a metaphor for the excluded categories that represents the fact of being politically and socially minor players in a society that sometimes considers them necessary but which, at the same time, can consider them a threat of destruction for the domination of only one group over the rest. How do these excluded categories fit in the definition of Canada and Canadianess? Bannerji answers this question:

> The identity of the Canadian 'we' does not reside in language, religion or other aspects of culture, but rather in the European/North American physical origin —in the body and the colour of skin. Colour of skin is elevated here beyond its contingent status and becomes an essential quality called whiteness, and this becomes the ideological signifier of a unified non-diversity. The others outside of this moral and cultural whiteness are targets for either assimilation or toleration. These diverse or multicultural elements, who are also called newcomers, introducing notions of territoriality and politicized time, create accommodational difficulties for white Canadians, both at the level of the civil society, of culture and economy, and also for the ruling practices of the state. (2000: 42-43)

There is one more identity aspect which defines and conditions the "visible minority": raced women. Woman, as Himani Bannerji says, is "the sign of the nation" (2001: 54), a space where she is doubly subjected both to the patriarchal colonial state and the patriarchal nation. According to her, "women are thus advised or presumed to be contented with their status of 'non-autonomous, non-bourgeois, non-secular personhood'" (2001: 56). All her critical and fictional work explores the relationship between race and sex as biological markers that cause and

justify subordination and marginalization. Accordingly, Himani Bannerji uses again the term "visible minority" to define woman as a raced individual manipulated and silenced by the patriarchal community and nation. In her poetry Bannerji gives voice to these "visible minorities" especially to women in an act of struggle that finally "becomes so many people" (1986: 11).

Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin tackled the question of "why the empire needs to write back to a "centre" where "language becomes the medium through which a hierarchical structure of power is perpetuated, and the medium through which conceptions of 'truth', 'order', and 'reality' become established" (2005: 6-7). Bannerji subverts language and uses its power to create the language of the minorities, to give a new perspective of truth, order and reality, and, particularly, to create the space that this new language can describe. The poetic voice of Bannerji's poetry is the voice of the diasporic individual, the immigrant who lives in the fissure between two worlds: the past and the present. Bhabha states that the immigrant subject "requires the experience of anxiety" understanding anxiety as "the affective address of a 'world [that] reveals itself as caught up in the space between frames" (1998: 214). This is what he calls the "in between spaces", the space where Bannerji's speaking subject lives. Deconstructing the imperial language results in a new language, a language that can be attributed to the "visible minorities" and is able to build up a new space and with it a new identity, a new reality and a new truth. Roshan G. Shahani says in reference to Bannerji's poetry that the poetic space is supposed to be a space of "existential angst" or "exited psyche" (1996: 180). I agree with the conclusion that Bannerji's poetry lacks this sense of "exited psyche" or direct immigrant experience to be replaced with a broken voice that is transforming all the pain into struggle and resistance. Bannerji's poetry goes one step further turning her poetry into a weapon with which the obstacles of multiculturalism can be overcome.

In her book of poems entitled *Doing Time*, Himani Bannerji puts into practice all her critical theory about racism, gender, patriarchy and nationalism. Each poem seems to be a voice that describes and an eye that sees the same place but from different perspectives. Each poem is a different window opened in the same house and the act of speaking through it reveals a new world and, with it, a new identity. In this collection of poems Bannerji creates an imaginary space that is described as a fracture. A middle space where culture, races and gendered races create. There, they find a voice that destroys the barriers imposed by postcolonial Canadian society. With these poems she gives voice to the margins of society and, in a way, she rewrites history. The poem that introduces these different voices is the one that gives its name to the whole book, "Doing Time", a poem that summarizes the poetic content and presents the main metaphors:

> If we who are not white, and also women, have not yet seen that here we live in a prison, that we are doing time, then we are fools, playing unenjoyable games with ourselves. (1986: 9)

The central voice that she describes is the voice of a woman who considers the place where she lives to be a prison. As Susan Jacob explains in her analysis of the 'prison' image in Bannerji's poetry, this reflects both the lack of personal and private life but particularly the rejection of the concept of freedom as something false and an unreal product of imperialism (1996: 191-192). This "we" that she refers to in this fragment will become in the end "so many people" because principally they are "doing time". Bannerji, giving voice in her poem to these minorities, is rewriting history, is uncovering the corrupted and violent methods through which colonialism took root. As a colonized and postcolonial country, Canada's history has been told by the same dominant group which in this case is the voice of the white European individual. Once the Multicultural State is accepted, history as it is known should be modified by those voices which now have a recognized place in Canadian society. The unique historical perspective has to leave a way open for these voices to reconstruct and create their histories in Canadian society. This is what Bannerji does with her poetry: she is opening an alternative and creating a new perspective necessary to create a space not constructed under Eurocentric principles.

In her poem "between sound and meaning" she describes clearly that 'in between space' into which the immigrant and the non-white individual fall in a postcolonial society. This voice is "standing at the crossroads", between two cultures where she is nameless, without an identity. The past connected to suffering and slavery is dragged by this voice from room to room like prison chains on her ankles while she is trying to free herself through the act of writing poetry. This is impossible because her original language has been left behind in the process of immigration and consequent integration into a new society. This condition of double consciousness (in W.E.B. Dubois's terms) and race are connected with the central image of the poem: the space between sound and meaning:

> You have fallen into a fissure,
> Between sound and meaning.
> You run your hands over your body
> Feeling out the length, the breadth, the depth. (1986: 14)

Between sound and meaning there is a fissure where she can feel and touch her body. With these two images she makes a combination of language and body. The word is a combination of sound and meaning in its material manifestation: the signifier. Hence, we can interpret that in the middle of sound and meaning is the signifier. The signifier is what makes the word visible as her raced and gendered

body makes her visible and condemns her to live in a fissure of recognition that at the same time takes her into a position of inferiority. Indeed, in her essay *The Paradox of Diversity*, she describes race as an ideological signifier:

> Colour of skin is elevated here beyond its contingent status and becomes an essential quality called whiteness, and this becomes the ideological signifier of a non-diversity. (2000: 42)

There is an attempt to integrate "inventing a name", an identity. However, the threat of racism and violence is always present in this case in the figure of Mara as the Hindu Goddess who brings death. It can be interpreted that past fear and death are always present in that dark fissure which at the same time, as a hope, can also be a return to the darkness of the mother's womb that is only possible in sleep. Once they are awake they are out in the patriarchal world where they are only what they want them to be. This point takes us back to her reflection about how the brightness of visibility has been turned into darkness that, in this situation, has become a refuge.

If "between sound and meaning" is a poem that deals with the image of space in relation with the gendered and raced individual, "Canada in Winter" is a poem that directly identifies this space with Canada and connects it with patriarchy. Again the voice of a woman describes, with grotesque and terrifying corporal images, the result of that cruel, violent and racist part of postcolonial Canada. The first reading of this poem creates an image that brings out at the same time feelings and metaphors as those evoked by Sylvia Plath's poem "Lady Lazarus". Actually, this reading has a referent in the book. Bannerji writes a poem tribute on the occasion of Plath's death called "To Sylvia Plath" (1986: 38). "Canada in Winter" is a poem that in its images seems to echo "Lady Lazarus" to express the patriarchal oppression that, in a way, is expressed by the poets as a torture; but in the case of Bannerji's poem, she adds the postcolonial condition with which the male oppressor is able to use not only gender but also race to exert his power and domination. In addition to this, exiled women suffer, on the one hand, the patriarchal actions and situations of the society they are trying to integrate into and, on the other, the patriarchal domination imposed by their own culture. In this case the patriarchal oppression is double especially in the case of South Asian men whose culture is based on the control of men above the rest of the individuals. In the poem, Canada is described as a distant cold landscape of snow and whiteness, snow representing cold in a place where she cannot integrate. The cold is outside and outside is the world of the fathers and inside is the house, a warm place associated with the mother's womb. To complete the image of Canada as a cold white landscape, the poet adds the image of the wind. The wind stands for the sound of the landscape, as the voice of Canada that constantly talks to these non-white

women that appear in Bannerji's poems. The wind drags with it the painful past and therefore the real history that the official one is trying to hide: "the snow cannot hide the blood anymore" (1986: 43) like "sadness is rubbed against your ankles" (2000: 14) in "between sound and meaning".

The voice of the woman is constructed, as I mentioned before, through grotesque and terrifying images, reflecting the poem "Lady Lazarus". Some of Bannerji's verses can be read as echoes of Plath's. Both poetic voices are describing a woman who is slowly dying. Bannerji describes a wounded bleeding woman who leaves a trace of blood in the snow, on the white skin of Canada, painting it with her colour. This image can be connected with Plath's description of her poetic voice as a "sort of walking miracle". Both images can be linked by the idea of gas, lamps and light that can be interpreted as metaphors related to the Nazi regime concerning genocide, death and dehumanization. Concretely, light represents the outside and the patriarchal world; darkness represents the inside and the mother's womb. At the end of the poem we see Bannerji's woman transformed into the mythical bird 'The Phoenix':

> Torn wings
>   Leaves
>   Feathers
> In the bush. (1986: 430)

The woman who at the beginning of the poem was dying now has torn wings, that is, has lost her freedom, waiting for her only possible salvation at the hands of her executioner. However, in the comparative terms used to analyze this poem, we can assume that, like Lady Lazarus and 'The Phoenix', this woman will rise out of her ashes, will reinvent herself and resist. In fact the poem ends with a tone of resistance and struggle because she extends the suffering of one woman to women in general and to those who are victims of oppression: "everywhere/millions are dying" (1986: 43).

"Apart-hate" connects space with race. Concretely, it describes Canada as a cultural imperialistic society where non white people are subjected to a postcolonial power. In other words, it deals with the situation of the immigrant in a society dominated by the same ruling group (the white European colonizers who established their power once they arrived in the country) who fights to maintain that domination that seems to weaken in the postcolonial and multicultural Canada. Here Bannerji clearly makes reference to all the "visible minorities" that live in Canadian society. She plays with the concept 'Apartheid' to change it into 'Apart-hate', describing, on the one hand, the racial segregation that this term defines and, on the other, highlighting the violence and rage that gave origin to this action. Bannerji writes in her essay *On the Dark Side of the Nation*:

> An unofficial apartheid, of culture and identity, organizes the social space of 'Canada', first between whites and non-whites, and then within the non-whites themselves. (1998: 108)

Canada is again represented as a white landscape and as a land governed by white individuals. As she states in the previous paragraph, Canada practises a hidden cultural apartheid that reveals itself through violence (1986: 46-47):

> In this whiteland
> Chinese coolies, black slaves, Indian indentures
> Immigration, head tax, virginity tests
>
> Apart-hate
>
> Sudden attacks in the dark
> In the dawn with cops and dogs
> White Cop plays with her mouth —resuscitates
> London Pretoria Toronto
>
> Apart-hate

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The word 'Apart-hate' divides the poem into different sections as apartheid does. It is a refrain that with each repetition seems to condemn its victims more heavily. In the poem it sounds like a confirmatory chorus that manifests its strong desire to make effective what this voice says as in a mantra. Each raced individual is described in terms of slavery that in its essence implies violence and each has his particular adjective. It is striking that she does not use any adjective to refer to the word 'immigration', suggesting that that condition regroups the minorities mentioned in the verse before. More striking is how she describes women with the words "virginity tests". While in the poem "Canada in Winter" the voice of the woman suggested her inferior and oppressed condition as a victim of a patriarchal society and culture, here she is described in terms of sexual property. Himani Bannerji writes on this matter:

> Women of the nation are thus permitted to be sexed beings only as property, as owned beings to serve their husbands and patriarchal lineage by being mothers of the nation and national heroes. (2001: 67)

She is a property for a patriarchal society and for her culture as a South Asian woman. The poem finishes with the image of this raced skin considered as 'pelt'. This is a denigration of the raced minorities who are again offended and marginalized because of their body visibility:

> In this white land
> Skin is fingered like pelt
> Skin is sold and the ivory of her eyes
>
> The category human has no meaning
> When spoken in white
> Apart-hate.

This white society treats the non-whites as non-human and grotesque individuals, disgusting and terrifying beings whose strangeness manifests itself in decayed physical features as blood, or pelt that at the same time transforms them into shadows, semi-dead people. The image of a non-human grotesque is a metaphor that represents the treatment of the non-whites by the white society. Ignorance regarding women and other cultures or races makes the white humans behave as non humans to maintain their power and their particular essence of humanity.

All the main elements analyzed in the three previous poems are condensed in the poem "Paki Go Home" with a new element which defines both her critical and poetic work: resistance. If in the other poems resistance, struggle and hope were insinuated, in this poem resistance becomes the central and final image of the poem. The poem is divided into three parts. The first part of the poem situates the poetic voice in a place in winter trapped in an atmosphere of "fear anger contempt" that wires the bodies. She describes a hostile situation of repression that in this part of the poem is generalized to all the non whites. In the last stanza of this section the situation blows up:

> And a grenade explodes
> In the sunless afternoon
> And words run down
> Like frothy white spit
> Down her bent head
> Down the serene parting of her dark skin
> As she stands too visible
> From home to bus stop to home
> Raucous, hyena laughter,
> "Paki, go home"

She makes this tense atmosphere explode by going from the general to the particular and showing how this South-Asian woman is attacked in an ordinary and harmless situation. The cruel words "frothy white spit" try to stain her coloured body with fear, contamination and despair. White land and white spit are images related to Canada and the white community. This connection makes them a symbol of corruption and cruelty. The second part of the poem describes the woman going

back home and establishes a brilliant, but at the same time sad, relationship between the Canadian winter landscape and her body:

> The light of her sadness runs like tears
> Down the concrete hills, tarmac rivers
> And the gullies of the cities
> The wind still carries the secret chuckle
> The rustle of canes
> As black brown bodies flee into the night
> Blanched by the salt waters of the moon.
> Strange dark fruit on tropical trees
> Swing in the breeze gently. (1986: 16)

The union between her body and the landscape is established with images like "blanched by the salt waters", connected to the image "frothy white spit", in an attempt not to integrate these "black brown bodies" but to swallow them and make them disappear. The brightness of her visibility is now transformed into tears that take her down to the "gullies of the city", take her to that fissure "between sound and meaning". Wind covers the crushing city and it pulls with it the painful past and racism. The last two verses open the third and most revealing part of the poem comparing the raced minorities with "strange dark fruit" that still lives. This hope is transformed into a resistance weapon, into a form of contestation that will speak "like a song, like a roar, like a prophecy that changes the world":

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> To organize, to fight the slaver's dogs,
> To find the hand, the foot, the tongue,
> The body dismembered
> Organ by organ rejoined
> Organized.
> Soul breathed in until she, he
> The young, the old is whole.
> Until the hand acts moved by the mind
> And the walls, the prisons, the chains of lead or gold
> Tear, crumble, wither into dust
> And the dead bury the dead
> Until yesterdays never return. (1986: 17)

This part goes from the particular experience of the South Asian woman to the general again, in order to organize themselves in an attempt to keep their own identity and finally get together in one community. Together they will destroy the prison they live in and by this means they will create their own freedom. This destruction is a regeneration of the past: they have to use the painful past, the

history seen by their eyes to destroy the present and restore everything into a future that will allow them to create and express their real identity.

The four poems analyzed summarize the four main images developed throughout the book of poems *Doing Time* in an accumulative and simultaneous process of elements that build a space and a multicultural identity. Space, as an abstract 'in between space' of confusion, and the voice of the immigrant woman who speaks from a double patriarchal oppression, culminate in the representation of space in relation to imperialism, gender and race in the poem "Apart-hate". These three images that constitute the space of "between sound and meaning", "Canada in Winter" and "Apart-hate" show their ultimate intention in the poem "Paki Go Home" which is to grow from that new space into weapons of resistance able to make a space for them in society.

Himani Bannerji makes of her poetry her most valued weapon. She discovers the language of the margins of society to include new voices in history and revise the national identity with the experience of the exiled individuals. Her personal experience as a South Asian Canadian woman helped her to work out a theory that confronts the official history of Canadian society and was necessary to build the pillars of a new space for the new comers who are treated as aliens. In conclusion, racism, gender, patriarchy and resistance, which live in Canadian society, are the foundations of this space that is a result of the deconstruction of these concepts. Bannerji constructs her poetry to struggle against cultural imperialism and to build up a place where the "visible minorities" will be able to be themselves without any kind of oppression or marginalization. Racism and patriarchy become weapons to fight against the postcolonial oppressive structures and to regenerate their lives. Bannerji depicts and gives voice in her poems to a social multiculturalism, an activist multiculturalism that resists and fights with the poems and leaves a door open for hope, freedom and equality.

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SHAKESPEARE'S PLAUSIBLE COMMUNITY: THE FIRST ACT OF *TITUS ANDRONICUS* AND ITS KYDIAN PRECEDENT

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1. Reclaiming Early Shakespeare

It is no longer in bad taste to take pleasure in a performance of *The Spanish Tragedy* or *Titus Andronicus*. The credit enjoyed by these two early masterpieces of public drama when they electrified late Elizabethan audiences with their shocking novelty lasted at least until the end of the first decade of the seventeenth century, if Ben Jonson's 1614 "Induction" to *Bartholomew Fair* attests the continuing popularity of Kydian and Shakespearean avengers. Jonson's aggression towards these plays indicates that they were still drawing audiences "five and twenty or thirty years" after their first appearance (Campbell 1995). However, what is certain is that most Restoration audiences and commentators seemed to have regarded the plays as distastefully violent if not openly offensive. In the eighteenth century *The Spanish Tragedy* was completely neglected; *Titus* survived in an adaptation by Ravenscroft (1687) who, emulating Chiron and Demetrius's "trimming" of Lavinia, as it were, "improved" the play by disfiguring it almost beyond recognition. Well into the second half of the twentieth century, only scholars with a bibliographical interest in Elizabethan drama paid serious attention to the plays. And even then, those prepared to grant the plays a historical significance could not suppress their revulsion for the bloodthirsty avengers. Thus, T.S. Eliot, otherwise so responsive to Elizabethan writing, pronounced his harshest verdict on *Titus* when he famously

described it as "one of the stupidest and most uninspired plays ever written, a play in which it is incredible that Shakespeare had any hand at all" (Eliot 1999: 82).[1] This is no longer the case. The volume and intensity of theatrical, critical, and editorial attention received by the two plays in recent decades marks a turning-point in the history of their reception. Even university students appear to be strongly affected by what scholars of previous generations would have diagnosed as some sort of critical disease.[2]

The restoration of *Titus Andronicus* is part of the general restoration of the earliest Shakespeare, including the *Henry VI* trilogy and *King John*. It was only after the Second World War that these plays began to be taken seriously by both scholars and stage directors. There is no doubt that the recovery of this early group of plays is one of the important contributions of twentieth-century Shakespearean scholarship. Likewise, the re-establishment of *The Spanish Tragedy* has a broader significance as part of the rediscovery of the so-called pre-Shakespearean drama. Since the late eighteenth century, the pre-eminence of Shakespeare has overshadowed the plays of the early generation of Elizabethan public dramatists or University Wits: Greene, Peele, Lyly, Kyd, and Marlowe. Middleton, Webster, Marston, and the rest of the brilliant Jacobeans, have also paid a long tribute of silence to their immortal colleague. In the nineteenth century, the assumption of the superiority of Shakespeare was reinforced with the Romantic notion of the poetic genius. The poet, endowed with imaginative powers that apprehend the eternal truths, soars above the limiting circumstances of the present and becomes the timeless Bard. And Shakespeare "the Bard" did not write plays but "dramatic poems". An aesthetic icon is thus substituted for the historical man of the theatre. Hence the professional, material, and institutional context in which Shakespeare worked is deemed to distort the true meaning of his production. To approach Shakespeare's texts as plays written for the stage was to fail to grasp their artistic value. This view of Shakespeare has proved highly influential. The interpretative principles of Goddard's well-known book, for example, show that this tradition has continued to flourish long after the nineteenth century:

> Drama, as we have said, must make a wide and immediate appeal to a large number of people of ordinary intelligence. The playwright must make his plots plain, his characters easily grasped, his ideas familiar. The public does not want the truth. It wants confirmation of its prejudices. That is why the plays of mere playwrights have immediate success but seldom survive. What the poet is seeking, on the other hand, is the secret of life, and, even if he would, he cannot share with a crowd in a theatre, through the distorting medium of actors who are far from sharing his genius, such gleams of it as may have been revealed to him. He can share it only with the few, and with them mostly in solitude. A poet-playwright, then, is a contradiction in terms. But a poet-playwright is exactly what Shakespeare is. And so his greater plays

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are one thing as drama and another as poetry, one thing on the outside, another within.

The myth of Shakespeare's absolute originality goes hand in hand with the negation of the theatricality of his works and explains the reluctance to acknowledge the interactive nature of his creativity. As Martin Wiggins points out, "once part of a group, [Shakespeare] has been reduced over time to pre-eminent singularity —and it is easy, though obviously mistaken, to assume that his plays are bound always to be originals because they are the more familiar".

Yet Shakespeare was a man of the theatre through and through. As actor and playwright, he was professionally committed to his company, the Lord Chamberlain's Men (later the King's Men), economically dependent on the takings at the box office, and fully responsive to those trends and vogues initiated by fellow and rival authors, with whom he did not shrink from collaborating on occasion. Indeed, Shakespeare saw his two narrative poems, *Venus and Adonis* and *The Rape of Lucrece*, published in proper editions, but did not seem to accord the same attention to the printing of his play-texts. Nor did he make any attempt to put the plays on a par with his poems by assembling them as his "Works", which is what self-regarding Jonson did with his Folio edition of 1616, to the astonishment of not a few. To recognize these basic facts it is necessary to re-inscribe the Shakespearean corpus within its original context: the London public stage. From this perspective, early plays like *Titus* can no longer be regarded as training exercises for the mature plays. Rather, they are seen as Shakespeare's response to each stage in the development of Elizabethan drama, that is, as testimony of his engagement with the new possibilities of a continuously evolving dramatic practice. Shakespeare's plays exist in dialogue with the drama of his time.

The parallel rediscovery of *The Spanish Tragedy* and *Titus Andronicus* would not have been possible without this theatrical shift in focus. Nonetheless, our understanding of the relationship between them continues to be inadequate. That a relationship exists is often acknowledged, but is invariably explained away in the most general terms, as a matter of a few "startling features" (Waith 1998: 38). We are now prepared to admit that Shakespeare often responded to the example of others, but what is meant by that is simply a matter of localized borrowings. Hence it is granted that the Kydian precedent offered Shakespeare a model, but only a formal one. Waith, for example, concludes his examination of Shakespeare's debt to Kyd thus: "like *The Spanish Tragedy*, *Titus Andronicus* is sensational, serious, learned, and spectacular" (Waith 1998: 38). However, the history of the emergence of Elizabethan public tragedy would seem to suggest otherwise. It is increasingly recognized that *The Spanish Tragedy* played a pivotal role in the progression of Elizabethan drama. What is more, in terms of the dramaturgical possibilities that

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it opened up, it is possibly the single most influential play of Renaissance tragedy. C.L. Barber, for example, judges the play "nothing less than great, strategically great" (Barber 1988: 131), while McAlindon hails it as "quite the most important single play in the history of English drama" (1986: 55). It is a fact that Kyd's play started off as an unprecedented success. Between 1592 and 1597, except for *The Jew of Malta*, no other extant play seems to have been performed as often as *The Spanish Tragedy*. It is believed that it may have been performed by at least four of the major Elizabethan playing companies and at no less than seven of the London playhouses. Such popular acclaim is confirmed by the number of editions it went through: eleven between 1592 and 1633, a number which no Shakespeare play can boast. Parodies and references to Hieronimo in both Elizabethan and Jacobean plays (e.g. Beaumont's 1607 *The Knight of the Burning Pestle*) attest the continuing popularity of the play long after its appearance. Clearly, a young playwright at the outset of his career and eager to make his mark could not have ignored this spectacular success. There were not a few imitations of Kyd's play, but *Titus Andronicus* was the one play which proved another smash hit. This is not accidental. There can be no doubt that the appeal of Kyd's play had to do mostly with its innovative treatment of revenge. Extreme violence and cruelty feature in the play, but were not foreign to the pre-Kydian stage. The appeal of the Kydian avenger does not lie in sensationalism. It was Shakespeare who grasped the full implications of the new avenger for the public drama and sought to explore them further in his play. Yet in criticism the possibility of Shakespeare's seriously creative engagement with Kyd's tragic vision is never properly considered. This has to be a consequence of the lingering bias against Shakespeare's first tragedy.

As a result, whenever the two plays are examined in the perspective of dramatic continuity, *Titus Andronicus* emerges as an inferior derivative of *The Spanish Tragedy* which as such can contribute little to the fledgling public drama. Shakespeare's play is not the product of an intellectual engagement with the Kydian discovery of tragic revenge. It only appropriates a number of striking forms and motifs. In this respect, the verdict that Barber and Wheeler's influential study passes on the play is representative:

> Designed in obvious imitation of Kyd's *The Spanish Tragedy*, *Titus Andronicus* has an aged, worthy pillar of social piety, who suffers outrage to his children, is driven to desperate, extravagant grief and protest [...] and finally, by turning dramatic fiction into physical action, achieves outrageous revenge [...]. Because motives [...] are projected in symbolic action for which there is no adequate social matrix, there can be no control by ironic recognition, no clarification of what these motives mean as they are expressed in relation to a plausible community whose stability they disrupt. *Titus Andronicus* fails, by contrast with *The Spanish Tragedy* (let alone *King Lear*), because there is in effect no larger social world within which the outrage takes place,

> no ongoing business of state and private life within which the isolation of the injured
> hero can be presented, in the way that Hieronimo's desperate, helpless isolation is
> conveyed. The revenge motive as a struggle for vindication of what is at the core of
> society is only formally present in *Titus Andronicus.* (Barber and Wheeler 1986: 125)

This tells us that *Titus* is a disappointing failure because it offers symbols instead
of a community of interacting characters. It thus looks to the medieval past rather
than to the future of Elizabethan drama. Revenge comes across not as the tragic
exploration of a profound sense of injustice (the case of Hieronimo) but as an
exercise in gratuitous violence. Barber and Wheeler's negative verdict rests, then,
on the claim that *Titus* fails in its representation of revenge because it fails in its
representation of a community possessing a meaningful alternative to violence.

What I contend is the opposite claim: far from an opportunistic remake, *Titus* is a
significant contribution to the new public drama which further develops the Kydian
discovery of the interacting community. Behind Barber and Wheeler's indictment
of the play is the received perception that *Titus Andronicus* is "more like a pageant
than a play" (Bradbrook, as quoted in Hamilton 1967: 63). However, there
remains a subtler and still more persistent assumption. It is that the first
Shakespearean play to attempt a serious representation of Roman culture is the
Plutarchan *Julius Caesar*. As Robert S. Miola points out, "the most striking feature
of modern critical reaction to *Titus Andronicus* is the persistent refusal to consider
it one of Shakespeare's Roman plays". A form that this prejudice usually takes is
the claim that the author of *Titus Andronicus* conceived its avenger and his tribe
more in pagan than in Roman terms. The defining features of the Roman nation
are dissolved into a pagan barbarity that confuses Roman and Goth, villain and
avenger. From this the conclusion is drawn that Titus's revenge is unrecognisable
as a Roman act. Emrys Jones's well-known study of the early Shakespeare, for
example, claims that *Titus* is "Greek in feeling", and that "the setting is Roman
but the story it tells is one of Thracian violence". For Jones, who is trying to link
the play to Euripides's *Hecuba*, the Greek character of the play manifests itself in
its sanguinary atmosphere, to which the Romans contribute no less than the Goths:
"the play's first act of barbaric violence is Titus's own —his sacrifice of Alarbus, son
of Tamora. This act of sacrifice, an addition to the source, is itself not Roman but
Greek" (Jones 1977: 106-107). Unlike Kyd, who successfully recreates a chivalrous
community under God and their King, Shakespeare's lack of anthropological
imagination, it would appear, frustrates his first attempt to put a living and
interacting society on the Elizabethan stage. It is the perception of an uncivilized
violence, common to Goths and Romans, then, that underpins the charge of
Shakespeare's misrepresentation of society, which, in turn, supports the imputation
of the meaninglessness of Titus's revenge. The implications of what we see enacted,

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however, seems to me to be at the antipodes of this: even violence, which appears to negate the communal hold on the individual, bears the marks of his or her cultural, that is, social affiliation.

2. The Interactive Community in the New Drama

What Shakespeare represents in his tragedy of Romans and Goths is their reciprocal perception of barbarity, which is entirely different from the representation of a common barbaric disposition. From the start, the idea of barbarity is present as a means of differentiating rather than confusing identities. Admittedly, the first to perform a barbaric act are the Romans. Carrying the coffins of his dead sons, victorious Titus returns to Rome. He enters the city in triumphal procession, pays tribute to Jupiter at his Temple or Capitol, the religious heart of Rome, and opens the family tomb in order to inter his dead sons. This ritual re-encounter with the city after ten years of war is completed by a final ritualistic act —the sacrifice of Alarbus, eldest son of the captive Queen of Goths. To us, readers and spectators living in the allegedly civilized twenty-first century, the sacrifice is patently barbaric, and all the more because it involves the rending and disembowelling of the body, its severing into parts and its consumption by fire. But there is nothing here to allow us to assume that this ritual is un-Roman. Predictably, criticism has given this initial act of vengeance the "pagan" treatment, so that Ronald Broude, for example, in an often-quoted article presents it as a "characteristic example of pagan vengeance" (Broude 1979: 469). Nevertheless, Shakespeare stresses the fact that not only does the sacrifice respond to no vindictive impulse but that it is conducted in perfect accord with Roman religious practice. It is not the vengeful living but the dead that "religiously [...] ask a sacrifice" (I.i.127). As Lucius shows, the satisfaction that the Andronici take in Alarbus's slaughter is the satisfaction of accomplished duty:

> See, lord and father, how we have performed
> Our Roman rites. Alarbus' limbs are lopped,
> And entrails feed the sacrificing fire,
> Whose smoke like incense doth perfume the sky.
> Remaineth naught but to inter our brethren. (I.i.145-149)[3]

For the mother of the victim, it is of course quite different. The violence that is being done to her children appears incomprehensible to her. But she condemns it as a mark of *romanitas*, which she so much hates —"O cruel, irreligious piety" (133). To her foreign eyes, the demands that Roman piety makes seem utterly inhuman. As outsiders to the faith, the Goths perceive in Roman rites nothing but

sheer barbarity. Compared to Rome, "was never Scythia half so barbarous" (134), says Chiron, one of Tamora's two surviving sons. Chiron's imputation of barbarism is an ironic reversal of the cultural righteousness of Marcus, who has just announced Titus's return from "weary wars against the barbarous Goths" (28). These mutual perceptions of barbarity do not argue for a condition of barbarousness that Goths and Romans share. Rather, they establish a cultural relativity: in a truly interactive theatre, each culture is shown from the perspective of the other, so that their limiting relativity is exposed. "Barbarism" is the perceived cultural limitation of the other tribe that remains unperceived in one's own. Thus, what Shakespeare establishes from the start is the limitation that a given culture imposes on its members. Contrary to what some critics assume,[4] Shakespeare identifies the barbarity of Goths and Romans in order to emphasize the cultural divide separating them, and hence their distinctiveness as communities. The existence of these dramatic ironies should alert the audience to the fact that the imputation of barbarity does not exhaust the meaning of violence.

The importance of this relativity for my argument is that it defines a historical and cultural dimension for the community that makes its members' dependence on it more, not less, definite than in *The Spanish Tragedy*. In comparison to Kyd's drama, this dependence argues for a more profound conception of selfhood: characters are more definite in Shakespeare because they are more relative. And what they are relative to is their community. To claim, as Jones does, that a shared barbarity blurs the Romanness of the Andronici is to disregard a significant advance on Kyd's generic representation of the community. Indeed, from the perspective of Shakespeare's culturally specific communities, Kyd's Spain appears abstract and schematic. *The Spanish Tragedy* certainly generates a sense of "ongoing business of state and private life" in a way unknown to the declamatory drama of its revenge predecessors like *Horestes* (printed 1567) or *Gorboduc* (performed 1561). And not only that: the play successfully represents a community the identity of whose members is shown —and not just stated— to rest on their location in a network of sexual, familial, and hierarchical relations, all of which are seen simultaneously at work in their actions and speeches. Speech ceases to be, as it was in the set-speech drama of the previous generation, a statement of ideas; in the new drama it enacts an identity that grows even as it reveals itself in dialogical action. Shakespeare, however, is not Kyd's rival. What he does is to assimilate the Kydian example by taking it further: where Kyd's achievement was to represent *the community*, the achievement of Shakespeare is to recreate *a community*.[5] Of course, the social reality of *The Spanish Tragedy* is not timeless. The Spanish court appears as a recognizably traditional court of chivalric values.[6] But Kyd's main concern in dramatizing a community living up to chivalrous values and norms is to represent a God-sanctioned social ideal against which the atheistic savagery of Lorenzo the

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villain can be measured. Though set in Spain, England's greatest colonial and ideological rival at the time, the audience is made to identify with the King and his pious servant Hieronimo, thereby fully registering on the spectators the devastating impact of Lorenzo's transgressions against the social, political and moral order. What is central to Kyd's conception of the community is its normative validity, which is meant as universal. By contrast, Shakespeare not only imagines a pagan world that is presented as completely foreign to the Elizabethan audience, but produces two different national groups whose beliefs and practices create insiders and outsiders, thus determining the identity of their respective members. In *The Spanish Tragedy*, the different nationality of its characters remains purely nominal: nothing in their actions or speeches shows the Portuguese to be different from the Spaniards. In *Titus*, as the strategy of reciprocally perceived barbarity demonstrates, we continuously feel that a Roman acts and thinks as he does because of his Roman affiliations, as the Goth does because of his. The fact that this representation of the community is founded upon Kyd's example should not obscure the fact that it represents an advance on it.

3. The Avenger

Right from the outset, the hero of *Titus Andronicus* reveals Shakespeare's assimilation and development of the Kydian discovery of character as the product of interactive dramatic context. It also becomes clear from the start that revenge is central to this recognition. Because Kyd's community is conventional, his hero is presented as one of us. Hieronimo embodies the God-fearing family man, with whose suffering we fully identify when he is brutally uprooted from his secure world of respectability and affection. Only in his mad desperation does Hieronimo become capable of violent action. Titus's is a different case. How differently their characters are conceived is evident from the start. Hieronimo makes his first appearance on the occasion of Spain's victory over Portugal as another member of the party who welcomes the triumphant troops back home. Only when his son Horatio enters, leading the Portuguese prince captive, does he begin to stand out. It then becomes clear how profoundly he identifies with the values of his chivalric community: for him, service to his king and country expresses the natural law that regulates personal, familial and social life. Titus's first appearance similarly highlights his commitment to Rome. It becomes clear that this commitment is not of the common sort. In the speech that precedes Titus's entrance, Marcus refers to him as "Chosen Andronicus, surnamèd Pius" (I.i.23). The patriotic connotations of this epithet, famously related to Aeneas, should not be overlooked. As Barrow points out in his influential study of Roman civilization, "for

a 'religious man' the phrase is usually 'a man of the highest *pietas*'". In this profound sense, *pietas* implies a subordination to the claims that gods, family, and country have on you —"the claims exist because the relationships are sacred" (Barrow 1963: 22). To be "Pius", then, is to excel in the awareness that you belong to others as well as to yourself, that is, to accept the full implications of the solidarity into which you are born as a Roman.

When Titus enters in ceremonial procession, the appositeness of Marcus's epithet is confirmed. Titus's opening rituals amount to an assertion of identity, both national and personal, in that they renew the Roman people's commitment to themselves as a nation through his offer of the victory to Jupiter. In their study of Shakespeare's engagement with classical culture, Charles and Michelle Martindale ask themselves "why does Shakespeare's Rome appear to many so much more convincing than the Rome of other English Renaissance dramatists" in order to conclude that this is the case because only Shakespeare's plays achieve "a sense of a possible past culture with its own imaginative consistency" (1990: 130, 125). Whereas his predecessors and rivals often mistake scholarly accuracy for imaginative consistency, Shakespeare shows religious and cultural practices to reflect a vision of life that is at the centre of the characters performing them.[7] As Jacques Berthoud has perceptively pointed out, *Titus* is "the first sustained attempt to put a consistent foreign world on the [Elizabethan] stage" (Berthoud and Massai 2001: 25). My contention is that this remarkable achievement was possible in large measure because of the play's capacity to show what it means for the Roman hero to have internalised as part of his identity the rituals and institutions of his ancestors' land. Titus's piety constitutes the purest expression of the Roman ideal of life. As Barrow further explains:

> Throughout their history the Romans were acutely aware that there is "power" outside man, individually or collectively, of which man must take account. He must subordinate himself to something. If he refuses, he invites disaster [...]. Willing co-operation gives a sense of dedication; the purposes become clearer, and he feels he is an agent or an instrument in forwarding them; at a higher level he becomes conscious of a vocation, of a mission for himself and for men like him, who compose the state. When the Roman general celebrated his "triumph" after a victorious campaign, he progressed through the city from the gates to the temple of Jupiter (later in imperial times to the temple of Mars Ultor) and there offered to the god "the achievements of Jupiter wrought *through* the Roman people". (1963: 9-10)

Unlike Hieronimo, a mere spectator of the triumphal return of the Spanish troops, Titus enters Rome (and the play) as an embodiment of national glory, of a martial virtue without which Rome could not quite be itself and indeed may cease to exist. Re-enacting the rite described by Barrow, he pays tribute to the god who has

directed him on his Roman mission. It soon emerges that Titus's identification with such a mission is absolute, quite beyond anything possible in Hieronimo's chivalric world. Titus's return is the final one over ten years of war against the Goths, during which he has lost twenty-one of his twenty-five sons. The epic simile with which he opens his salutation speech (I.i.74 ff.) shows that he projects himself in the light of the ancient warrior-heroes, in whose example he has made his greatest sacrifices, perpetuating the glorious tradition of Rome. Titus's invocation of mythical and historical precedent is characteristic of the Andronici, to the extent that it constitutes one of the salient traits of the play. Like the early *The Comedy of Errors*, *Titus Andronicus* is a learned work. This fact has been interpreted as a sign that in his first plays Shakespeare, who had no university education, was actively competing with his rivals the University Wits. Shakespeare, it is claimed, was asserting his classical learning against his erudite fellow playwrights. Hence Jonathan Bate, observing that "from the outset, the characters in *Titus* establish mythical and historical patternings for the action", concludes that "precisely because Shakespeare had less formal education than certain other dramatists, his play has more display of learning" (1993: 103). While this may indeed be the case, the fact remains that the traditional examples invoked by Titus show much more than his (or Shakespeare's) acquaintance with the Roman past: they reveal that he lives in emulation of heroic precedent —that is to say, that Titus is the product of the culture in which he exists. And, of course, this also holds for the Goths, who are shown to be Rome's cultural outsiders. Accordingly, where Titus is capable of the greatest sacrifice in deference to legendary precept, the Goths exhibit a contemptuous scepticism towards it —for example, in Tamora's allusions to Aeneas ("conflict such as *was supposed/* The wand'ring prince and Dido once enjoyed" [II.iii.21-22, my italics]) or to Diana ("Had I the power that *some say* Dian had" [II.iii.61, my italics]).

4. The New Tragic Vision

The fact that Titus's commitment to his society is of an heroic dimension unknown to Hieronimo has to do with the fact that Titus's society is also heroic in a way that chivalrous Spain is not. In my reading of the plays, this opposing aspect of the heroes' identities confirms rather than denies the fact that Titus owes a great deal to Hieronimo as an avenger. Indeed, it reveals the full extent of Shakespeare's intellectual engagement with Kyd's new vision of revenge. What Shakespeare presents in his first tragedy is a *radicalised* version of the committed man of honour and paragon of civic virtue turned avenger. Titus's identification with the community is of the Kydian type, but taken to an extreme. The consequences of

this for revenge are disclosed only in Act V, after the suffering inflicted on the Andronici becomes more than is humanly bearable, even for a military Stoic like Titus. In Act III, the great Act of suffering, Rome pounces on his hero with a ferocity whose reality is incomprehensible to him: Lucius is banished from Rome, while Lavinia is discovered raped and maimed moments before the severed heads of his two captive sons are contemptuously returned along with the hand Titus sacrificed for their reprieve. But in confirmation of the unity of his play and of the control he exerts over it, Shakespeare provides an ominous hint of the consequences of any collapse of *romanitas* at the end of Act I, well before the calamities begin. This defining hint confirms what the tragic evolution of Hieronimo suggested —that revenge is a necessary kind of madness that results from the dissolution of the hero's internalised communal self. In other words, the unprecedented way in which Act I of *Titus Andronicus* recreates the condition of individual existence in society shows how Shakespeare capitalized on the new possibilities of the Kydian dramaturgy. But Act I not only establishes the interacting basis of its hero's identity— that is to say, his dependence on Rome for his sense of self. It also reveals the tragic contradictions that such dependence can generate, and does so by prefiguring the necessary breakdown of selfhood that must ensue when Rome ceases to sustain Titus's sense of who he is. Titus's reaction to the challenge to authority at I.i.286 and ff. suggests the full tragic potential of his absolute commitment to *romanitas*. From this perspective, it becomes clear how carefully worked out the pattern of Titus's disintegration into the madness of revenge is —indeed, how central to the play's tragic vision is the Kydian representation of the self in the community.

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After his victorious return to Rome, his ceremonial progress through the city, and his reception of the people's tribute from Marcus, Titus refuses the offer of the "palliament of white" of imperial candidacy, and raises Saturninus to the throne (1.i.190 ff.). This is the first in a series of mistakes that precipitate a crisis at the centre of Roman power. Titus recklessly promises Lavinia to the emperor, but Bassianus, challenging Titus's decision, claims her as his own. The rest of the Andronici help in her abduction, provoking Titus's sense of challenged authority. Titus's reaction is as instinctive as it is brutal: when his son Mutius attempts to impede Titus's access to Lavinia, he kills him on the spot. Yet this merciless act constitutes an affirmation of *romanitas*: "what, villain boy, / Barr'st me my way in Rome?" (I.i.293-4). We are now made to feel very uneasy about Titus's uncompromising identification with his martial empire: in the course of this crisis it has begun to emerge that Rome is as dominated by appetite as its new emperor is. In the new Rome of Saturninus, Titus's uncompromising code of honour is beginning to prove dangerously inadequate. In its extraordinary ferocity, Titus's slaying of Mutius —one of his few sons to have survived the demands of Roman

service— bodes ill for his sanity in the face of the far greater challenges the emerging Rome has in store for him: grief, humiliation, impotence, and, finally, madness —a vengeance whose appalling barbarity would become legendary on the Elizabethan stage. It is beyond the scope of this paper to show the psychological depth and subtlety of Shakespeare's representation of the avenger's madness. It certainly demands a less mechanical analysis than received notions of revenge as private justice permit. The originality of the new avenger will be missed unless it is recognized that the inordinate ferocity of Titus's final act of retaliation is in direct proportion to his initial self-investment in civic virtue. To put it bluntly: it is Titus's radical commitment to Roman civilization that renders inevitable the frenzied carnage of Act V. This is the paradoxical recognition attendant on the emergence of the new revenge tragedy, driven as it is by a new and truer conception of the logic of the self-in-society. This new conception allows for tragic contradiction in a way unknown to the previous generation of Elizabethan playwrights. To ignore this fundamental aspect of the plays is to fail to do justice to Shakespeare's debt to Kyd and, even more important, to the playwrights' revolutionary part in the creation of Renaissance drama.

Notes

1. However, in his well-known essay on William Blake, Eliot remarks that "[Blake's] early poems show what the poems of a boy of genius ought to show, immense power of assimilation" and goes on to mention the early Shakespeare as an example of such powers, which assimilate precedent to generate something new: "Blake's beginnings as a poet, then, are as normal as the beginnings of Shakespeare", he claims (1950: 152-153). It is difficult to accept that Shakespeare should willingly have coarsened his creative powers when writing his first tragedy. Flat dismissals of the play continued to be common in Shakespearean scholarship for a long time after Eliot's dismissal. Dover Wilson, for example, likened the play, which he edited, to "some broken-down cart, laden with bleeding corpses", while Winifred Nowottny's survey of Shakespearean drama devoted a single sentence to the play: "*Titus Andronicus*, a repulsive play, may be left out without regret" (as quoted in Hamilton 1967: 63).

2. Thus Emrys Jones: "*Titus Andronicus* is no longer, or perhaps no longer so often, thought of as an embarrassing aberration. Indeed some may feel that, for many of our students, *Titus* has become almost too popular, too central a text" (2001: 35).

3. All citations to the play are taken from Berthoud and Massai (2001).

4. Jonathan Bate, for example, is in no doubt that the sacrifice of Alarbus is intended to "break down the distinction between Romans and barbarians" (1993: 108).

5. To stress, as I am doing, the groundbreaking novelty of these two early plays of the new drama is not to deny that continuity also exists between this drama and the medieval tradition. This has been amply demonstrated by the pioneering work of Willard Farnham's *The Medieval Heritage of Elizabethan Tragedy* (1936) and his successors' classic studies: Bernard Spivack's *Shakespeare and the Allegory of Evil* (1958), and David Bevington's *From "Mankind" to Marlowe* (1962). For an up-to-date survey of the question see Rowland Wymer (2004).

6. How Spanish Kyd intended his play to be remains a disputed question. In a revealing article, J.R. Mulryne (1996) argues that the play, written at the time of the Armada, must have been regarded from a Hispano-phobic perspective by the Elizabethan audience. While a Hispano-phobic subtext may be present, as my description of Act I suggests, Kyd seems to me to make more demands on his audience than sheer jingoism. For a discussion of the historical dimension of the play see Ardolino (1995); for an updated comprehensive review of Kydian scholarship, see Erne (2001). The matter is further discussed in Chapters 3 and 4 of my thesis (*The Subjectivity of Revenge: Senecan Drama and the Discovery of the Tragic in Kyd and Shakespeare*, The University of York, July 2002), from which some parts of this article have been adapted.

7. This applies to most of the 39 extant Roman plays of the period, from Thomas Lodge's *The Wounds of Civil War* (ca.1589) —the first recorded— to Chapman's *Caesar and Pompey* (ca.1604), of which Martindale observes that "characters [...] are quite carefully drawn, but not the society which produced them and against which they played out their struggles" (Martindale 1990:132).

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"CIVIL WAR INSIDE MY BODY".
TWO NARRATIVES OF DYING
IN CONTEMPORARY ANGLOPHONE FILM

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Introduction: A General View on Death,
Theory, and Creativity

After the sexual revolution of the 1970s, death is the ultimate taboo, overwhelmingly present, yet undeniably silenced in our everyday life: "death has become remote, no longer an integral part of life, but a fearsome and unwelcome visitor" (Callanan and Kelley 1997: 31). In contrast to the public rituals of mourning in ancient societies, today we have pushed death and the dying off-stage, keeping them in the margins because of an irrational fear that benefits nobody. Sociologist Beverley McNamara explains this evolution with a powerful image. In her analysis of the contemporary ethics of the end of life, developed from the teachings of tanatology specialist Philippe Aries, death is a savage entity that we feel the need to control:

> Death in the pre-modern era was, according to Aries, 'tame', whereas death in contemporary times is so 'savage' and terrible that it is ultimately hidden or denied. This modern 'savagery' creeps in under the mask of medical technology and the death of the patient in the hospital, covered with tubes, becomes a popular image, more terrifying than the *transi* or skeleton of macabre rhetoric. (2001: 6)

The process of dying is especially feared, then, when it is caused by disease, which brings about a physical decay that we tend to avoid looking at. In a consumer-

centered society where beauty and youth are overvalued, a sick body is seen as a threat that must be eluded at all costs. McNamara expands on this social phenomenon of panic when she says that the whole organization of human culture and society relate "to survival and to pushing back the moment of death through focusing on the worth of living" (2001: 1). Together with consumerism, our second direct response to the fear of death is to resort to the biomedical model, which pushes sickness and death away from everyday life, keeping them in specialized environments and conceptualizing them as separate from the human beings undergoing the process. Tanatologist David Wendell describes this bureaucratization and technologization of terminal illness in his work *Confronting Death*: "[b]ureaucracy is an arrangement of human activities that values the following: specialization; rationalization; the development of power through expert and specialized knowledge, knowledge secretly protected; and, perhaps, above all, depersonalization" (1996: 24).

In this sense, contemporary readings of the biomedical model connect directly with Michel Foucault and his analysis of the clinic, medical knowledge and power. In *The Birth of the Clinic* (1963) he focused on the concept of the *gaze*, relating the doctors' eyes and their technologies for surveillance to a certain type of learned discourse, inaccessible to the layman, and connected to a set of practices of power over the human body. Gender-conscious thought has rescued Foucault's theorization of power, truth, and knowledge as linked to the body and the possibility of resistance to dominant discourse. Titles like *Feminism & Foucault. Reflections on Resistance* (1988), *Disciplining Foucault. Feminism, Power, and the Body* (1991), or *Feminism, Foucault, and Embodied Subjectivity* (2002) explore the convergences and divergences between the French philosopher's and contemporary feminist theory. This article is situated in what Margaret McLaren calls the "extender view", accepting the premise that Foucauldian concepts are useful for feminist theory and can be adapted to include questions of gender that the French thinker initially left out: "[e]xtenders draw on Foucault's work and apply it to women's experience. This has been especially useful to illuminate bodily aspects of women's oppression using Foucault's concepts of disciplines, biopower, power, and social norms" (McLaren 2002: 24).

Over the last few decades, other titles have appeared in fields such as the sociology of medicine, psychology, tanatology, philosophy, and even self-help, opening new debates on death and dying, and related issues like the experience of sickness, pain, palliative care, and euthanasia. Following the path opened by the late Elizabeth Kübler-Ross in her classic *On Death and Dying* (1972), other specialists have presented their theories on the process of dying, and artists have put their imagination at the service of sick bodies and souls. In sociology, for instance, Clive Seale analyzed the "dying role", especially in relation to cancer and AIDS, in

Constructing Death. The Sociology of Dying and Bereavement (1998). Bryan Turner focused on the social construction of health and illness, affirming in *Medical Power and Social Knowledge* (1995) that "the medical profession has a policing function within society" (206). In the line that the aforementioned David Wendell and others would follow, Turner states that "[m]edicine as a form of social control involves the standardization of illness into phenomena which can be managed by bureaucratic agencies" (206). Renée Fox had already cleared the way for this kind of critical analysis in a 1989 book that merged personal experience and sociological thought:

> The body is persistently under observation in the hospital. It is intently looked at, listened to, felt, and asked about; its input and output are recorded and measured; the odors it emanates are systematically noted […]. As medicine and its technology have advanced, the hospital has increasingly become the focus of powerfully penetrating machines […]. These machines watch over patients' bodies and produce copious data about them, making it possible for physicians and nurses to closely observe patients at a distance, away from the bedside. (152)

In art, pain, disease and death feature very often. Mexican Frida Kahlo (1907-1954) is a classic example of an artist representing suffering in autobiographical painting. Carlos Fuentes explains in his introduction to Kahlo's published journal that Frida described her pain directly with her brushes, making an effort to avoid silence with an articulate howl that reaches a visible and emotional form in her work (2001: 12). More recently, anglophone visual artists like Nan Goldin (1953-), Jo Spence (1934-1992), or Hannah Wilke (1940-1993) have dealt with cancer, AIDS, medicalization, and death in their photographs.[1] In creative writing, death has been a recurrent topic for a long time, with disease and its peculiar processes gaining importance as a thematic preoccupation: "[f]rom the Book of Job and *Oedipus Rex* to *As Is* and *The Normal Heart*, two recent plays about AIDS, literature reflects societies' needs to understand the mysteries of disease" (Hudson Jones 1990: 13). Throughout the last decade, we have witnessed in the USA and Great Britain the presentation of plays like *My Left Breast* by Susan Miller (1998) or *Cancer Tales* by Nell Dunn (2002), featuring women's sick bodies in the wake of Tony Kushner's groundbreaking project on AIDS *Angels in America*, written between 1991 and 1992; the publication of personal testimonies like *Picasso's Woman. A Breast Cancer Story* (1996), and the development of programs that use poetry, short-stories, and other forms of written expression in the healing process of sick people.[2]

Moving on to the field of film, this article analyzes two examples of women-centered stories of dying, focusing on the screen as an appropriate medium to present the plight of the female dying subject harassed by biopower. In these two

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stories, triggered by a diagnosis of ovarian cancer, issues of body politics, power in the clinical environment, and the process of coming to terms with a nearing death are present. If, as David Morris suggests (1991: 3), pain resists verbalization and writers are constantly searching for effective ways to express it, Margaret Edson (as responsible for the original play *W;t*), Mike Nichols (as the director of the film adaptation of Edson's text), and Isabel Coixet (as a script writer and director of *My Life Without Me*) struggle to find new outlets for their sick protagonists' voices, by means of poetic language, images, and surprising hints of humor that will end up giving shape to two original proposals of death narratives in contemporary film.

1. Death Comes Knocking: Mike Nichols' Adaptation of *W;t*

In her 1999 text *W;t*, which obtained the Pulitzer Prize for Drama, American playwright Margaret Edson offers an ironic insight into the dying process of Vivian Bearing, Ph.D. Diagnosed with ovarian cancer, she re-defines her illness as an intellectual challenge. Confronted with the cryptic lexicon of the doctors, she acknowledges: "in this particular field of endeavor they possess a more potent arsenal of terminology than I" (43), but immediately answers back: "[m]y only defense is the acquisition of vocabulary" (44).[3] Trying to master medical discourse while fighting pain, Bearing stages the contemporary fear of death and the urgency to leave a legacy. Throughout the play, the audience shares her experience, presented through brechtian devices like alienation and metatheatrical references: "[i]t is not my intention to give away the plot; but I think I die at the end. They've given me less than two hours" (6).

In 2001, director Mike Nichols adapted Edson's play to the screen. In the HBO edition for Digital Video Disc, the story is summarized as follows:

> Vivian Bearing is an English professor with a biting wit that educates but also alienates her students. With her teaching and life both rigidly under control, Vivian would never let down her defenses, until the day comes when they are taken down for her. Diagnosed with a devastating illness, Vivian agrees to undergo a series of procedures that are brutal, extensive and experimental. For eight months her life must take an uncharted course. No longer a teacher, but a subject for others to study, Vivian Bearing is about to discover a fine line between life and death that can only be walked with wit. (Nichols 2001)[4]

As can be inferred from the synopsis, Nichols' film and Edson's play can be understood both as artistic narratives of death and as denunciations of biopower over a woman's body. In their works, set in a university hospital, Vivian Bearing is

under constant medical surveillance. Michel Foucault's biopower, represented by the doctors' gaze, the X-ray and other internal tests, the charts with the input and output of fluids, and other elements surrounding Vivian's stay in the clinic, serve as the background for a story of learning and un-learning, compassion, hope, fear, and dignity.[5]

In Mike Nichols' film, the original metatheatrical impulse is kept by presenting the protagonist, played by Emma Thompson, talking directly to the camera and reflecting about the passing of time in life and in her narration. During her last X-ray test Vivian looks straight at the lens (and, by extension, at the spectator), and recites "this is my playes last scene", which evokes her knowledge of John Donne while at the same time commenting on her current situation. As a visual strategy, the director makes prolific use of intense close-ups, and the audience is made to witness the physical and mental decay of Vivian as a patient undergoing an experimental, strong, and invasive medical treatment. The degradation of her body and mind is highlighted by the radical contrast between her healthy self —as presented in some of the flashbacks to her academic life— and her present sick self, increasingly affected by metastasis, which brings about physical suffering and confusion.

In *Wit*, we see Vivian lose all her hair (eyebrows included); lose weight and gain pallor; suffer from abdominal pain, extreme thirst and stinging in her throat; vomit; develop sores in her lips; get angry when she is unable to find words to explain her plight; struggle to dominate an alien vocabulary; and finally feign an emergency just to bring nurse Monahan to her bedside for consolation. All this is ironically punctuated by Vivian's own comments, eyes directed at the camera, which maintains the brechtian alienation effect devised by Margaret Edson in her play. Tracking and freeze frame shots, together with explicit ellipses orchestrated by Bearing as an intratextual narrator contribute to this effect, too, as does the substitution of the healthy Vivian for the present-day sick Vivian in some of the flashbacks. Thus, for instance, we see an adult and bald Bearing in a hospital gown playing the role of young Vivian during a childhood conversation with her father. Similarly, sick professor Bearing, barefoot and wearing a baseball cap, faces the students during an analeptic scene at the university. The superposition of the sick body over the everyday life scenes is radically brechtian: it forces the audience to reflect upon the generalized practice of hiding illness from view or covering it with make-up, wigs, and other carnivalesque strategies of pretense. In this sense, respecting Margaret Edson's dramatic principles, Mike Nichols reveals what specialist Rebecca Schneider calls "the explicit body in performance": a site of social markings, a dialectical weapon that, as done in *Wit*, transgresses by its mere presence the traditional dynamics of spectator-actor relationships, vindicating a "reciprocity between viewer and viewed rather than the traditional one-way-street"

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(Schneider 1997: 8). In this film, Vivian Bearing is watched by the audience, but she also looks back at it, presenting it with ethical dilemmas on the limits of science and the visibility of death.

The protagonist's main conflict in *Wit* is that she is not only affected by cancer, but trapped in a sick role, one that puts her in a powerless position and creates expectations of behavior to which she is not ready to adapt. Peter Freund and Meredith McGuire discuss the construction of this social label, explaining that "[l]ike all social roles, the sick role is primarily a description of social expectations (including those of the sick person). While these expectations strongly influence behavior, the sick role does not describe how sick persons actually behave" (1991: 131). Therefore, there is a gap between the theoretical construction of the role in society and the actualization of behavior as seen in flesh-and-blood people suffering from disease. In Nichols' film, Vivian is presented as an independent, extremely intelligent woman that is not ready to internalize the role when she is taken ill into hospital. From day one, she resists the label by trying to regain control of her treatment, and by struggling to explain her plight through wit and verse, the languages that she masters. John Donne, the seventeenth-century poet to whom she has dedicated her whole academic life, is her weapon against death: by submitting it to words and punctuation, she hopes to keep it at a safe distance. Her knowledge of poetry and metaphysical philosophy is also a reinforcement of her identity inside the hospital, which cancer and its medical treatment threaten. Freund and McGuire explain the sick person's feelings when faced with a situation like Vivian's: "[i]llness is upsetting because it is experienced as a threat to the order and the meanings by which people make sense to their lives [...]. For the individual, illness and affliction can likewise be experienced as assaults on the identity" (1991: 147).

In several scenes in the film, the protagonist tries conscious exercises of meaning-making. Susan Sontag affirmed in *Illness as Metaphor* that "[c]ancer is a rare and still scandalous subject for poetry; and it seems unimaginable to aestheticize the disease" (1979: 19). However, Professor Bearing rebels against this exclusion of the disease she suffers from from the kind of language that she likes and controls best, and takes a clear stance by connecting it directly to poetry, trusting her deep knowledge of John Donne will sustain her: "I know all about life and death. I am, after all, a scholar of Donne's Holy Sonnets, which explore mortality in greater depth than any other body of work in the English language". She makes efforts to regain her peace and the original meanings and references in her world, and two strategies serve her for this purpose. On the one hand, she frequently resorts to irony, putting up a sardonic façade against treatment lacking in delicacy on the part of the technicians or of humiliating processes like undergoing a pelvic exam at the hands of a former student. Thus, after repeatedly being asked her name by

indifferent members of staff, she ends up identifying herself as "Lucy, Countess of Bedford", who was John Donne's patron for some time. Later on, when the clinical fellow and ex-student of hers starts with the gynaecological test, she whispers: "I wish I had given him an A". Even in her final moments, she is able to add with a certain degree of metatheatrical sarcasm: "I apologize in advance for what this palliative care treatment modality does to the dramatic coherence of my play's last scene".

On the other hand, Vivian uses John Donne's lines to try and regain some calm during her difficult moments. We are, as death specialist Ira Byock writes, "inherently meaning-makers", and "[f]aced with the ultimate problem and unalterable fact that life ends, human beings impulsively strive to recognize some meaning in death" (2002: 279). As Dr. Posner is about to touch the tumor that is killing her in his pelvic exam, Vivian starts reciting "Death be not proud, though some have called thee/ Mighty and dreadfull, for, thou art not soe [...] Die not, poore death, nor yet canst thou kill mee". When challenged by the clinicians' medical jargon, she compares their vocabulary to Donne's: "imagine the effect that the words of John Donne first had on me: ratiocination, concatenation, coruscation, tergiversation. Medical terms are less evocative" (43). Later on, when Vivian has become conscious of the battle going on both in and outside her body (as cancer tries to invade her organism and doctors and patient alike struggle to defeat it), she reads yet another sonnet by Donne: "If poysonous mineralls, and if that tree, / Whose fruit threw death on else immortall us, / If lecherous goats, if serpents envious/ Cannot be damn'd; Alas; why should I bee?" Rosette Lamont, writing about Edson's original drama, points at this as "[o]ne of the most exciting moments in the play" (2000: 573), one in which the audience is presented with "a mature, self-confident Vivian, the master of her classroom. She is armed with her knightly sword, a pointer" (Lamont 2000: 573).

The image used by Rosette Lamont is particularly appropriate, since Vivian and her doctors can be symbolically read as a group of knights involved in a life-or-death quest for a Holy Grail that would be identified with the cure for cancer. Actually, Clive Seale identifies the quest narrative as one of the three possible forms of articulating terminal disease, talking "'through' rather than 'about' the body" (1998: 27). According to Seale, in the quest narrative illness is understood as a journey with a call for departure (in this case, diagnosis), an initiation (the medical tests in *Wit*), and an eventual return (the hope for cure and recovery that is, in this instance, not achieved). In the course of that quest, then, the doctors engage in several combats for which Vivian's body becomes the battlefield: scans, punctures, X-ray, analyses, blood pressure control, isolation, experimentation with drugs, chemotherapy.

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Although in the film version she is not holding a pointer in the "poysonous mineralls" scene, Mike Nichols does reveal this idea of the female body as a battlefield by situating cancerous Vivian, wearing all the hospital markers of the sick role (gown, ID bracelet, etc.), in front of her class, but playing the role of healthy Professor Bearing at the peak of her energy. For the spectator, there is a contradiction between what s/he sees and what s/he hears; between what the woman's body seems to communicate and what the woman herself is acting out. As I have commented above, this paradoxical juxtaposition of images, with the actor characterized as a dying patient but playing a full-force professional, contributes to the alienation effect and to the consciousness-raising function of the film.

The Cartesian battle between her body and her mind is best understood by Vivian through words, her main tool and her passion since childhood. In her narrative, she sometimes resorts to semantic fields connected to warfare, as when she talks of the doctors' "arsenal of terminology", or when she conceives chemotherapy as a battle going on inside her body in which not only cancerous cells, but also healthy ones, are destroyed (Edson 1999: 66). Susan Sontag identified this tendency to conceive scientific efforts as a war against illness: "[t]here is the 'fight' or 'crusade' against cancer; cancer is the 'killer' disease; people who have cancer are 'cancer victims'" (1979: 57). Feminist performers and writers have made a connection between this and the representation of the female body as a site of conflict. According to Mary Deshazer, texts which deal explicitly with women and cancer, "employ the explicit body in performance to mark women's cancerous breasts, ovaries, and wombs as sites of social meaning that transgress from the rules of normative female bodies and convey powerful embodied histories" (2003: 3).

Following this line, Margaret Edson chooses to conclude her play with a nude: Vivian takes off her cap, bracelet and hospital gowns and appears in front of the audience "naked, and beautiful" (1999: 85). Throughout the story Bearing, who had always lived inside her mind, had resented the rebellion of her body, lost control of her physical functions and surrendered to the inescapable fact of mortality. As Patricia Weenolsen explains, the uncontrollable reactions of the human body to sickness and pain are part of the process of dying. In this respect, she explains that the sick person feels as if a civil war is raging inside her/his body (Weenolsen 1996: 74). The need to regain control of one's body, then, is part of the path towards a peaceful death, and Edson's protagonist is allowed this final relief. In a highly non-erotic manner, Vivian is presented to the audience free from the signs of biopower that the hospital had inscribed on her (IV pole, gown, needles...(. For Deshazer, "as Vivian strips off the cap that hid her baldness and the bracelet that provided her hospital name and number, she is luminous, in control of her body and its movements, whole" (2003: 10). As feminist

performance critics state, the female body on stage becomes a canvas for scars, a site of conflict, an eloquent narrator of stories of resistance (Borràs 2000: 7). In Edson's text, when learned language proves inadequate for the protagonist's narrative and John Donne's poetry stops being effective to provide her with answers, the body takes center stage to help the character conclude her narrative not in the guise of a victim, but with the dignity that she had been calling for throughout the play.

In his adaptation of the theater piece, Mike Nichols chooses not to use the nude as a final image. Probably conscious of the historical objectification of women's bodies throughout film history, he decides on a different strategy to give Vivian back her voice and her incorrupt physical self at the moment of her death, echoing the proverbial "face as a mirror of the soul" idea: while nurse Monahan draws the curtain in Bearing's room, symbolically representing the subtle "comma between life and death" that Professor Ashford (her mentor) had thoroughly explained to Susan, the camera takes us to a close-up on the dead Vivian's face, which slowly fades away and into the healthy Vivian's portrait, with her own voice in the background, reciting one final sonnet by John Donne. Ridding herself of a body that has become a burden, in Nichols' version Vivian is restored to her self and her dignity by the reminder of her healthy beauty and the director's option of giving *her*, and not the doctors, the final word in the film.

2. Too Many Things, Too Little Time: Isabel Coixet's *My Life Without Me*

Isabel Coixet's 2003 English-speaking success *My Life Without Me* was shot in Canada (Vancouver and Burnaby), in an atmosphere of cold, humidity and hardship. Some of the narrow, intimate locations she had used in previous films, such as the launderette and the battered car, are repeated, contrasting with the open natural spaces of Canada. In fact, the main characters live in a small trailer in the backyard of Ann's mother's old home. Ann, the protagonist of the film (played by Sarah Polley), is the complete opposite of Mike Nichols' Vivian Bearing: she is in her twenties, lacks a formal education, and works as a cleaner in the university. Upon being diagnosed with ovarian cancer, she makes a list of "things to do" and tries to prepare everything for "her life" to continue without her. In that list she includes ten items, seven of which are partially or totally fulfilled by the end of the story, namely: "tell my daughters I love them several times a day" (she does); "find Don a new wife who the girls like" (their sensitive new neighbor, Ann); "record birthday messages for the girls for every year until they are 18" (she gives the tapes to her doctor); "say what I'm thinking" (sometimes she does; sometimes she does

not); "make love with other men to see what it is like" (at least one man); "make someone fall in love with me" (Lee does, head over heels); and "go and see Dad in jail" (only one visit).[6]

In the movie, loosely based on Nanci Kincaid's short story "Pretending the Bed is a Raft" (1997), the Catalan director presents a highly personal reading of the dying process as an opportunity to fulfil one's wishes and to achieve a certain sense of closure. The main difference between the short story and the film is that in Coixet's version Ann keeps her illness a secret, which for the director makes her a heroine.[7] Kincaid's protagonist, Belinda, tells her husband Virgil and her mother Grace about "a spot on my womb" (1997: 200). While Virgil resorts to denial, insisting that "Belinda is not going to die. And that's final" (201), Grace starts a campaign for her baptism, because she relates the tumor to the hand of Satan: "[e]very bad thing that happened, from the earthquake in Mexico to Lamar wetting his pants, Grace called a Satan attack. 'A spot in your womb?' Grace said. 'A malignant spot? My God, Satan has outdone himself now!'" (200).

In her script, Isabel Coixet leaves the rest of the family out of the equation, focusing exclusively on Ann's experience, not as a patient confined to a hospital setting (as Vivian was in *Wit*), but as a free individual who makes her own choices about her final months. In contrast to Nichols' narrative, the audience of *My Life Without Me* is not forced to watch the physical decay of the protagonist. Only two scenes take place in the hospital: one is the moment of diagnosis; the second one, when Ann takes a box of tapes for her daughters to her doctor. Between the two of them, the doctor-patient relationship evolves visibly: when he discloses the fatal diagnosis to Ann, the doctor is totally unable to look her in the eye, sadly admitting "I can't sit in front of someone and tell them that they're gonna die". A few weeks later, when Ann goes back for some painkillers, they sit in the same impersonal and depressing waiting room, but the physician takes a chair and positions himself directly opposite to his patient. This time, they discuss death more openly: she rejects tests and hospitalization, but accepts medication in order to live a more or less "normal" life. On his part, the doctor accepts her surrender and stops insisting on invasive and useless treatments, going instead for a palliative care option because, he says, "dying is not as easy as it looks".

In contrast to the detailed presentation of Vivian Bearing's physical processes in *Wit*, in Coixet's work we see Ann in pain on very few occasions: the first attack arrives unexpected, when she is doing the housework, and gives rise to the fatal tests. Her mother takes her to hospital and then drives back to pick up her granddaughters from school, leaving Ann alone to face the terrible results. After she is informed, Ann decides not to share her state with anybody, and the film shows the difficult tests that she goes through due to this decision. Thus, for

example, the spectator is made to witness Ann's mother bitterly complaining about her headaches and aching bones every day after work, while the daughter keeps silent about the cancer that is consuming her. The contrast between the two women and their attitude to life and pain contributes to their characterization throughout the story.

The second bout, in which abdominal pain makes Ann vomit violently while she is at work, brings about a monologue in which she confesses her disappointment and sorrow to her best friend, Laurie. Interrogated about the reasons for her physical reaction (Laurie is obsessed with losing weight and thinks Ann is on a strict diet), Ann furiously responds:

> You wanna know why I'm throwing up? I'm throwing up because when I was eight years old, the girl who was supposed to be my best friend told everyone I was a slut. I'm throwing up because when I was fifteen years old I didn't get invited to the only party I ever wanted to go to in my entire life. I'm throwing up because when I was seventeen I had my first kid and I had to grow up overnight; and I got no more dreams; and without dreams you can't fucking live!

After this, the intrusion of pain only marks the voracious evolution of her cancer, and Ann is seen physically suffering twice more: once, she is bedridden and has her neighbor Ann take her role in the kitchen, which gives her a hint of what "her life" will be without her. The second time, she is having lunch with her lover Lee and, doubling with stinging pain, she understands that it is the beginning of the end. She grudgingly asks Lee to leave immediately after his revelation that he is in love with her, and calls Don to drive her home, literally to her deathbed. Again, the ignorance of her plight makes the people around Ann act in ways that the audience, fully informed of the situation, reads as (involuntarily) inappropriate, highlighting Ann's courage and determination. Thus, for example, the second time she meets with Lee, the man confesses: "my body hurt thinking you wasn't wanna come".

Because she is very young (23), Ann's dying process is short, sparing her family the burden of a long sickness and a traumatic medical treatment. As Vivian did in *Wit*, although for very different reasons, Ann walks towards her death completely alone. Professor Bearing did not have a family or friends to share her problem with; Ann decides to keep it to herself in order to protect her loved ones. In her work *On Death and Dying* (1972), Elisabeth Kübler-Ross described five stages of grief in the dying person: 1) denial; 2) anger; 3) bargaining; 4) depression; and 5) acceptance (1993: 59-147). Since the doctor gives her only two months to live, Ann skips denial and goes directly from anger to acceptance; she has time for little else. She decides to savor every moment: she walks in the rain, makes love with Don and Lee, plays with her daughters pretending the bed is a raft and there are sharks threatening them, talks to her old friends (Laurie) and makes new ones

(nurse Ann), visits her father in jail, goes shopping and to the hairdresser's, and listens to music for the first time in ages.

Ann's story, which is constructed by Coixet both through action and through her voice-over narration in the second person ("this is you, eyes closed, out in the rain, you never thought you'd be doing something like this…") reflects the metaphysical belief that Dr. Bernie Siegel presents in his preface to *The Art of Dying*: "[t]o be immortal one must love" (qtd. in Weenolsen 1996: xvi). In opposition to Vivian, who we saw had spent her life going up the academic ladder on her own, Ann has lived for others since her adolescence, becoming a responsible wife, mother, and worker prematurely. At the beginning of Coixet's film, Ann is a generous woman who even at the peak of her distress is thinking about other people's wellbeing. Thus, when she is taken to hospital and made to wait for hours, she insists to all the nurses and doctors that they must tell her mother to pick up her daughters from school. Similarly, while she is trying to accept the fact of her approaching death, she still worries about her husband's new job or about her mother's bitterness.

However, after the doctor coldly breaks the news to her, Ann's character starts a new line of development. For the first time in her short life, she also begins to think about herself. She cultivates her independence and evolves towards a round character, "a heroine and unbelievably normal at the same time, not a saint, but somebody who does something extraordinary".[8] Life until this moment, she says in one scene, looks like a dream, and now she is starting to wake up. Like Vivian in *Wit*, Ann in *My Life Without Me* tries to extract some kind of meaning from her existence. She looks around to what she has and back to what she has done, because, as Callanan and Kelley explain, "[m]ost people, as they're dying, want to feel that their having been alive has been significant, that they made some difference in this world and the lives of those around them" (1997: 159). The director herself confirms this vision when she acknowledges that she intended to make the audience think about the fact that we only have one opportunity to live, and that what we do will have consequences for the existence of those around us.[9]

The main concept in Coixet's narrative of dying is that of emotional legacy. Ann struggles to leave a will of love and good memories to the people in her life. What in *Wit* was conceived as an academic and cultural inheritance (Vivian's papers, books, lessons, etc.), in *My Life Without Me* becomes a humble, but immense gift: "[i]t was like the only present I could give you and the girls: save you all the trips to the hospital and all the stress". Until the very end of the film, Ann rejects the sick role as explained by Freund and McGuire, because she understands that "the sick role is primarily a description of social expectations" (Freund and McGuire 1991: 131). A strong and stubborn woman, Ann does not wish to conform to

those expectations, which imply dependence, passivity, and obedience to the biomedical rules. In her last visit to the hospital, when the doctor asks her why she is not keeping her appointments, she decidedly rebels against biopower and affirms: "I need to feel like I've got some control. I don't want any more tests if they're not going to save me". Hers is, as actress Sarah Polley comments, an extremely "efficient and practical" attitude towards illness. Once she has internalized the diagnosis, she comes to understand death as presented by specialist Ira Byock, and makes an effort to construct her own continuum: "a stage of life [...] Byock examines dying as the last of a continuum of developmental stages" (Staton, Shuy and Byock 2001: 259). In that sense, Coixet's protagonist tries to die exactly as she has lived: doing her best for her loved ones and not being a nuisance to anybody. She records tapes for her husband, lover, mother and daughters, and struggles to make them as happy as possible in their difficult economic conditions, putting the emphasis on the idea that life is going to continue after she is gone, but something of her will remain. As Staton, Shuy and Byock observed in a group of dying patients analyzed in their study *A Few Months to Live*, "[p]articipants in their dying months actively sought to affirm a personal continuity that in some way would transcend their physical death" (2001: 255). Ann even looks for a new wife for Don, and she is lucky enough to meet her new neighbor (conveniently called Ann, too) just in time. She puts her through a little "test" with her two daughters and, near her end, watches her moving around her house, cooking for her family and literally replacing her in her life even before she is gone.

Having achieved a certain degree of peace by being able to tick off most of the items on her list of "things to do before I die", Ann, finally bedridden (although she still insists to her family and friends that "it is just anaemia"), whispers to herself: "[y]ou pray that this will be your life without you". This is her final hope, the reconciling thought that allows her to finally let go. Consistently with Coixet's attitude to physical suffering throughout the movie, the audience does not witness the precise moment of Ann's death. In coherence with the narrative line of the film, the spectators are invited to appreciate the legacy that she has left. After a subtle dissolve from Ann's deathbed (the past) to "her life" in the present, *My Life Without Me* ends with a series of shots of the different people in her environment continuing to live after she has passed away. While we see her mother dating a man, Don and the girls going for a picnic with neighbor Ann, Lee finally furnishing his house, or Laurie eating, Ann's voice is heard as she recorded it on the tapes for each of them. As she whispers "I loved dancing with you", her lover's nostalgic smile closes the story and leaves the audience with an impression very different from other narratives of illness and death that may close the door to any possible future.

Notes

1. For information about these three contemporary artists, the following titles are useful: *Cultural Sniping*, by Jo Spence (London and New York: Routledge, 1995); *Mujeres artistas*, edited by Uta Grosenick (Köln: Taschen, 2003); *Witness to Pain*, edited by Nieves Pascual (Bern: Peter Lang, 2005).

2. For examples of contemporary uses of writing in therapy, check the following websites, amongst others: <www.cancer answers.org/stories/>, <www.inter-disciplinary.net/mso/hid/hid.htm>.

3. All the quotes from Edson's play have been extracted from the 1999 Faber & Faber edition.

4. The references to the DVD edition of *Wit* will always be taken from the HBO version. Please notice that the title of the playtext reads *W;t*, with a semi-colon substituting the "i" that is nevertheless respected in the film version.

5. I have elaborated on the application of Foucault's theories of biopower to *W;t* in my article "Foucauldian Biopower in Contemporary Anglo-American Theater: Margaret Edson and Nell Dunn", currently in press for *BELLS (Barcelona English Language & Literature Studies)*.

6. All the quotes from and references to *My Life Without Me* are based on the DVD version of the film edited by Filmax in 2004 for the Spanish market.

7. Coixet's comments are extracted from an interview included as an extra in the 2004 DVD version of the film.

8. Comments by actress Sarah Polley (interview in the DVD version of the film).

9. See Note 7.

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THE SUBALTERN ETHNOGRAPHER: BLURRING THE BOUNDARIES THROUGH AMITAV GHOSH'S WRITING

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Back in 1988, Clifford Geertz investigated into the ideological and legal transformation of the colonial subjects into sovereign citizens in the post-colonial era and the implications of the new order of things for the anthropological science, which for centuries served imperialism as one of its main ideological bases. Once the role of the ethnographer as objective witness to the Other was discredited, the very existence of anthropology as a realist science began to stumble in both its rhetorical and mimetic dimensions. This was due to both the emergence of an audience reluctant to continue to abide by the Self/Other dichotomy sanctioned by Orientalism and the dismantling of scientific descriptive language as mere discourse.

With this difficult background, voices such as Amitav Ghosh's emerge to re-locate the position of the anthropologist from the inside. If, as Geertz suggests, anthropology is more compartmentalised than ever in the post-modern world (1988: 140), Ghosh's self-imposed aim is to minimise the impact of such divisions through his double commitment as a researcher and novelist. Born in Calcutta in 1956, his training as a historian and anthropologist was soon transformed into a professional interest in creative writing, which bore his novel *The Circle of Reason* as first fruit in 1986. His current position as Visiting Professor in the Department of English and American Literature at Harvard is also proof of Ghosh's tendency to blur the boundaries between the ethnographic study and the literary narrative.

In his introduction to *The Imam and the Indian: Prose Pieces*, a collection of miscellaneous articles and reviews, Ghosh recalls the time when he was writing *In an Antique Land*. Variously regarded as a travel book, an ethnography and a memoir, its text delves into the life of a twelfth-century Jewish slave, and it also relates the experience of the author in Nashawy, the small Egyptian village where he pursued his quest, as well as the results of the research itself. Through his daily interaction with the locals, he discovers the strong social component that they ascribe to work:

> Verbs denoting certain calibrations of social relationships [i.e., 'co-operate', 'help so-and-so'] superseded verbs that referred to technical acts [i.e., 'harvest rice', 'pick cotton'] —an order of preference that was directly contrary to my expectations. (Ghosh 2002: ix)

Definitely, work and social interaction reveal themselves as connected in the minds of the villagers. The activity of work, seen in the context of human relationships as fostering bonds of cooperation and friendship, is reflected in everyday language in a metonymic fashion, so that the linguistic concept of social activity, i.e., the context in which workers submerge themselves into their duties, acts as a referent to the productive act of working as a whole.

This interest in replacing mimesis with metonymy in ethnographic description condenses the main aim of Ghosh's project, as can be detected in both his research and literary production. Well aware of the weak verisimilitude of the anthropological representation of far-away cultures, Ghosh proposes instead a strategy based on metonymic threading which allows a connection to be made between apparently unconnected cultural instances under a single referent shared by all of them. At the same time, there is a thrilling irony in all his novels: it is very difficult to find a common string that threads them together. None of his plots seems to resemble one another, Ghosh never recycles his stories. And yet their parallelism lies in their total absorption in resemblance, for what they defy is the building of compartments and classifications to manipulate reality. They are all fuelled by the same drive: the art of establishing connections.

Without considering Geertz's remarks on the current state of anthropology, it may seem that Ghosh, as an ethnographer, is faced with the unmanageable challenge of interpreting an unfamiliar culture and rendering it intelligible with claims to objectivity, a hardly attainable ethical task though classically inherent to anthropological practice. Notwithstanding, the writer adopts the position of a committed subaltern researcher,[1] unwilling to go into the realm of intellectual fabrication that fed the ideology of imperialist anthropologists. This is achieved through his search for connections and analogies away from dominant discourses so as to renew the role of ethnography in the era of 'posts-'. *In an Antique Land,*

the non-fictional work from which the essay "The Imam and the Indian" is excerpted is sustained by this same rationale. The book, which was published in 1992 in London by Granta Books, is not easily classifiable within the frames of any category as far as genre is concerned. Frequent reflections about his research and his life in Nashawy are scattered throughout, giving it a metafictional air which should strike any reader looking for aseptic scientific distancing. At the same time, Ghosh mingles the ethnographic mode with the biographic one, the historical account of the life of the slave, the actual object of his research, with annotations from his own personal diary during the time he spent in Egypt. This overlapping of genres is definitely a strategy that Ghosh adopts to question the too-readily assumed construction of scientific discourse as objective, while transferring his thematic interest in connections to the level of genre and literariness.

Using Hayden White's distinction between a "discourse that narrates" and "a discourse that narrativizes", Ghosh's *In an Antique Land* can be ascribed to the first category as it is "a discourse that openly adopts a perspective that looks out on the world and reports it", in clear contrast with "a discourse that feigns to make the world speak itself and speak itself as a story" (White 1987: 2). The examples White gives to illustrate this opposition —Tocqueville, Burckhardt— all have in common their reluctance as historians to conform to the traditional patterns of narrativity, especially those having to do with chronological order and the observance of a well-defined structure concluding in a closed ending. Ghosh is similar in this respect, taking a step further: he also problematises the question of narrativity, even though he uses a different strategy. Instead of refusing to tell a story altogether, he chooses to narrate —and not to narrativise— not by avoiding any specific genre, storytelling in this case, but by mixing up genres so as to destabilise the popular assumption that truth should be conveyed through a single uniform narrative form. He replaces the pro-historical, anti-hi/storical dissidence of these earlier practitioners of history with a structurally multi-layered approach to historical account that allows for multiple vehicles of expression —the ethnography, the personal memoir, fragments from his own PhD thesis— while privileging none in particular, thus calling into question the omniscient descriptive precision of each one of them.

But the practice of challenging the linear narrativity of historiography for the sake of it would be extremely self-referential as well as intellectually sterile. Urbashi Barat has commented on the underlying rationale behind the use of this technique, drawing attention to "a corresponding rejection of the Western/Christian notion of "progress", especially in terms of an inevitable linear or chronological process "that is at the centre of this canonical conception of historical and scientific knowledge" (2001: 125). Ghosh refers precisely to this "Christianising impulse" of historical manipulation when asked about the nationalist instrumentalisation of

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historiography in an interview in *Kunapipi* in 1997, while at the same time he mentions *In an Antique Land* as a breakthrough in his writing career and an eye-opener for his own perception of history and his role as a researcher:

> I wouldn't have believed this before I wrote *In an Antique Land*, but once you see the ways in which history has become really a kind of battleground in the Middle East —well, not even a battleground; no-one even disputes the boundaries. Egypt is not interested in the Geniza documents and Western Jews see the fact of Egyptian Jewry as an aberration, an anomaly. Jewish history is profoundly tragic because it's a history that has been completely invented within the German academy in the nineteenth century. It comes out of the German scholasticism, and out of a pressure to systematize history; it's essentially a Christianizing impulse. More than two-thirds of the Geniza consists of magical documents and amulets, and none of that is ever dealt with. I think it's just regarded as non-Jewish. Similarly, all the Sufi stuff is traced back to a kind of proto-Jewish mysticism. I mean, the very fact of that interchange with Islam is completely disregarded. Increasingly, there are scholars working on this stuff. But Israel conceives of itself in such a Europeanizing way —basically that model of German scholasticism has become what Judaism is today. You can just see today the erasure of what existed in the Middle Ages— of what that period represented. (Silva and Tickell 1997: 175)

Just as Ghosh is deeply interested in colonial history and orientalist ethnography as narrative constructions serving nationalist purposes, so his choice of spatial setting and temporal frame is highly relevant inasmuch as he describes a story of a multicultural society in medieval times. Pointing to the fact that cosmopolitanism in pre-colonial contexts has long been disregarded as mere myth, particularly in the case of Middle-Eastern history, he unearths the forgotten life of the Jewish slave Bomma, which had been carefully hidden for centuries by anthropology and history in their imperialist versions, the very sciences that he cultivates as a scholar. At the same time, this choice of setting entails a demystification of hybridity as an eminently post-colonial phenomenon, which is an added value to *In an Antique Land* in a time when the literary arena is pervaded with narrative recreations of multiculturalism almost exclusively set in post-colonial times. Padmini Mongia has drawn attention to this issue, pointing out that

> by offering a glimpse into the cosmopolitan, humane circuit of relations prevalent in medieval India up to the moment when European dominance via colonialism enters its history, Ghosh poses a postcolonial challenge via the pre-colonial [...]. Although European colonialism and imperialism have been written as having a historical inevitability to them, Ghosh's precolonial world questions that inevitability. The world he creates reveals the possibility of futures and histories other than the one we have come to regard as inevitable. (2003: 84-85)

Apart from destabilising post-colonialism's monopoly of multiculturalism, Ghosh not only rejects the inevitability that conforms the basis of the civilising mission undertaken by European colonialism, but also the sense of moral obligation and ethical commitment that has been traditionally associated with it. *"La mission civilisatrice"*, as Said characterised it in *Culture and Imperialism* (1994), is also justified by duty, in the sense that the Western master, as the sole custodian of truth, is obliged to the colonial through the task of enlightenment, which is considered as a mission, an act of intellectual charity towards the completion of a globally civilised world. Said also notes that this system of power and knowledge, of "culture and imperialism", is characterised by "the ability to be in far-flung places, to learn about other people, to codify and disseminate knowledge, to characterise, transport, install, and display instances of other cultures [...] and above all to rule them" (Said 1994: 130). Such imperialist efforts, which take on encyclopedic dimensions, are promoted by "the rise of ethnography", whose role is actively complicit with the colonialist enterprise.

This awareness of ethnography as a tool for past imperial conquests leads Ghosh to reshape the role of the ethnographer that he himself plays in *In an Antique Land*, displacing the omniscient, narrativising voice of the traditional historian from the centre to a shared position within a polyphonic discourse alongside other voices —real-life Others such as the imam, the peasant, and the slave— that would have been traditionally considered as marginal, and which are recognised as valid as his own. This is Ghosh's own way to "write back to the centre", by questioning the ethnographer's centrality underlying anthropological ontology. As a non-Western secular scholar, Ghosh is only too aware of the need to abolish the dominant dichotomy dividing East and West upon which Orientalism is based. He is the subaltern ethnographer that lays claim to his own agency in the construction of scientific knowledge.

This new perspective of ethnographic practice not only replaces the duty of the ethnographer to the civilising mission with a commitment to the agency of the subaltern, but also demystifies the image of the colonial subject as a naive uncultured individual in desperate need of Western enlightenment and guidance. This is further illustrated in *The Calcutta Chromosome*, an alternative history of malaria research where the renowned Sir Ronald Ross is miraculously led to the discovery of the malaria vector by a secret society of subaltern "researchers". Through the thick fabric of a science-fiction narrative, Ghosh unravels a story of scientific knowledge in which traditional roles are shifted, with official authority acting as a mere instrument in the subaltern's hands. Accordingly, the possibility of accessing research objects through pure knowledge is revealed as an illusion under the premise that "in knowing something, you've already changed what you think you know so you don't really know it at all: you only know its history" (1996: 105).

As in the case with *In an Antique Land*, the merit of *The Calcutta Chromosome* resides in its multi-layered nature. Taking the structure and plotting of a science-fiction novel as a basis, the author questions again the identification of knowledge and science through the fictive recreation of a "counter science" whereby the civil-service scientist Ronald Ross is conducted throughout his research by the subaltern Other. Again the omniscient angle usually reserved for the scholar is moved to marginality and the natives Laakhan and Mangala are raised to positions of power as manipulators of knowledge. In this sense, Mathur describes *The Calcutta Chromosome* as a "postcolonial science fiction that provides a re-visioning of science not only through an active blurring of the lines between science, social science, and fiction, but also by elaborating the contours of a 'counter science' that offers a fundamental epistemological challenge to the dominant discourse of science" (2004: 13).

Ghosh manages to elude the easy dichotomy between science and magic, associated respectively with the Western and Eastern breach, by devising a plot in which the final results of scientific research are directed and produced by the subaltern. Tabish Khair has also highlighted the issue of subaltern agency in *The Calcutta Chromosome* as one of its essential constituents: "Such an intricate plot insists on not only the comprehensibility and agency of the subaltern, it also dismisses arbitrary and essentialist dichotomies between the West and India". For Khair, agency allows the subaltern to regain his silenced role in the narrative of history, "for history can be seen as the plotting of human experience and agency" (2001: 309).

The question of subaltern agency is also related to the role that imagination plays in the construction of knowledge, which is an issue central to Ghosh's project. This is also true of Ghosh's earlier works, as is the case with *The Shadow Lines* (1988). The novel relates the story of a Calcutta-based Indian family and their relationship with the English Prices, which started in colonial times in India and survives through World War II and the Partition up to the 1980s. It is then that the unnamed narrator finally arrives in London, and for the first time in his life accesses the physical reality of the city that had only been formed in his mind as an imaginary construction nurtured by his uncle Tridib's recollections of the time he spent there when he had been put up by the Prices in the months immediately preceding World War II.

Again the figure of the researching scholar emerges in the character of Tridib, who had been trained as an archaeologist. His understanding of scientific knowledge is a mere extension of his global insight into truth and reality, which to him is inevitably bound to individual perception. Tridib's position is bent towards what Geertz (1973) characterises as "thick description",[2] i.e., the difference between a

particular act as devoid of external meaning and the very same act when observed from different subjective positions and contexts which ascribe different meanings to it. To this he adds the use of imagination and creativity as liberating forces for the individual, who is free to use them at will in order to counteract the artificiality of cultural and ideological apparatuses. His view of scientific truth is consequently not based upon narrativity, which is the popular vehicle of knowledge and historical research among his contemporaries.

Nonetheless, Tridib's position towards reality cannot be simplified as pure relativism, for it constitutes the basis of a philosophy of truth that affects his practice as an archaeologist and researcher. Tridib the archaeologist constantly emerges in the memories of the narrator, who feels perfectly identified with his uncle's ideology. On his arrival in the metropolis, he is immediately haunted by a longing to know London "in her finest hour" (1988: 57), to be transported to pre-World War II London to relieve the frustration that he experiences when he realises that his perception of the metropolis will never correspond to that of Tridib's. As Brinda Bose has noted, "in Ghosh's fiction, the diasporic entity continuously negotiates between two lands, separated by both time and space —history and geography— and attempts to redefine the present through a nuanced understanding of the past". Through a rather Bhabhaesque interpretation of the novel, she describes *The Shadow Lines* as a "metajourney" that takes the protagonist "into that third space where boundaries are blurred and cultures collide" (Bose 2001: 239). It is within that hybrid context in which the narrator is immersed in London that he is finally confirmed in his refusal to accept any truth as definitive. Here the concept of imagination is understood as an equivalent to independence from ideological positions of any kind, whether they come from the colonial Centre or any other figure of authority. Furthermore, it represents the choice to configure the individual's vision of the world according to a selective and creative use of perception that is operated by multiple Others and not imposed from an omniscient Self.

In the context of the ideological bases that sustain nationalism, Ghosh also reappropriates imagination so as to contest the fiction of "imagined communities" (Anderson 1991) in which the nation is rooted. Thus, attempting a balanced portrayal of the agitated backdrop of pre-Partition India in which the novel is partly framed, Ghosh constructs the character of Th'amma, the narrator's grandmother, who acts as a foil to Tridib and his nephew's endeavours: Th'amma's own personal vision of the nation is constructed on war and bloodshed. This excludes those Indian expatriates in Britain such as her granddaughter Ila, whom she considers as "colonial", for only those participating in the tradition of warfare are to be considered active agents in the process of national configuration and deserving the endowment of nationality. In her view, the exclusive parameters of violence are the

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basic constituents of a country, whose borders can only hold those who have contributed to their demarcation with their own blood:

> Ila has no right to live there, she said hoarsely. She doesn't belong there. It took those people a long time to build that country; hundreds of years, years and years of war and bloodshed. Everyone who lives there has earned his right to be there with blood: with their brother's blood and their father's blood and their son's blood. They know they're a nation because they've drawn their borders with blood [...]. That is what *you* have to achieve for India, don't you see? (1988: 76)

Consequently, Th'amma's conceptual mapping of the nation, which mirrors that of nationalism, is based upon the unifying effects of "Tradition" —represented in her mind under the guise of warfare— that constitutes the main ingredient of a country's territorial integrity.[3] This position perfectly illustrates Benedict Anderson's definition of the nation as "a deep, horizontal comradeship [...] [a] fraternity that makes it possible, over the past two centuries, for so many millions of people, not so much to kill, as willingly to die for such limited imaginings" (1991: 7).

As a counterpoint to this, the narrator's voice is crucial for recovering the lost pieces of history that have slipped through the cracks of this selective nationalistic memory. Through his research in the faculty library, Tridib's nephew reasserts himself as a deserving heir to his uncle's memory, tracing back the connections between the riots that he witnessed as a child in Calcutta and the communal attacks in Dhaka which cost Tridib his life back in 1964. This turning point in the novel exemplifies the power of the individual's use of imagination, oriented towards the establishing of connections beyond the rigidity of ideological constructs already institutionalised, an effort that runs counter to any political efforts to construct a selective national history to serve the purpose of nationalism. In this way, Ghosh contributes with *The Shadow Lines* to the tradition of the "counter-narratives of the nation" that, according to Homi Bhabha, "continually evoke and erase its totalizing boundaries" and "disturb those ideological manoeuvres through which 'imagined communities' are given essentialist identities" (1990: 300).

The narrator's interest in material culture is not satisfied with the transcendental narratives that his grandmother Th'amma devotedly addresses. His use of imagination —which is not based upon narratives and is primarily oriented towards the search for connections with a deep anthropological interest that mirrors the author's— acts as a counterpoint to nationalism. The latter is mediated through the narrative of "imagined communities" that homogenises differences inside the nation while highlighting those that fall outside its boundaries. In consequence, imagination is represented as a liberating force for the individual, who is capable of retracing the links erased by the artificiality of nation.

The narrator reveals himself as having wholeheartedly assimilated his uncle's philosophy of truth. It is interesting to note how he and his cousin Ila associate totally different meanings with the word "freedom" in their respective discourses, even though they initially share the same contextual frame of reference. While the narrator relates it with the capacity to interpret and represent reality through one's own creativity, the word "freedom" can only elicit in Ila's mind reminiscences of independence from the British Raj, an anti-imperialist interpretation which is fostered by her unconscious self-perception as an immigrant living in the post-colonial era:

> I tried to tell Ila and Robi about the archaeological Tridib, the Tridib who was much more contemptuous of fairylands than she would ever be; the Tridib who had pushed me to imagine the roofs of Colombo for myself, the Tridib who had said that we could not see without inventing what we saw, so at least we could try to do it properly. And then, because she shrugged dismissively and said: Why? Why should we try, why not just take the world as it is? I told her how he had said that we had to try because the alternative wasn't blankness —it only meant that if we didn't try ourselves, we would never be free of other people's inventions. (1988: 31)

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The narrator is able to perceive knowledge as not constrained by power because to him it resides within the imagination. This view entails a new perspective of the relationship between knowledge and power that drifts away from a post-colonial angle of interpretation. This self-image of the subaltern as subjects capable of reasserting their capacity to manipulate knowledge and join in the process of its construction is a narrative rendering of Ghosh's profound conviction that "the subaltern can speak" —to use Spivak's words— and that their speaking is an act of freedom in itself. Ila's idea of freedom, on the other hand, is strongly influenced by the dominant ideology that labels her as a migrant, and is too conscious of the position that she occupies within the periphery with reference to a centre and constructs her identity as "upper class Asian Marxist", thus boycotting her own individual freedom in the name of an ideology. Knowledge as an individual creative process that slips away from the constraint of ideologies mirrors what has been previously noted in the case of *In an Antique Land*, where cosmopolitanism is similarly untied from post-colonialism in the medieval setting of its plot.

It follows that this ethical stance sustaining truth as subordinated to individuality and subjective experience is ascribable to Ghosh as a writer and —inseparably— as an anthropologist and ethnographer. Though far from the disconcerting figure of Tridib as an unreliable narrator and advisor who readily dismisses gullible characters as deserving "to be told anything at all" (Ghosh 1988: 12), Ghosh also engages intellectual honesty by admitting that reality is inevitably filtered through individual subjectivity, considering that total detachment from the scholar's object of study

is factually unattainable. In this respect, Shirley Chew has pointed to the anxiety that the author experiences as a side-effect associated with the role of the narrator as an ethnographer in *In an Antique Land*. As the narrative progresses, Ghosh becomes increasingly aware of the fact that Lataifa and Nashawy, the Egyptian villages where he carries out his research, prove to elude any scientific description, reluctantly accepting that his definitions of both places are simply a personal approach mediated through his own position as an observer. Being a non-Western intellectual writing from the metropolis, the author sees himself, Chew observes, as "subverting the conventions and the main concerns of his narrative". Chew cites, among others, "the recurrent intrusions of the personal into the descriptive fieldwork" as well as "the gaps of knowledge left unfilled" as the main causes for such anxieties (2002: 113). But through the philosophy of subjective truth underlying "thick description" and his awareness of the illusion of omniscience, the author as ethnographer is then reconciled to his anxiety for objectivity, and the validity of history as infallible is questioned once again.

Nevertheless, Ghosh does not hide his rather pessimistic view of the real possibilities of subaltern agency in everyday life. The conversation between the Imam and Ghosh on which his essay "The Imam and the Indian" is centered serves to exemplify this undertone of pessimism:

> At that moment, despite the vast gap that lay between us, we understood each other perfectly. We were both travelling, he and I: we were travelling in the West. The only difference was that I had actually been there, in person: I could have told him about the ancient English university I had won a scholarship to, about punk dons with safety pins in their mortarboards, about superhighways and sex shops and Picasso. But none of it would have mattered. We would have known, both of us, that all that was mere fluff: at the bottom, for him as for me and millions and millions of people on the landmasses around us, the West meant only this —science and tanks and guns and bombs.
> And we recognized too the inescapability of these things, their strength, their power —evident in nothing so much as this: that even for him, a man of God, and for me, a student of the 'humane' sciences, they had usurped the place of all other languages of argument. (Ghosh 2002: 11)

Again, this idea of "travelling" echoes the plot of *The Shadow Lines*, where the narrator travels imaginatively to London before he does so physically. Something similar happens between the Imam and Ghosh, since the author had actually been to the West, whereas his interlocutor has just second-hand appreciations of the West to support his arguments. Here the effects of the civilising mission can actually be seen in a post-colonial —and fiercely neo-imperialist— world where the subaltern —though unconsciously— still replicates the ideology of those in power. In other words, the agency of the subaltern is possible as well as necessary, but the language

through which it is exerted still belongs in the monopoly of the West. The only solution for Ghosh is for the individual to adopt a self-critical attitude, inviting readers to exert individual power over knowledge, by producing "thick descriptions" that displace the universalising cultural discourses which have survived the civilising mission in our world today. It is precisely this single thread of language tying up the margins around a centre that has to be cut.

Notes

1. My use of the term subaltern must be interpreted in a broader sense than that proposed by Gramsci with reference to the peasantry and the working class, and that would be later adopted by Spivak, Bhabha and other post-colonial critics. It is clear that Ghosh, as academic, essayist and novelist, can hardly be counted among the oppressed. It is his contribution to the Subaltern Studies Group that matters here, as Ghosh himself joins in the effort of contesting dominant interpretations of colonial historiography underlying this intellectual stance. Thus we can say that Ghosh practices a subaltern ethnography insofar as he counteracts the traditional views and interpretations contained in the imperial project of political and cultural "improvement" to which anthropology contributed for such a long time.

2. Geertz borrowed the term "thick description" from the philosopher of language Gilbert Ryle, who first proposed it in 1968 in a conference entitled "The Thinking of Thoughts:

What is *Le Penseur* doing?" delivered at the University of Saskatchewan, in Canada. In it he exemplifies the "thin description" of an eye movement such as a wink as opposed to the different interpretations ascribable to it, i.e., its "thick descriptions". In other words, a "thick description" of a human behaviour is one that explains not just the behaviour, but its context as well, such that the behaviour becomes meaningful to an outsider.

3. But Th'amma's aspirations for Indian national unity —which rely on the homogenising effect of a "Tradition" of warfare— prove to be hopelessly sterile, for they are based upon the Western British model which is not easily transposable to so culturally variegated a society as India's. As Mondal points out, "in the case of large nations such as India which have substantial minority cultures this has led to increasing problems as the totalizing figure of the 'nation' seeks to subsume all of its heterogeneous identities into one" (2003: 26).

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THE BELOVED PURPLE OF THEIR EYES: INHERITING BESSIE SMITH'S POLITICS OF SEXUALITY

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> You never get nothing by being an angel child
> You'd better change your ways and get real wild
> Ida Cox, "Wild Women Don't Have the Blues"

1. New Perspectives of African-American Feminist Studies

Some of the latest studies in Black Feminism are concerned with outlining its historical evolution as a discipline, as well as envisioning major tasks to undertake in the future. Other studies compile features underlining a common ground of thematic links among different arts, thus interrelating cultural expressions from different genres. There also seems to be a particular interest in compiling anthologies including outstanding, but often neglected, artists from different manifestations of African-American culture. Taking the first premise into account, many critics have focused on outlining the evolution of Black Feminist literary studies from a historical perspective. V.P.Franklin (2002) dwells upon the reasons why Black Feminism arose during the 1970s as a response to the lack of attention African-American women had to bear both in Black Studies, eminently male, and the Women's Liberation Movement, primarily white. By coining the term 'womanism' in her seminal book *In Search of Our Mother's Garden: Womanist Prose*

(1983), Alice Walker came to terms with these distinctions by bridging the gaps between disciplines such as Black Feminism, Black Studies and Feminism. By means of her 'womanist' perspective, Alice Walker highlighted the differences in strategies used in black and white feminist approaches while defending the wholeness of the entire black community, including both females and males.

In a similar way, Ula Taylor (1998) attempted to outline four main phases in Black feminist thought. To her mind, in the first wave, women created self-definitions to repel negative representations of Black womanhood. In a second phase, Black women confronted any structure of oppression in terms of race, class and gender. Subsequently, Black women became involved in intellectual and political activism, and finally, they came to terms with a distinct cultural heritage to resist discrimination. Thus, resembling Kristeva's work (1995) to a certain extent, it is possible to argue they followed a scheme of difference, dominance, and eventually, understanding of a shared cultural heritage. Similarly, Frances Smith Foster (2000) also reflects on the evolution of African-American literary studies, stating that 1960s texts were characterised by being "predominantly twentieth-century and overtly political". (1967) Nevertheless, as Black studies evolved, the consideration of gender relations among African-Americans became a central concern with the increased availability of books written by women. Moreover, as Foster admits, "much ado was made about writing literature in genres that were accessible to 'the people'" (1967), so that the scope of African-American studies broadened in order to incorporate different cultural and artistic manifestations. Deborah E. McDowell (1980) complained about the lack of a developed body of Black feminist political theory (154) and the eminently practical nature, rather than theoretical, of Black feminist scholarship approaches (154). In this respect, McDowell raised a note of caution so as to define a Black feminist methodology while outlining three main tasks African-American feminist criticism should take into consideration: examination of the works of Black male writers; revision of the scholarship of feminists in other disciplines, and isolation of thematic, stylistic, and linguistic commonalities among Black women writers (156-157). These two latter tasks, the concern about other disciplines and the identification of shared features in texts by different African-American writers, have been the focus of many recent studies in Black Feminism.

A second major concern in Black Feminism, following McDowell's thesis, has been to outline commonalties and establish links between different cultural manifestations within African-American women's studies. Judith Musser (1998) states that "the Harlem Renaissance was a period in which diversity flourished" (27) and establishes a poetics of common characteristics that different short-stories of the period were found to share. Some of the characteristics Musser mentions can also be attached to other African-American women's cultural manifestations such

as: urban settings; themes of struggle, conflict and oppression; female protagonists; use of dialect; a first-person narrator; female relationships, rejection of stereotypical representations of women; gender conflicts and violence. The subject of gender conflict and violence seems particularly recurrent as a result of poverty and oppression, to the extent that Barbara Smith[1] (1977) considered it to be present in most African-American women's fiction (8).

A third main trend in African-American women writers' studies has been to compile or review anthologies incorporating major names from different cultural manifestations. Aslaku Berhanu (1998) argued that important contributions by notable African-American women were neglected by most mainstream scholars (296), so she endeavoured to compile recent publications collecting outstanding names of African-American women from different arts in important anthologies such as Darlene Clark Hine's *Black Women in America: An Historical Encyclopedia* (1993) and *Black Women in United States History* (1990); Jessie Carney Smith's *Notable Black American Women* (1992), Donald Bogle's *Brown Sugar: Eight Years of America's Black Female Superstars* (1990), and Marianna W. Davis' *Contributions of Black Women to America* (1982).

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2. Revision of Black Feminist Canonical Works in the Light of the New Perspectives

In the light of these three main trends in Black Women Studies today,[2] Zora Neale Hurston, Alice Walker and Toni Morrison[3] can usefully be made objects of reflection in order to gauge the evolution of Black Studies through history and the main trends within Black Feminism today. Most anthologies compiling African-American women writers' fiction include stories by Zora Neale Hurston, Alice Walker and Toni Morrison.[4] Taking into consideration the concern about the historical evolution of Black Feminism, these three main writers often stand out as representative characters in the phases of Black Feminism that Taylor (1998) outlines. In a way, they share a common cultural heritage that can be appreciated through their fiction, especially with regard to gender relations and sexual politics. Moreover, not only their novels *per se* but also the latest critical studies of their works exemplify these new trends within African-American Women's Studies.

Bearing in mind the evolution of Black Feminism, Jordan (1988) offered an alternative view to the consideration of Hurston's *Their Eyes* as one of the first canonical Black feminist novels. Despite acknowledging its importance in the field, Jordan describes Hurston's novel as a 'feminist fantasy' since Janie "never perceives herself as an independent, intrinsically fulfilled human being" (115). Jordan argues black feminists have often turned to Hurston's novel as an eminently feminist text,

thus neglecting the reactionary atmosphere of the period and, at some points, of Hurston's novel itself. Nonetheless, as Batker (1998) points out, Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God* situated women at the centre of an African-American women's literary tradition and its transcendence takes shape "within a broad continuum of African-American women's writing on sexuality early in this century" (199), thus concluding that "*Their Eyes* engages in early twentieth-century black feminist politics" (199). Recently, the latest studies published with regard to Toni Morrison's *Beloved* have focused on the unravelling of Beloved's identity in order to highlight the concept of a past common heritage, ultimately finding out that "Beloved's lack of name signifies that she is everybody" (Koolish 2001: 177), or that "Beloved represents the pain of slavery they all suffer in some way" (Parker 2001: 12). Following another recent trend in Black Feminist studies, some critics have focused on depicting commonalties between black women writers' novels and other cultural manifestations such as folk culture. Ferguson (1987) identified the male archetypes embodied by Janie's three husbands in Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. Similarly, Jordan also put forward the importance of women's relationships with one another as an important presence in both Hurston's *Their Eyes* and Walker's *The Colour Purple* (108).

3. The classic blues women singers and their politics of sexuality in Black Feminist Studies

Taking into consideration the emphasis on the historical evolution of Black Feminism, along with the concern about identifying common features and the interdisciplinary approach to different arts within Black Feminism, several recent studies have focused on the importance of the blues, thus revealing this tripartite tendency in African-American Women Studies. The blues interpreted from the point of view of African-American women singers was described as the classic blues, as opposed to the country or folk blues which was particularly termed as male (Hamilton 2000). The classic blues became popular during the 1920s and 30s; the period commonly known as the Harlem Renaissance. Thus, in a way, the classic blues originated at the same time that Black consciousness also began to emerge. Moreover, the blues, as specifically black music, broadened the scope of African-American culture, thus considering popular culture in addition to mainstream literary manifestations. As Hamilton suggests "[t]he years from 1920 to 1960 saw the publication of a diverse array of accounts of African-American music, written by social scientists, folklorists, poets, record collectors and others who interpreted and documented black musical practice" (139). In addition, the classic blues lyrics included many of the features of cultural and gender politics commonly found in

African-American women's fiction, even if rendered differently, emphasising its sexual overtones.

Paul Oliver (1983) was one of the first critics to detect the relationship between ethnic literature and the blues. In his view, the link between blues and literature is "not 'inter-' but one-sided" (9) in the sense that it was often African-American writers who drew material from the blues rather than blues singers who found inspiration in literary texts. Oliver states this relationship began in the origins of the Harlem Renaissance and was personified by women singers of the blues, among them Bessie Smith: "Blues-related poetry appeared first in the 1920s 'Negro Renaissance' when the experience of blues by Black poets was mainly through recordings or the stage presentations of Harlem shows and the vaudeville performances of Bessie Smith and Clara Smith" (10). According to Oliver's statement, blues women singers gained status in Black Feminist studies, especially, Bessie Smith, who became a female icon (Oliver 1959; Albertson 1972; Brooks 1982). Lately, this connection has been recognised by Saadi A. Simawe (2000), depicting the transforming power of blues music in the fiction of major African-American women writers such as Sherley Anne Williams, Gayl Jones, Alice Walker or Toni Morrison.

Women blues singers transformed the blues from a local folk tradition into a performing art, ushering black culture into the American mainstream due to the emergence of the recording industry. Consequently, women vocalists contributed to the professionalisation of the blues. In contrast to the male country blues singers, who traditionally conceived the blues as a way of easing labour and as a means of personal expression, and heritage from the work songs and spirituals of slavery times, it was mainly women who were responsible for creating the classic blues. Female blues singers also brought innovations to the blues itself, as regards the content of their songs, the style of their singing, and in their musical accompaniment. They began to combine the country blues elements with vaudeville and performances that significantly contributed to the audience appeal, infusing them with the central subject of love, often gone wrong. These songs also included elements of fun and parody, ironic remarks, subtle references to sexual intercourse and numerous indirect lines, which unveiled many layers of complex and profound meaning. These women singers transformed the blues tradition from a personal, largely local expression of black experience into a public form of entertainment, introducing it to both black and white audiences. Consequently, they transformed the folk music of the country blues into popular music, bringing experiences of black life to the public stage and granting them public recognition on a national scale.

In her seminal book *Blues Legacies and Black Feminism* (1999), Angela Y. Davis, put forward the connection between women blues singers and Black Feminism,

stating that "hints of feminist attitudes emerge from their music through fissures of patriarchal discourses" (xi). Davis argues that black feminist traditions have often excluded ideas produced within poor and working-class communities because these women had no access to published written texts. Nevertheless, she states that "some poor black women did have access to publishers of *oral* texts" (xii). Actually, these black women were the first to record the blues, thus granting the community of African-American women a voice of their own. Before the black men blues singers began to achieve popularity in the decade of the 30s, these women had already managed to contribute "a vast body of musical texts and a rich cultural legacy" (A.Y. Davis: xiii). One might expect that, since these black women blues singers emerged during the artistic movement known as the Harlem Renaissance, critics at that time might have become interested in their music. However, the contributions of blues singers such as Bessie Smith and Ida Cox were regarded as 'low culture' in contrast to other forms of art such as literature or painting. This may be the reason why some African-American women writers, well-aware of the importance of women's blues legacy, have often included the figure of the blues woman in literature, have inscribed in their texts the rhythm of the blues songs, or have contributed to developing the politics of women's sexuality that characterises women singers' blues songs. As Davis points out, some fictionalized portraits of blues women appear throughout the novels of Toni Cade Bambara, Gayl Jones, Sherley Ann Williams, Zora Neale Hurston, Alice Walker, or Toni Morrison. Even Mary Helen Washington entitled her second collection of short stories *Any Women's Blues* (1986). Thus, the blues lyrics of black women constitute a privileged discourse to analyse issues related to gender and sexuality in working-class black communities.

Blues songs share with other forms of popular music their concern with love. Nevertheless, the blues deviated from other popular compositions in their treatment of love. While the European-derived American popular songs of the time described "idealised nonsexual depictions of heterosexual love relationships" (A.Y. Davis: 3), blues songs dealt with extramarital relations, domestic violence, ephemeral sexual partners, sexual desire and bisexuality. Moreover, they were sung by women. As Davis concedes, this openness to address male and especially female sexuality "reveals an ideological framework that was specifically African-American" (A.Y. Davis: 4). Davis claims that the former slaves' economic and political status had not changed, but the status of their personal relationship had altered so as to allow African-American men and women to make autonomous decisions as regards their sexuality. Thus, issues related to sexuality were not frequent in musical forms produced during slavery. After emancipation, sexual issues could not be expressed through spirituals and work songs, which were the most popular musical forms under slavery focused on a collective desire to end their enslavement. Thus, the

blues emerged as "the predominant postslavery African-American musical form [that] articulated a new valuation of individual emotional needs and desires" (A.Y. Davis: 5). Consequently, from the spirituals and work songs, which were inherently collective, emerged the blues, on the one hand, which was secular in origin and the gospel, on the other hand, which was conceived as a sacred musical form.

Angela Y. Davis argues that "personal and sexual dimensions of freedom acquired an expansive importance, especially since the economic and political components of freedom were largely denied to black people in the aftermath of slavery" (10). Thus, sexuality became an important theme of blues songs for men and women singers, but it even became more pronounced in the women's blues. As opposed to the mainstream assumptions of women's sexuality and idealised love, women blues singers challenged issues such as domesticity, marriage and motherhood, and even often exalted economic independence and sexual promiscuity. Quoting the scholar Daphne Duval Harrison, Angela Davis (13) gives a list of the most commonly found themes in women's blues: advice to other women, alcohol, betrayal or abandonment, broken or failed love affairs, death, departure, dilemma of staying with man or returning to family, disease and afflictions, erotica, hell, homosexuality, infidelity, injustice, jail and serving time, loss of lover, love, men, mistreatment, murder, other women, poverty, promiscuity, sadness, sex, suicide, the supernatural, trains, travelling, unfaithfulness, vengeance, weariness, depression and disillusionment and even weight loss. Nevertheless, despite the recurrence of men's abuse of their women, the lyrics often depict assertive and self-willed women who do not hesitate to retaliate with more virulence if necessary.

Thus, women's blues songs challenged any assumptions of women's gender-based inferiority that usually pervaded mainstream culture. By expressing their different views on sexuality politics and defying romanticised relationships, women blues singers redefined women's place and reaffirmed the identity of African-American women. As Angela Y. Davis claims, they were wholly responsible for forging and memorialising "images of tough, resilient, and independent women who were afraid neither of their own vulnerability nor of defending their right to be respected as autonomous human beings" (41). Gradually, the experiences of these African-American women, depicted through songs, influenced other forms of art such as literature. The sexual politics described and defended in the women's blues was imbibed by African-American women writers who infused their female characters and experiences with those of the women in blues songs. As Houston A. Baker (1987) claims, blues should be conceived as a matrix and "the matrix is a point of ceaseless input and output, a web of intersecting, crisscrossing impulses in productive transit" (3) to the extent that it constitutes "the multiplex, enabling *script*, in which Afro-American cultural discourse is inscribed" (4). Thus oral and written texts influence and intersect with each other.

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4. Bessie Smith's Legacy to Zora Neale Hurston, Alice Walker and Toni Morrison

Some African-American women writers have acknowledged the deep influence some women blues singers exerted on their work. Zora Neale Hurston was deeply concerned about African-American anthropology and folklore and she was Bessie Smith's contemporary. Alice Walker proved a fervent admirer of Bessie Smith and her influence can be traced through some of the female characters that appear in her novels. Moreover, Toni Morrison has also admitted that music deeply influenced her career as a writer; her character Sula meaningfully illustrates her remark. Not only women writers but also critics and scholars have paid some attention to the mutual influence between blues songs and literary texts. Thomas F. Marvin (1994) and Maria V. Johnson (1998) outlined some established links between blues music and the novels by Zora Neale Hurston and Alice Walker. In the next pages, I will also aim to outline some links between Bessie Smith's lyrics and Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, Alice Walker's *The Colour Purple*, and Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, focusing on the politics of sexuality of African-American women in their intercourse with men that emerged through women singers' blues songs.

Bessie Smith will always be considered the Empress of the Blues. Her voice, harsh and coarse, implied she was not trying to please anyone. As Elaine Feinstein remarks, "the habit of submission, of letting yourself be used, comes too easily to women [whereas] Bessie's voice is a full-hearted rejection of any such foolishness" (11). Underneath the sad tone Bessie imprints on her songs, there suddenly emerges "a sense of freedom and the triumph of her own courageous spirit" (Feinstein: 11). Her lonely voice hardly ever flatters the men she addresses in her songs, but is rather a powerful counterpart to "men's most arrogant interest in women" (Feinstein 1985: 12). In fact, Bessie never dreamt of having a home, with a husband and children to look after. As Feinstein concedes, "home wasn't the place in which she felt most herself" (12). Instead, Bessie seemed glad to be able to manage on her own. Bessie Smith imprinted roughness and lack of social acceptability in her blues songs as a way of defiance. Thus, although on-stage Bessie was declared to be the best, her daring and intimidating behaviour frequently caused more than a stir off-stage. As regards her appearance, Feinstein states: "if I try to conjure up Bessie's presence, in wig and feathers, ready to go on stage, she rises before me, a large-framed woman, with a quick temper, used to resorting to violence when crossed. She was strong enough to fell a man; and she didn't always wait to be attacked before using her fists" (13-14).

Bessie's personality emerged as one of her most remarkable features. As Feinstein claims, "Bessie carried herself as if she did not know how old she was, and felt

beautiful, and liked her own size, in the same way that she wore her blackness with pride instinctively and before it was fashionable" (29). She fervently believed in herself and both her confidence and strength have often been regarded as symbols of resistance by African-American females. Her humble origins and her eventual success as a blues singer are illustrative examples of a self-liberated and autonomous woman, fulfilling the American dream of ascending from *rags-to-riches*. Nevertheless, despite her behaviour which was somewhat dissolute and even violent on occasions, Bessie always felt responsible for her family, her brother and sisters, often taking the role of their mother and father. Despite the strength and resoluteness Bessie showed throughout her life, she sang about the sorrows of women's lives, especially about their heartaches, denouncing female dependence on men, and their efforts to face desertion and betrayal. Despite the fact that women in the United States could vote in 1920, the situation of black women was not likely to change. As Feinstein remarks, black women of the time were consigned to the roles of *mammy* or *whore*. As regards their relationships with men, their male counterparts were frequently so abominably treated that they found it impossible to react humanely towards their women. As a consequence, they often abused them. However, in Bessie's songs and in most of other female blues singers, men are presented as lazy and irresponsible, in addition to treating their women badly, and so they are often scorned. As time went by, these women blues singers produced numerous songs which imbibed and contained the shared thoughts and feelings of the black women as community.

The appearance of the blues in Black Feminist Studies today also tends to follow the previously-mentioned tripartite tendency. Anthologies compiling African-American women writers' prose fiction granting the blues a major role have recently been published,[5] thus showing that the blues is present, either thematically or stylistically, in major canonical texts. Moreover, there has been a concern to study different cultural manifestations following an interdisciplinary approach blending both literary texts and musical texts. Furthermore, there is a need to detect common features shared by different writers within Black Feminism. This article identifies common features of the sexual politics in these three novels in relation to Bessie Smith's classic blues lyrics.

Zora Neale Hurston was a folklorist concerned with gathering as many representations of African-American cultural manifestations as possible during the Harlem Renaissance. Batker (1998) acknowledges both Hurston's familiarity with the classic blues culture emerging at the time, and the influence the classic blues ideology exerted on her writings (Wall 1982; Baker 1984; Ellison 1989; Long 1990). In fact, in a clear reference to Hemenway (1977), Batker admits that "on a trip with Langston Hughes, she [Hurston] stayed with Bessie Smith and was quite familiar with Harlem cabarets as well as the Southern tent-show and

vaudeville tradition which showcased classic blues singers"(200). Batker mentions different features often attached to Bessie Smith's classic blues which can also be identified in Hurston's *Their Eyes* (1937). One of them is the rejection of the traditionally neat dichotomy between respectability and desire. As happens in *Their Eyes* with Janie, "Bessie Smith's 'Young Woman's Blues' plays with the opposition between respectability and sexual assertion" (Batker 1998: 203). Batker also refers to the importance of the mistreating-man character together with images of mules and fruit trees as metaphors of women's sexual potency, commonly found in both Hurston's novel and classic blues songs. Maria V. Johnson (1998) also corroborates the cultural link that can be established between Zora Neale Hurston and Bessie Smith. As Johnson states,

> like Bessie Smith and other vaudeville blues singers of the 1920s and '30s, Hurston also used blues as a means to present new images and to celebrate the individual voices of African American women. Hurston's most extended blues critique and celebration of blues creativity is her acclaimed novel *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. (401)

Throughout her exhaustive analysis, Johnson points out several thematic and stylistic links between Hurston's novel and the classic blues, such as the impermanence of love and relationships, the celebration of female sexuality, the blues tripartite structure,[6] some images (like the bee, the mule, the jellyroll and Tea Cake as the blues man), or the juxtaposition of different voices. Johnson even quotes several of Bessie Smith's blues lyrics so as to link them thematically to Hurston's novel, pointing out common themes such as loneliness ("Empty Bed Blues"), voicing one's feelings ("Jailhouse Blues"), powerlessness ("Men Old Bedbug Blues"), or desertion ("In the House Blues").

With regard to Alice Walker's *The Colour Purple* (1982), Maria V. Johnson (1996) has asserted that "Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God* and the blues music of blues women like Bessie Smith rank among Walker's most significant musical/literary influences" (221). She particularly focuses her analysis on both Walker's short-story "Nineteen Fifty-Five" from her collection *You Can't Keep A Good Woman Down* (1981), and *The Colour Purple* (1982). Johnston argues that Walker became endowed with the blues techniques in prose fiction through the influence Hurston and *Their Eyes* exerted on her writings (222), and she especially focuses on the relationship dynamics that both Walker's novel and the classic blues lyrics share as a case in point in order to prove the presence of the blues throughout *The Colour Purple*. While Johnson mainly highlights the blues techniques used in Walker's novel, Thomas F. Marvin (1994) concentrates on a comparative analysis between Shug Avery, a major character in Walker's novel, and Bessie Smith. As he mentions,

> She [Shug] transforms the life of Celie, the novel's protagonist, through a 'blues conversion' of the type advocated by Bessie Smith in her song 'Preachin' the Blues'. Shug, like Bessie Smith, forges a strong bond with her audiences and gives voice to the 'spirit of the blues' in order to bring relief to less articulate sufferers. But more importantly, she encourages Celie and other oppressed women in the novel to express themselves and stand up for their rights. (411)

Moreover, Johnson also discusses the relevance of Shug in Walker's novel as the blues female personification who prompts Celie's gradual sexual awakening. Moreover, particularly focusing on Bessie Smith's song "Preachin' the Blues', Johnson refers to both Shug and Bessie as catalysts that mediate between the boundaries that often separate the sacred and the profane.

In relation to Toni Morrison's *Beloved* (1987), Eusebio L. Rodrigues (1991) analysed the telling of *Beloved*, claiming it follows a musical style (296). More recently, Christine Spies (2004) has analysed the use Morrison makes of music throughout her novels. Even Morrison herself acknowledges the important role music, and particularly blues, usually plays in her writings asserting that "music is the mirror that gives me the necessary clarity" (Gilroy 1993: 181). Rubenstein defends the presence of the blues through Morrison's fiction to the extent that the author of *Beloved* "thematically 'sings the blues' of black experience through the use of literary techniques that inventively borrow from blues patterns" (148). Actually, in Morrison's novel *Sula* (1973), published more than a decade earlier than *Beloved*, the protagonist refers to Bessie Smith when she complains she will be loved "when Lindbergh sleeps with Bessie Smith" (*Sula*, 145). Subsequently, in *Jazz* (1992), as Sherard (2000) admits, Morrison quotes some of Bessie Smith's blues lyrics such as "Get it, bring it and put it right here". Many studies have focused on Morrison's use of music techniques in her writings with regard to *Jazz*. However, it was not until Eckstein (2006) that the importance of the blues in *Beloved* became a focus of attention. According to Eckstein, both the musical gathering of women at Sethe's house towards the end of the novel (271), and Paul D's chain gang experience of call-and-response (275) bear important points in common with the blues. Moreover, he also analyses the relationship some of the most important characters in *Beloved* establish in relation to the blues. *Beloved* may be linked to the black oral tradition as an embodiment of the spirit child that returns after its death; Baby Suggs is remindful of the Afro-Christian tradition of singing, and Paul D embodies the secular tradition of the blues, while the 'white-girl' Amy Denver represents the cross-cultural birth of the blues.

5. Bessie Smith's Politics of Sexuality in *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937), *The Colour Purple* (1982), and *Beloved* (1987)

In the following sections, thematic links regarding the politics of sexuality between Bessie Smith's lyrics and these three novels will be mentioned with a view to exemplifying the new trends of Black Feminism, that is, intertextualising different artistic texts, revising canonical literary texts under these new perspectives and popularising neglected artists in the African-American cultural domain.

5.1. Bessie Smith's songs and Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God:* love, dependence and desertion

When Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God* was published in 1937, it did not receive full recognition. It was in the early 1970s that the novel was rediscovered by literature professors and scholars such as Alice Walker, bringing Zora Neale Hurston's novel into the modern literary canon. Just as Walker searched for Hurston's unmarked grave and marked it as a sign of recognition, her novel *Their Eyes Were Watching God* was also retrieved as a deserved homage to African-American men, and especially women, in their search for identity, becoming one of the most important works written during the Harlem Renaissance and one of the first novels to gain insight into African-American women's situation. At a more general level, the novel portrays the series of experiences Janie Starks undergoes in her process of maturation as a woman. In Hurston's novel, we find thematic links with Bessie Smith's blues lyrics in relation to gender, and particularly, with regard to: i) love and women's expectations, ii) men's economic power and women's dependence on them, and iii) men's meanness and women's subsequent desertion.

i. love and women's expectations

Hurston's novel tackles women's right to voice their need to love and be loved. Janie awakens to love and desire as she matures as a woman. During her adolescence, Janie undergoes a transcendental experience while she is lying under a pear tree and observes the bees pollinating the blossoms. This epiphanic experience is regarded as Janie's first awakening into sexuality as a woman. It is through this mesmerising state that she beholds Johnny Taylor, whom she terms "a glorious being" when before she had regarded him as merely "shiftless". In "Baby Doll", Bessie Smith pleads to be somebody's baby doll to ease her mind and fulfil her wish to love. She is not too demanding as to what this man should be like, since she sings, with obvious sexual connotations, "he can be ugly, he can be

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black, so long as he can eagle rock and ball the jack". Thus, at this point, as in Bessie's song, Janie only wishes to love somebody as her sexuality is emerging. Gradually, Janie also gains insight into the importance of choosing wisely. After three months of marriage to Logan, Janie goes back home to ask Nanny the way to love her husband. This episode shows obvious links with Bessie Smith's song "A Good Man is Hard to Find", in which she expresses her sadness because her man treats her meanly and reflects upon how difficult it is to make a good choice since, although she believed her man was good, now she even "craves to see him laying in his grave". Janie soon leaves Logan behind to start a relationship with Joe, thus displaying women's capacity to feel desire and be sexually aroused. The flirting conversation between Janie and Joe at the beginning of their relationship shows links to Bessie's song "I Need a Little Sugar in my Bowl", in which she repeats "I need a little sugar, in my bowl, / I need a little hot dog, between my rolls/ you gettin' different, I've been told, / move your finger, drop something in my bowl/ I need a little steam-heat on my floor". Joe proves an enterprising character, self-conceited and confident who promises to rescue Janie from the oppressive yoke under which Logan holds her. Nonetheless, it is Janie who finally takes the initiative and leaves Logan. Thus, in both Hurston's novel and Bessie Smith's lyrics, African-American women unashamedly voice their desire to love and be loved.

ii. men's economic power and women's dependence

Throughout Hurston's novel, it is implied that women's dependence is mainly caused by men's exclusive economic power. Janie feels dependent on men mainly because she is subjected to men's economic power. Both Janie and Bessie become aware of their discouraging situation once their first hope to love and be loved vanishes. Gradually, men's economic power brings about women's dependence. As time goes by, Janie begins to resemble Bessie in "Lost Your Head Blues", when she sings "I was with you baby, when you didn't have a dime/ I was with you, baby, when you didn't have a dime/ now since you got a lot of money, you have thrown a good gal down". Gradually, Janie becomes aware of her own subjection and subtly voices how men have been debasing her as a woman. In her first marriage, Janie feels hopelessly subjected to Logan. At this period of Janie's life, she feels like Bessie in "Mean Old Bed Bug Blues", when she sings "gals, bed bugs sure is evil, they don't mean me no good/ yeah, bed bug sure is evil, they don't mean me no good/ thinks he's a woodpecker and I'm a chunk of wood". However, she also undergoes the same situation with Joe and Tea Cake. In her third marriage, Janie somehow feels excluded since Tea Cake does not invite her to celebrations. Thus, Janie gradually becomes aware of the fact that the ideal of love that she nurtured at youth may not be totally feasible in real life. Despite their

bad ways, Janie resents being deserted by men, thus underlining women's fear of feeling lonely and abandoned. Janie also undergoes economic dependence in her third marriage, since one week after Janie's marriage to Tea Cake, he leaves her before she awakes. Soon Janie realises that the silk purse in which she hid two hundred dollars has disappeared. Janie immediately believes that Tea Cake has stolen the money with a view to deserting her. This episode recalls Bessie's "Down in the Dumps", through which she sings "I had a nightmare last night, when I laid down/ when I woke up this mornin', my sweet man couldn't be found". Nevertheless, to Janie's own surprise, Tea Cake returns at dawn but having spent Janie's own money. Thus, it is implied, economic dependence is at the centre of women's subjection to men.

iii. men's meanness and women's desertion

Janie often resents men's miserliness to the extent of deserting them. Janie's second husband, Joe, soon emerges as the mayor and becomes a commanding character. This is clearly shown when the villagers assert they would like to hear Janie speak after Joe is elected, although it is Joe who takes the podium, implying that Janie's place, as a woman, is not that of the speaker. Gradually, Janie's position as the mayor's wife isolates her from the rest of women in town. As Bessie sings in "Gimme a Pigfoot and a Bottle of Beer", she also complains about men's dictatorial ways referring to the fact that "when he stomps his feet, he send me right off to sleep". Joe repeatedly behaves stubbornly and too severely with Janie. It is implied that once he acquires some power, his authoritative commands resemble, to some extent, that of white masters in slavery times. Actually, his male power over Janie is reified through both Joe's preventing Janie from speaking in public and his continuous remarks for Janie to tie up her hair. Despite Joe's behaviour, Janie feels unable to challenge her husband and her lack of confidence leads her to understate Joe's abusive behaviour. This episode resembles Bessie's "Dirty No-Gooder's Blues", in which Bessie reflects on the way men change their ways so suddenly, singing "he'd treat you nice and kind till he win your heart and hand/ he'd treat you nice and kind till he win your heart and hand/ then he git so cruel that man, you just could not stand". Nevertheless, women progressively take action with regard to their control over their relationship with men. After Logan's continuous threats and Joe's commands, Janie decides to leave both men and escape. As Bessie sings in "Hard Time Blues", "I'm getting tired of his dirty ways/ I'm going to see another brown/ I'm packin' my clothes/ I'm leavin' town". Consequently, after they have completed their process of maturation, women are enabled to make their own decisions and start a new life on their own.

5.2. Bessie Smith's songs and Alice Walker's *The Colour Purple:* mistreatment, desire and retaliation

The Colour Purple (1982) is a novel structured through a series of letters that Celie and Nettie exchange from their separation when they are children to their eventual encounter in their adult life. Throughout Walker's novel we also encounter thematic links with Bessie Smith's songs especially focused on men's violence and mistreatment of women, women's sexual desire and lesbianism, and women's retaliation and reversal of roles.

i. men's violence and mistreatment of women

Celie falls an easy prey to men's continuous threats of violence. At the beginning of the novel, Celie writes a letter to God confessing she has been raped by Alphonso, her mother's husband, whom she also believes to be her father. As Bessie states in her song "Aggravatin' Papa", she denounces men's mistreatment of women and the violence in men-women relationships singing "just treat me pretty, be nice and kind/ the way you're treating me will make me lose my mind". When Celie gets married to Albert, she undergoes the same loathsome experience through her husband's disrespect. Thus, it is argued women feel oppressed under the yoke of violence their husbands inflict on them. Likewise, it is also inferred that African-American women suffered a double kind of oppression at the hands of their white masters and of their black male partners.

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ii. women's sexual desire and lesbianism

While Celie grows up as a woman, she is sexually initiated through Shug's endeavours. Thus, it is argued that Celie is firstly introduced to sex by a woman. Shug and Celie represent dichotomous archetypes of African-American women, the *mammy* and the *whore*. Shug is a splendorous and self-liberated blues singer, while Celie is shy and humble and becomes dazzled by Shug's beauty and daring approaches. Shug is very self-confident and presents obvious links with Bessie Smith's personality as Marvin (1994) remarks. It is Shug who initiates Celie into desire and sexuality, and thus Shug may well have sung with Bessie her song "Nobody in Town Can Bake a Sweet Jelly Roll Like Mine", arguing "no other one in town can bake a sweet jelly roll so fine, so fine". Despite the fact Celie and Shug share the same man, as husband and lover respectively, they feel no jealousy but rather become close female friends until Shug's departure. Five years later, Shug returns to Albert's home, having married Grady, of whom both Albert and Celie feel extremely covetous. One night, Shug approaches Celie in bed and she tells Shug about her life with Alphonso. Shug sympathises with Celie and they begin a lesbian relationship. It is at this point that Celie begins to understand the nature of love, and as Bessie sings in "Weary Blues",

Celie might have said "want you in the mornin' and I want you in the evenin'/ yes, I want you, yes I want you but it don't do no good/ miss you when it's rainin' and I miss you when it's shinin'/ and I wish that I could kiss you and I would if I could". Thus, Celie, as Bessie did, starts a lesbian relationship and discovers, for the first time, the experience of being in love and sexual enjoyment through another woman. Through Bessie's songs, females unashamedly voice their need to feel sexually aroused and fulfil their desire as women.

iii. women's retaliation and reversal of roles

Once Shug initiates her, Celie feels strong enough to counteract Albert to the extent that their traditionally-established gendered roles become reversed. Celie is finally given the rest of Nettie's letters, which restores her strength again, through the renewed literal, and allegorical, sisterhood with other females. Celie's awareness and need to retaliate corroborates Bessie's feeling in "See If I'll Care", when she sings "I know that you feel good now with nothin' on your mind/ but just mark my words, dear, there'll come a time/ I know you're gonna pay, you'll want me back someday". Actually, when Celie is away, Albert feels hopeless. A woman's reprisal often implies a reversal of gender roles to the extent that the woman becomes stronger and the man feels weaker at the woman's display of strength. Similarly, this reversal can also be observed in the relationship between Harpo, Albert's eldest son, and the strong-minded Sofia. Harpo attempts to beat his wife into submission, but he ashamedly fails. At this stage, stereotypical gender-based roles are somehow reversed, and consequently, Sofia and Harpo are scorned by the villagers. As Bessie sings in "Foolish Man Blues", voicing the entire community, "there's two things got me puzzled, there's two things I can't stand/ mannish actin' woman and a skippin' twistin' woman actin' man". Thus, towards the end of Walker's novel, there is an important gender-role reversal between female and male characters, as is usually the case with the female figures in Bessie Smith's lyrics.

5.3. Bessie Smith's songs and Toni Morrison's *Beloved*: gothic imagery, loneliness, women's loneliness and a shared grievous past

In *Beloved* (1987), Toni Morrison explores the themes of love, family, and self-possession in a world where slavery had presumably become an unfortunate issue of the past, but emerges, throughout, as a haunting presence. Nonetheless, there are other forms of slavery that still subject and enslave women and men. In relation to Bessie Smith's lyrics, *Beloved* also deals with feelings of (re)membering, pain, loneliness and violence from a bitter past; understanding relationships of ownership as a result of a shared past, and gothic imagery, which are also frequently found through Bessie Smith's blues lyrics.

i. gothic imagery

Women have been subjected to the double yoke of slavery and patriarchy, both inflicted by men. Beloved is both a representation of the female victims of slavery and patriarchy, although her ghost returns to haunt all the living, females and males. Thus both Morrison's novel and Bessie Smith's lyrics share an important display of gothic imagery as a result of the haunting presence of past events that continue to exert their painful effects on the present. Beloved often resembles the character in Bessie's "Cemetery Blues", when she sings "folks, I know a gal named Cemetery Lize, down in Tennessee/ she has got a pair of mean old graveyard eyes, full of misery/ every night and day, you can hear her sing a blues away". These feelings are also present throughout Bessie's song "Haunted House Blues", when she sings "this house is so haunted with dead men I can't lose/ and a sneaky old feeling gives me those haunted house blues". The black community around, aware of the situation, begin to sympathise with Sethe, and Paul D, a former slave of the plantation, finally returns to look after Sethe. Nonetheless, despite the fact that her presence is still noticed, Beloved disappears, and in a way, as Bessie sings in "I'm going back to my used to be", Sethe feels at ease with her life again. However, as Bessie claims in "Yodling Blues", Sethe goes on to feel "the blues, the blues, the yodling blues/ they seem to haunt me all the time". Thus, Beloved represents the past grievous memories as a result of slavery, since Toni Morrison dedicated the novel to the slaves that perished during the transatlantic crossing from Africa to America. Sethe's feeling of loss and her eagerness to overcome fear is similar to the blues that haunts Bessie all the time. Sethe experiences a curse similar to that of Bessie, so that the blues becomes an ever-present aspect in her life; an extrapolation of bitter pain and resentment from the past that expands to her present.

ii. women's loneliness and men's impotence

Denver is the only child who still lives with Sethe, since her two sons, Buglar and Howard, left the house after experiencing frightening encounters with their ghostly sister. Sethe feels lonely as Bessie sings in her song "Beale Street Mama", when she begs "Beale Street Pap, why don't you come back home/ it isn't proper to leave your mamma all alone". The spirit of Sethe's dead baby is malicious and ever present in the house and her absence, or rather her ghostly presence, infuses the house with loneliness and despair. This sense of loneliness affects Sethe's relationship with Paul D. Once they have lain together for the first time, Sethe and Paul D realise it has been a disappointing experience altogether. Men's impotence and women's unfulfilled desire is also ever present in Bessie's song "My Handy Man Ain't Handy No More", where she argues "he won't make a single move unless he's told, he says he isn't lazy, claims he isn't old/ but still he sits around

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and lets my stove get cold". Thus, the grievous past of slavery, impersonated by Beloved, is reflected in the impotence and impossibility of sexual enjoyment between women and men, both rendered powerless through the bitter legacy of enslavement.

iii. a shared grievous past of ownership

Both Sethe and Paul D share the burden of a grievous past of subjection under slavery to the extent they feel unable to live as if nothing had happened. Like Bessie in "Mama's Got the Blues", Sethe feels "some people say that the weary blues ain't bad/ some people say the weary blues ain't bad/ but it's the worst old feeling that I've ever had/ woke up this morning, with the jinx around my bed". Moreover, Sethe remembers that her husband Halle treated her in a brotherly way, but she reflects on the fact that love necessarily implies being able to make demands, have expectations and lay claim to the other. Actually, ownership becomes an important issue throughout the novel, as a reflection of past slavery. Eventually, it is revealed that, soon after Sethe began to live in the house, the schoolteacher, one of his nephews, the slave catcher and the sheriff came to reclaim Sethe and her children. When Sethe caught sight of them, she killed her daughter, Beloved, and also tried to kill Howard, Buglar and Denver but did not succeed. This is the reason why she has been neglected by the rest of the community. In a way, her situation recalls that of Bessie in "Nobody Knows You When You're Down and Out", where she sings "then I began to fall so low, / I didn't have a friend, and no place to go". Sethe acted out of love since she preferred sacrificing her own children rather than condemning them to perpetual slavery. However, Sethe's ongoing trauma renders her unable to resume her life, thus infusing her existence with the blues of loss, as she looks forward to finding mutual understanding in order to feel part of the community again.

6. Conclusions

It has been the aim of this essay to establish links between these three novels and Bessie Smith's lyrics, in order to articulate the collective experience of African-American women throughout time as revealing a shared and communal past. Many of the experiences female characters undergo in these novels are voiced in Bessie Smith's songs. Janie, Celie and Sethe go through a process of maturation from their literal, or figurative, enslavement under the yoke of male partners towards their emancipation as mature females. Similarly, Bessie's lyrics portray weak women dependent on their promiscuous and lazy partners who emerge as sexually-aroused women who reject their males if they fail to fulfil their desire. Bessie's women can also become rough and violent, although they may suddenly get *the real blues* if

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they wake up in the morning and their *papa* has gone. These ambivalent feelings are also present through the novels discussed. They are all women exchanging and sharing experiences. In *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, Janie unveils her life story to Phoeby as an oral tale at the porch. In *The Colour Purple*, Celie and Nettie write letters to each other. In *Beloved*, Sethe's ghost child compels her mother to remember her past memories. Oral tales, letters and memories necessarily have a folk component that interweaves with songs. Despite their written form, all together present a chorus of experiences shared by African-American women. Past and present merge in order to form a communal experience. Songs and texts are sung and written, listened to and read by a community of women who contribute with their voices to the formation of African-American women's life experience. The thematic links outlined through this essay such as love and women's expectations, men's economic power and women's dependence, men's meanness and women's desertion, men's violence and mistreatment of women, women's sexual desire and lesbianism, women's retaliation and reversal of gender roles, sexuality, gothic imagery, women's loneliness and men's impotence, and a shared grievous past of ownership can be identified and are actually presented in similar ways in Bessie Smith's lyrics and the three novels analysed. These shared experiences contribute to constructing a politics of sexuality within the new trends of Black Feminism, underlining the awareness of the historical evolution in African-American Studies, the recovery of often neglected and forgotten artists, and the identification of common themes through multi-faceted artistic manifestations.

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Notes

[1]. McDowell (1980) has acknowledged Barbara Smith's essay "Towards a Black Feminist Criticism" (1977) as "the earliest theoretical statement on Black feminist criticism" (154).

[2]. Mainly, awareness of the historical evolution of Black Feminism, identification of common themes and the recovery of often neglected artists.

[3]. Zora Neale Hurston, Alice Walker and Toni Morrison are currently considered canonical writers as is shown by the inclusion of their works in recent Black Feminist manuals and companions, anthologies and courses.

[4]. One of the most recent examples is Valerie Lee's and Melissa Payton's *The Prentice Hall Anthology of African-American Women's Literature* (2005).

[5]. Mary Helen Washington edited the anthology *Any Woman's Blues: Stories by Contemporary Black Women Writers* (1986) and Marita Golden edited *Wild Women Don't Wear No Blues: Black Women Writers on Love, Men and Sex* (1993).

[6]. Johnson puts forward Janie's three marriages to Logan, Joe and Tea Cake in order to underline the blues tripartite structure of Zora Neale Hurston's novel.

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FOREVER YOUNG: CONSUMER CULTURE AND THE AGEING BODY IN HANIF KUREISHI'S "THE BODY"

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Who wouldn't like to be forever young? Unfortunately, the demographic tendency of present-day British —and Western— society seems to be exactly the opposite. For a few decades now, thanks to advances in medicine and technology and an improvement in the quality of life, a revolution in longevity is causing human beings to live longer and longer and, therefore, to grow older and older. Youth lasts just one third of a lifetime and, in spite of an increasingly elderly population, Western society still feels a blind veneration for the youthful and beautiful body, which is seen as reflecting a specific kind of personality.

The ageing body and old age have been the quintessence of negative implications in the history of Western civilization. As Simone de Beauvoir writes in *The Coming of Age*, in Western thought, old age is and has been considered "a kind of shameful secret that is unseemly to mention" (1996: 1). For her part, Kathleen Woodward defines old age as one of the discontents of our civilization that has traditionally been represented "in terms of splitting": "Youth, represented by a youthful body, is good; old age, represented by the aging body, is bad" (1991: 7).

In Ancient Greece, old age was perceived as a punishment or a fate like disease or poverty, whereas in Classical Rome, images of ageing waver between adulation for the wisdom and experience of the eldest and the contemptuousness for their decadence. Similarly, in the Middle Ages, the development of a strong religious conscience through Saint Augustine popularised the metaphor by which "old age

represent[ed] the body and sinfulness and youth represent[ed] the soul and salvation" (Troyansky 1992: 41). In the Renaissance, old age was conceived as a period of imposed repentance and, thus, the last opportunity to come to terms with the earthly vices.

Although the ageing body has never been a source of pride in the Western history of art and literature, it was during and after the Industrial Revolution that old age was imprinted with the most negative values. The obsession for constant development and progress that became the basis of advancing industrial and capitalist societies implied that elderly citizens were perceived as a social problem —increasingly dependent people who were not only unable to be part of the productive workforce but who had also to be cared for.[1]

It is during the Industrial Revolution that discipline of the body was established as a means of controlling social transactions. According to Michel Foucault, during this period the body acquired a "biopolitical" meaning which turned it into the "engine of power, to produce and accumulate" (Hewitt 1991: 230).[2] As a consequence, the external body became the main way of controlling the good and bad properties of the individual in relation to health, attitudes and behaviour:

> First, by the nineteenth century the body was no longer subject to the sovereign's absolute and unmitigated power, but endowed by various experts with a range of properties indicating types of crime, sexual aberrations and states of grace, health and mind. Each property was accorded a specific technology of control and form of corporeality. [...] Secondly, the application of discipline to correct deviations of the body, its behaviour, timing, speech, sexuality and even thought, required attending to the norm. (Hewitt 1991: 228)

The "social politisation" of the body accounts for the reinforcement of the ageing body; elder citizens were to be perceived not only as unproductive, but also as dependent and, therefore, deviants from the norm. The social position of the aged becomes further negativised when the organisation of knowledge is made prominent in the form of "timetables, taxonomies, typologies, registers, examinations and chrestomathies", a schema that allowed "the control of large numbers of bodies within a regimented space" (Turner 1991: 158).[3.] Thus, within the development of the school, the factory and the hospital, little space seemed to be left for the old who, although admittedly smaller in number at that time, were almost entirely left out of this emerging social organisation.

From the last decades of the twentieth century to the beginning of the twenty-first, a period characterised as the era of technology and information, keeping the body fit has not been centred so much on bodies that have to be part of an industrial workforce as on bodies that require what is known as 'body maintenance', a concept strongly influenced by an economic system increasingly focused on

consumerism. Sociologists Mike Featherstone, Mike Hepworth and Bryan S. Turner have studied and theorised on the concept of body maintenance and the preservation of health as a way of exercising social control through the body and its close association with consumer culture. Mike Featherstone argues that the term 'body maintenance' is an indicator of the "popularity of the machine metaphor for the body", so that "[l]ike cars and other consumer goods, bodies require servicing, regular care and attention to preserve maximum efficiency" (1991: 182). As such, the well-kept body not only becomes an object of cult *per se*, but it also becomes a sign of virtue and wisdom in the person who lives within it.[4]

In fact, consumer culture has turned the precious jewel of youth to its own benefit by trying to convince future clients that the negative qualities attached to an elderly body can be defeated by applying a number of techniques and products. In this sense, consumer culture is another form of social regulation by which the negative stereotypes constructed around old age are redefined from an equivocal perspective that, in many cases, actually contributes to their greater diffusion. Mike Featherstone and Mike Hepworth reflect on the double-edged messages of consumer culture in relation to the ageing body and old age and contend that,

> as far as body maintenance is concerned, an array of evidence continues to accrue which disproves the necessary decline of mental, sexual and physiological capacities in old age. Chronological age continues to be discredited as an indicator of inevitable age norms and lifestyles and a new breed of body maintenance experts optimistically prescribe health foods, vitamins, dieting, fitness techniques and other regimens to control biological age —which is the true index of how a person should feel. (1991: 374)

The influence of consumer culture on how the ageing body should be cared for and restructured is unquestionable in our present times. The contribution of consumer culture to challenging negative stereotypes related to the ageing body is questionable however since, while it delineates fashionable trends in body image, it indicates at the same time what is socially acceptable and what is unacceptable. In this sense, the "positive" ageing discourse that is heard more and more can be considered equivocal; as Blaikie points out, it "effectively eclipses consideration of illness and decline", whereas "final decay and death takes on a heightened hideousness since these will happen, regardless of whatever cultural, economic, or body capital one might possess" (1999: 72). Moreover, consumer culture contributes to making extreme old age and death invisible, two realities that seem to be increasingly erased from the surface of our day-to-day lives.

Thus, in present-day Western society, the ageing body has inherited some of the negative values that have been attributed to it from Antiquity, but is now considered a 'machine' that can be repaired at any time, with the result that those whose bodies show signs of ageing are seen as untidy and careless, characteristics

that apparently match their personality. On the other hand, those aged people who look young and healthy are those more highly praised, thus widening the dichotomy between young and old.

Some of the consequences of the over-emphasis placed by Western society on keeping a youthful body are fear and anxiety, felt both before reaching old age and, later, when inhabiting that 'foreign land' and when the signs of ageing are irremediably marked on the body. Peter Laslett lists a number of fears felt by the aged and, mainly, by those who "have begun to recognise for the first time how much of their life still to come will be spent as an older person" (1991: 14). Among those fears there is not only the fear of death, of life-threatening diseases or senility, but also the fear of loss of "beauty, attractiveness, fertility, potency" (1991: 14). However, for Laslett, the most significant fear in the process of growing old "arises from the fear of simply being *classed* as such", since it implies that the negative stereotypes related to old age will be attached to that person, who then becomes "the victim of a set of inseparably inter-related prejudices —as undesirable, unproductive individuals, incapable of change" (1991: 15). For Haim Hazan, the dissolving of boundaries between young and old, between chronological and social age, results in an even more equivocal status of the aged that ultimately pervades the negative stereotypes attached to them. Hazan ultimately defines age as both "an overt form of social control and a tacit device of manipulation and regulation pervading all areas of life" (1994: 63).

Therefore, in contemporary British and Western society, the ageing body is much more than wrinkles or white hair, signs of ageing that frequently contribute to negative stereotyping that does not match the person behind them. If taking extra care of our bodies has become synonymous with wisdom and keeping the signs of ageing at bay with moral maturity, the time has come for a revision of our cultural and social views of old age and death, confronted as we are with an increasing elderly population. Nowadays, a postmodern conception of the world has challenged past boundaries and categories, and today's market-economy societies see the retired and elderly as potential consumers to be targeted through messages of constant body renewal and rejuvenatory leisure activities. However, such challenges are fallacious. Through images of ageing presented in the media, consumer culture tempts those entering retirement, who are still healthy and energetic, with messages of youthful eternity. By taking advantage of a wide range of products and techniques displayed in the marketplace, one can apparently keep as young as one wishes. Andrew Blaikie summarises this shift in the conception of old age thus:

> Popular perceptions of ageing have shifted from the dark days when the 'aged poor' sat in motionless rows in the workhouse, to a paternalistic pause when 'the elderly'

> were expected to don retirement uniform, to modern times, when older citizens are encouraged not just to dress 'young' and look youthful, but to exercise, have sex, diet, take holidays, and socialise in ways indistinguishable from those of their children's generation. (1999: 73-4)

In this paper, I aim to analyse the contradictions in relation to the conceptions of the young and old body, and, by extension, of youth and old age within British and Western contemporary society; contradictions further nurtured by the ambiguous messages we daily obtain from a consumerist-based media.

In his short story "The Body", Hanif Kureishi pushes such contradictions to an extreme by presenting a surrealist-like story in which a desire to remain young forever merges with the need to keep one's sense of self and identity within a community. Ultimately, the story highlights the present-day growing mismatch inherent in ageing bodies, youthful selves and prejudiced societies.

The main character of "The Body" is a well-known theatre director, Adam, who is starting to confront the idiosyncrasies of an ageing body:

> Want to hear about health? I don't feel particularly ill, but I am in my mid-sixties; my bed is my boat across these final years. My knees and back give me a lot of pain. I have haemorrhoids, an ulcer and cataracts. When I eat, it's not unusual for me to spit out bits of tooth as I go. My ears seem to lose focus as the day goes on and people have to yell into me. I don't go to parties because I don't like to stand up. (*The Body and Seven Stories* 3)

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However, it is not so much the physical deficiencies, clearly exaggerated, which disturb Adam as the fact that his ageing body is increasingly unable to arouse desirability and likeableness, attributes which seem to be restricted to the young. As Mike Hepworth and Mike Featherstone explain, in present-day Western society "the process of growing old is complicated by the fact that there are really two kinds of ageing: biological and social. The natural physical changes we associate with ageing are evaluated according to social norms which place a high premium on youthful energy and beauty" (1982: 3).

At the party venue that opens the story, full of glamour and fashion, Adam realises that, at his age, "education and experience seem to be of no advantage" in contemporary society. As he reflects to himself, "I imagine that to participate in the world with curiosity and pleasure, to see the point of what is going on, you have to be young and uninformed. Do I want to participate?" (*The Body* 5) It is not so much the ignorance or curiosity of younger ones that Adam values as the social information they display through their bodies —shrines of praise in spite of their intellectual or cultural vapidity.

When he was about forty, Adam realised he was getting out of shape physically, his paunch growing bigger and bigger. But it was when he was in his fifties that he became aware of the first signs of bodily deterioration, "having had it pointed out by a disappointed lover" (*The Body* 29). As a consequence, Adam started dying his hair and even signed up for sessions at a gym, although soon he "was so hungry that [he] ate even fruit" (*The Body* 29). Then, all of a sudden, he realised that his society was being bombarded with messages of body maintenance; and everyone around him, from his wife to the most beautiful actress, seemed to be hooked on to taking extra care of their external appearance, as if ageing naturally was sinful:

> It was rare for my wife and her friends not to talk about botox and detox, about food and their body shape, size and relative fitness, and the sort of exercise they were or were not taking. I knew women, and not only actresses, who had squads of personal trainers, dieticians, nutritionists, yoga teachers, masseurs and beauticians labouring over their bodies daily, as if the mind's longing and anxiety could be cured via the body. Who doesn't want to be more desired and, therefore, loved? (*The Body* 29)

Despite his awareness of the impossibility, even the craziness, of fighting against bodily deterioration as one ages, Adam acknowledges the social value of a youthful appearance, a value which also contributes to shaping one's personality. So he finally surrenders to a most strange proposition. At that same party, a stranger proposes that Adam undergo an operation so that his brain is transplanted into a young and attractive body. After some reflection, Adam reaches the conclusion that he does not relish becoming old and invisible; like any human being, he prefers to be desired, loved and to go through exciting experiences. He begins to feel his body is disguising a man full of aspirations and expectations, and he agrees to go through the operation on the condition that he would recover his old body within six months. After the transplant, the doctor visits him and explains: "Everything is complete now. Your mind and the body's nervous system are in perfect co-ordination. [...] Your clock has been restarted, but it is still ticking. See you in six months" (*The Body* 37).

The society described in the short story, a society quite similar to Western society, has apparently found the source of eternal beauty and youth which has been longed for and sought after in our own culture for centuries. At the beginning of the twenty-first century, technological and medical advances have not only made it possible to delay the onset of an ageing appearance, but have actually proved constant physical rejuvenation to be a reality. From inside its new body, it occurs to Adam's brain that they "were making a society in which everyone would be the same age" (*The Body* 37). However, as he learns later, it is not everyone who has access to such operations, but only those who are powerful and have money, those who have made a name for themselves just as he has done. As Matte, one of the

eccentric and rich new bodies he meets in his new guise, contends, this new transplant will allow them to create a "superclass of superbodies" (*The Body* 96). In this story, a long-term rejuvenatory technique is posited by which, as argued by Mike Featherstone (1991: 182), old car chassis are substituted for new ones when their owners consider it necessary, so that a person's presence and opinion are still taken into account and even considered relevant. Adam himself realises that, in a new body, he starts seeing the old "like a race all of whom look the same" (*The Body* 42); thus confirming the premise by which external appearance becomes the main and almost the only informant to the self.

Equipped with his new body, Adam undergoes experiences he had never had for lack of time or opportunity during the years he was working hard to maintain his family. The experience and knowledge acquired during his sixty-five years of life together with a valorised young and attractive body offer him a wide range of possibilities:

> I was delighted with the compliments about my manner and appearance, loved being told I was handsome, beautiful, good-looking. I could see what Ralph meant by a new start with old equipment. I had intelligence, money, some maturity and physical energy. Wasn't this human perfection? Why hadn't anyone thought of putting them together before? (*The Body* 56)

In this short story, youth and knowledge have been artificially conjoined. But, as with the protagonists of past literary works, the myth of eternal beauty fails to work. Goethe's Faust and Oscar Wilde's Dorian Gray conspired with powerful but evil forces in order to keep eternal youth and knowledge. However, both characters were deprived of their souls and finally disappeared. In "The Body", Adam neither trades with the devil nor with evil forces, but he does succumb to consumer culture's messages of eternal youth and beauty, messages also absorbed by those around him. Ultimately, he is engulfed by false expressions of the self and the values of an equivocal society and, as past heroes in similar situations, he ends up by losing everything. Adam, the name of the first man inhabiting Paradise according to the Bible, characterised by his innocence and virtuousness, adopts a different name while in his new athletic body —Leo— and, under this label, the protagonist crosses the boundaries not only of his sixty-five year old respected morale but also of his own individual and social self.

The way we develop our personalities is intimately related to society. Influenced as it is by social movements and groups, selfhood is moulded throughout the course of life; as Anthony Cohen argues, "[t]he self is not a monolith; it is plastic, variable and complex" (1994: 2).[5] One of the most influential researchers on the concept of selfhood in contemporary society has been George H. Mead and the conceptual framework he developed —symbolic interactionism. Mead was

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interested in analysing and describing how our sense of selfhood develops and is transformed through social interaction. Thus, Mead distinguished between the "me", the reflexive part of the personality, and the "I", the reflective one. The symbolic interactionist perspective is relevant when considering the experience of ageing because the symbols and images related to it that are at the base of any social interaction, influence the constant redefinition of the sense of selfhood of elderly citizens. Therefore, despite a person's sense of having a self that has always been much the same, that person is ultimately compelled to redefine his or her identity of self.

In the case of Adam, this redefinition only takes place at an external level so that he soon becomes aware of the mismatch that exists between his body and his self as well as between his self and the society that starts surrounding him. As he explains to Ralph, the young man who introduces him into this world:

> In bed, I was aware of these twinges, or sensations. There were times in my Old body life, particularly as I got older, or when I was meditating, when I felt that the limits of my mind and body had been extended. I felt, almost mystically, part of others, and "outgrowth of the One". […]
>
> This is different. It's as if I have a ghost or shadow-soul inside me. I can feel things, perhaps memories, of the man who was here first. Perhaps the physical body has a soul. There's a phrase of Freud's that might apply here: the bodily ego, he calls it, I think. (*The Body* 45)

Still, after a few pleasant experiences in his own city, Adam, now Leo, decides to get on a train and stop in any European city he felt like visiting and enjoying. It is during this period that Leo becomes the boy companion of a famous designer, the paid lover of a middle-aged American heiress, the friend of a group of young men who spend their time taking drugs and filming themselves and the idolised member of a spiritual centre formed by a group of divorced middle-aged women. As he explains, knowing that he could "go back home" made him feel there was no limit to the pleasure his body could give him:

> After the purifications and substitutions of culture, I believed I was returning to something neglected: fundamental physical pleasure, the ecstasy of the body, of my skin, of movement, and of accelerated, spontaneous affection for others in the same state. I had been of puny build, not someone aware of his strength, and had always found it easier to speak of the most intimate things than to dance. As a Newbody, however, I began to like the pornographic circus of rough sex; the stuff that resembled some of the modern dance I had seen, animalistic, without talk. (*The Body* 58)

Following Bryan S. Turner's argument, Adam feels his self become "a representational self, whose value and meaning is ascribed to the individual by the

shape and image of their external body, through their body-image;" so that control of his body is "exercised through consumerism and the fashion industry rather than religion" (1995: 23), as it was in the past. Thus, he allows himself to lose control of his own self by consuming pleasure thanks to his new body but always keeping in mind the fact of his capacity to recover his old body, his old self and his beloved community. Immersed in his life of hedonism, he is aware that it is his new body which allows him to experience pleasure in all its forms and varieties. Thus, if consumer culture has an important influence in shaping and establishing social stereotypes related to the body, it also has an impact on the construction of the self, a self constantly revised according to other people's attitudes which, at the same time, are shaped by the information we give off and which is culturally and socially charged.

The possibilities his new body offers Adam start to narrow when, after some satisfactory experiences, he finds himself at a party on a boat full of new bodies just like his own and he realises that these people's facial expressions are completely void. The owner of the boat, Matte, a most eccentric man, wants to get Adam's new body for his sick brother. When the strangeness of the situation eventually sinks in, Adam realises that, "Matte and I were both mutants, freaks, human unhumans —a fact I could at least forget when I was with real people, those with death in them" (*The Body* 102). To save his life, he has to escape from Matte's men and he returns to his old neighbourhood, where he spends time observing his wife and son. It is when he becomes an external observer of his past life that he is aware of the extent to which he misses it: "I didn't have time to begin a new life as a new person, and, expecting to go back, I missed my old life. I was in limbo, a waiting room in which there was no reality but plenty of anxiety" (*The Body* 108).

Adam returns to the hospital to get his old body back so that he might become the person he once was, now highly-esteemed in his own mind. However, it is too late; neither the hospital nor the doctors are there. He has already sold his soul to the overblown ideal of keeping a youthful and attractive body as the illusory goal of an enviable personality and acclaimed social position. Adam finally realises he has lost his sense of self, individually and socially, something he laments in the last lines of the story: "I was a stranger on the earth, a nobody with nothing, belonging nowhere, a body alone, condemned to begin again, in the nightmare of eternal life" (*The Body* 126). Eternal youth proves to be a burden rather than a blessing, aggravated by the fact that Matte would keep chasing him in order to get his new body, something that made Adam feel he was "wearing the *Mona Lisa*" (*The Body* 126).

In "The Body", the individual and social contradictions existing between an elderly body and a youthful and active self are pushed to an extreme. As Featherstone argues, nowadays "[a]ppearance, gesture and bodily demeanour become taken as

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expressions of self, with bodily imperfections and lack of attention carrying penalties in everyday interaction" (1991: 189). Because Adam feels this contradiction both within himself and in his society, he decides to undergo a most unusual transplant, with the result that he is not only deprived of his external appearance but also of his inner and social self. His external appearance informs others of the person he is and, at the same time, he sees and redefines himself as reflected in those he loves and appreciates. In this sense, when Adam knows he cannot go back to his former body, he is aware he has actually lost his true value as an individual within a social group. As he visits his wife in his new body and disguised identity, he explains:

> I put on my wife's favourite record. I kissed her hands and felt her body against mine as we danced. I knew where to put my hands. In my mind, her shape fitted mine. I didn't want it to end. Her face was eternity enough for me. Her lips brushed mine and her breath went into my body. For a second, I kissed her. Her eyes followed mine, but I could not look at her. If I was surprised by the seducibility of my wife, I was also shocked by how forgettable, or how disposable, I seemed to be. (*The Body* 118)

Ultimately, Hanif Kureishi's "The Body" invites us to redefine contemporary Western images of ageing and old age as conceptions that are highly-influenced by a culture rooted in consumerism, an ideology that, at the same time, takes advantage of our traditional obsession with physical beauty as represented by the media. According to Thomas R. Cole, nowadays the renewed search for eternal youth can be interpreted as the inability "to infuse decay, dependency, and death with moral and spiritual significance;" as a result of which "our culture dreams of abolishing biological ageing" (Post 1992: 128). Indeed, images of the ageing body are culturally —and socially— determined, and, for this reason, liable to be questioned and redefined. In their book *Quality of Life and Older People*, John Bond and Lynne Corner see the plethora of negative images of the ageing body and old age as evidence of pervading ageist attitudes towards elderly citizens. As he explains, "[i]f we perceive ageing as a process of increasing ill health and disability, of a time of diminished personal and social opportunities, we are likely to accept as inevitable the negative stereotypes of old age and ageism" (2004: 73). In this respect, Hanif Kureishi in "The Body" presents an extreme possible outcome in the event that conceptions of body, self and society are not challenged and made clearer. Adam himself wonders at one point in his experience as a new body what path our society is taking if "[w]e are changing ethics for aesthetics" (*The Body* 97), thus questioning the dehumanising quality of a society driven by unlimited technological and economic advance.

Notes

1. In *Ageing and Popular Culture*, Andrew Blaikie quotes a report of the "Royal Commission on Population", published in 1949, in which older people are considered to "excel in experience, patience, in wisdom and breadth of view", whereas the young are highlighted by their "energy, enterprise, enthusiasm, the capacity to learn new things, to adapt themselves, to innovate". The report concludes by stating that "[i]t thus seems possible that a society in which the proportion of young people is diminishing will become dangerously unprogressive" (1999: 39).

2. In "Bio-Politics and Social Policy: Foucault's *Account of Welfare*", Martin Hewitt revises Foucault's conception of the body

within society as presented in his works, mainly *Discipline and Punish*.

3. Bryan S. Turner also bases his explanations of the politicisation of the body in Michel Foucault's work.

4. In Mike Featherstone's own words, "fitness and slimness become associated not only with energy, drive and vitality but worthiness as a person; likewise the body beautiful comes to be taken as a sign of prudence and prescience in health matters" (1991: 183).

5. Anthony Cohen writes about selfhood and identity in *Self-Consciousness. An Alternative Anthropology of Identity* (1994).

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SE HABLA ESPAÑOL: A CERTAIN TENDENCY IN THE WESTERN FILM[1]

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> All along this frontier the outlands of two countries come together to form a culturally sovereign province. [...] From the scrublands of South Texas and Cohauila to the fierce basins and ranges of the Big Bend and Chihuahua to the desert dunes of Arizona and Sonora, its people are mostly of a nature less wholly Mexican or American than an amalgam of both, a nature as distinct and remote and isolate as the borderlands themselves.
>
> James Carlos Blake, *Borderlands* (1999)

> We do not yet have full control of the border, and I am determined to change that.
>
> George W. Bush (May 15, 2006)

The American West has often been represented as a space of promise in film as well as in other artistic expressions. In the United States, the migration westward evokes ideas of reinvention, adaptation and renewal, and feelings of uniqueness and national destiny. The westward expansion and the frontier experience are repeatedly associated with the emergence of the United States as a distinctive nation, and in this process towards national uniqueness and exceptionality the West transcends its geographical character to include concepts such as language, race, history, or religion. These identity factors, together with a number of political and social practices, are invoked as the determining attributes that help breed the United

States as a distinctive nation-state. Yet, the borderlands that we have come to identify as the West often emerge as dynamic and vibrant regions that challenge any homogenizing notion like a "national language", a "national (written) history", a "national race", etc. In this sense, as Jean-Luc Nancy noted in a different context (1993: 1), the West is a paradox. These borderlands have become both the site where genuine U.S.-ness is to be found and, at the same time, an empty signifier where the struggle for significance is played out —a signifier that shows its fundamental nature to be unlike any other because it is defined by the frontier, which guarantees representation while, at the same time, bars and excludes specific voices from being represented. The real vocation of the West seems to be representation and exclusion. The frontier both facilitates and challenges representation; the experience of the frontier is part of a historical process of nationalization and simultaneously a response to the homogenizing forces of this process. There is a battle for national distinctiveness that has been fought in the borderlands while, at the same time, these borderlands always invite a redefinition of the national character.

From this point of view, as many scholars have observed (see for instance Gary J. Hausladen 2003), the West is as much a place as a process, both a geographical location and a number of social interactions that are broadly identified as the experience of the frontier. In these places I repeatedly call the borderlands, identities and history always appear in the process of becoming, always fluid, flexible, and subject to reinvention. This seems at odds with the traditional view of the frontier as the explainer of the development and the direction of the country and the individualistic, hard-working, self-sufficient character of its citizens. Again, there is a paradox here: on one hand, the U.S.'s exceptional identity is located in the westward journey and the frontiering experience, and presupposes the control of the frontier while, on the other, the West as frontier has always been that space where meaning or identity emerges and re-emerges from the encounter with the other; it has been the bar that separates signifier and signified and that defines the West as both inclusion and exclusion, a bar that, paradoxically, both promises and negates co-presence, interaction, and transculturation. As Margaret García Davidson points out (1996: 178),

> [t]he uniquely American metaphor of the frontier as a wild, unsettled expanse of land with unlimited opportunity has been transformed into an academic discourse about borders, where multiple intersecting cultures engage in complex interactions of resistance and accommodation, conflict and assimilation.

The purpose of this article is to reexamine the West as a site of conflict over representation and identity, or, as Fisher puts it, a "civil war within representation" (1991: xiv). My intention is to look at a number of films about borders, both

physical and cultural, where this conflict is dramatized. Films like *The Ride Back!* (Allen H. Miner 1957), *Man from Del Rio* (Harry Horner 1956), *The Bravados* (Henry King 1958), or *Lone Star* (John Sayles 1996), stage, in the highly codified scenario of Hollywood filmmaking, the myth of the frontier and the development of a nation all over again in the encounter with other local and subjugated cultures (Hispanics in these cases) that had settled the land many centuries before the Anglos brought their the new social order. In films like these, these cultures do not merely resist the received myth of the West nor are they made visible in the narrative in revisionist fashion, but they enter a "civil war within representation" and reveal a hybrid national identity or cultural *mestizaje* both at an individual and at an institutional level. Renato Rosaldo describes borders as "permeable and porous", borders "allow for exchange", he says, and "suggest a complex space that contains both the tensions maintaining separateness between distinct entities [...] and the inevitable blurring [...] due to proximity and the process of *mestizaje*" (as quoted by García 1996: 184). In the aforementioned films, the national monomyth of the frontier becomes polyphonic; the borderlands are defined by the mixture of cultures, by interaction and dialogue, and by the blurring of boundaries; and the stories develop into a search for identity in the light of this multiplicity of voices. As James Carlos Blake writes in the autobiographical short story that opens his volume *Borderlands*, the people of these places form a different cultural region, they "are mostly of a nature less wholly Mexican or American than an amalgam of both" (1999: 2). As I write these words, thousands of Hispanic immigrants stage demonstrations protesting against a House bill passed in December 2005 known as the Border Protection, Anti-terrorism and Illegal Immigration Control Act of 2005. The proposed legislation would make it a felony to be in the country illegally or to provide assistance to illegal immigrants. With these demonstrations, Hispanic immigrants wanted to assert that they are not criminals, that they are needed in the United States and that they deserve full citizen rights. Protesters carried United States flags along with flags from their countries of origin, and chanted in English as well as in Spanish, and held up signs proclaiming "We Are America". This mishmash of traditions and identities that swept the streets of more than 140 United States cities according to the organizers, ensued a lengthy debate in the media and in academic circles, thus revealing to what extent these rallies had challenged geographical and cultural borders. The protesters seemed to assert a mixed identity that forces the country (whose distinctive character is believed to be a work in progress profoundly determined by immigration and the treatment of minorities) to imagine itself once more and find its place on a new hybrid cultural map. The true historical processes played out in the borderlands have been obscured by the need for a metanarrative that would endow the nation with a creation myth, a coherent fable that locates U.S.-ness not in a multicultural

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dialogue or "amalgam" but in the conquest and the control of the West's local cultures more akin to George W. Bush's words in a televised speech from the oval office on May 15, 2006 where he spoke of the need to "have control" of the border and with it, I dare say, to regain control of the line that separates signifier and signified, that is, control of representation.

The westward expansion has played a significant role in the way the United States has imagined itself as a nation. We have inherited a discourse about the identity of the United States that goes back to Frederick Jackson Turner's theses and locates the true essence of the United States in the social specificity of the frontier; the uniqueness of the country amounts to the result of what Turner calls the "perennial rebirth [and] fluidity of American life", a "social development [that] has been continually beginning over again on the frontier" in the contact with "the simplicity of primitive society" (1996: 2-3). For Turner, the advance of the frontier had above anything else, a strong nationalizing effect. The frontiering experience promoted the formation of a distinct and exceptional nationality and the development of social and political institutions; and both national identity and institutions were determined by the hard conditions of the westward journey, the landscape, and the contact with indigenous populations. These conditions, Turner believed, precipitated individualism, democracy, a social organization based largely on the family and a dislike of control.

History as submitted by Turner presents the West as a place to be conquered in a neat and orderly logic in what was to become the mythic narrative of expansion of a nation that strove to find a distinct identity in the 19th century after the war of 1812 against the British. In this mythic design, Mexicans and Native Peoples appear not as different cultural realities in a multicultural space but as immoral and criminal others whom an expanding nation "conquered" (Turner 1996: 2). This thesis became the favored and privileged interpretation of the West and has dominated cultural expressions since. As Doreen Massey notes, "the identity of places is very much bound up with the histories which are told of them, how those stories are told, and which history turns out to be dominant" (quoted in Campbell and Kean 1997: 124). Frontier mythology, namely the concept that there has been a moving western frontier that has determined U.S. history, has been fundamental in the representation of U.S. culture and identity as one marked by hardships, opportunities, success, individuality, masculinity, self-reliance, adventure, hard work, violence, and a superior design that excluded other ethnic groups. This frontier mythology rests on ethnic conflicts and on exclusion; it rests on the conflict between Anglo-American culture and the cultures of other Americans (as well as on the silence of women). Standing in the East looking west, this space has been interpreted as a territory of opportunity, but standing in the West looking east or in the South looking north, the same region acquires totally different meanings.

As was said above, the West is more than a geographical place, it is, Campbell writes, "a multicultural, multiaccented, multilayered space whose various cultures exist both separately and in dialogue with all the others that exist around them" (2000: 2). In other words, the West first and foremost designates a conflict over representation that has been lost to the numerous stories that would become the West's official history.

If for a moment the significance of the epic frontier narrative was ever in danger of losing its grip on U.S. society, the cultural expressions that followed, Hollywood's films among them, helped solidify and perpetuate a set of values and certainties about gender, race, and land that ultimately would become a synonym for U.S. national identity and purpose. The architects of the West as we know it now have been the artists in visual media. Painting, photography, sculpture, and film, among other cultural expressions, have become the site where the country has pictured itself as a singular nation. Yet, these expressions have never rendered a single coherent image. Turner provided the country with a tidy and orderly history of its origins and relentless progress but the "perennial rebirth" and "fluidity" referred to above rather situates the Anglo-American West in terms of struggle for representation, in terms of transformation and renewal in the collision and contact with other cultures. What I would like to call attention to is that Turner's West is both the result and the evidence of a battle over representation where some stories have crossed over into the official narrative (or signifier) establishing a creation myth that carries particular values about race, gender, and social and political organization, while below the visibility line lies a stronger multifaceted collective history that is part of this creation myth just the same and makes itself present at different times and in different ways.

These invisible or silenced stories are an indissoluble part of the reality of a community and cannot be buried forever. They usually make themselves present when a society is faced with a changing world and is compelled to deal with new challenges and to ask itself questions that didn't occupy a significant position on the country's agenda before. The Turnerian West of unequivocal certainties about the course of the United States has been extensively revised, especially since the 1950s. At the time, old agendas about the identity of the country became more attentive to diversity due, largely, to the impact of social movements (namely civil rights and women's movements) and changes in sexual roles. In addition, another significant tryout for the reductionist myth of the West was the impact of postmodern theory. Mikhail Bakhtin and Walter Benjamin's assault on mythography and Michel Foucault's critique of traditional historicism offered different ways of looking at the West. Neil Campbell (2000) has gone over the significance of these theorists for the unifying representation of the frontier. Walter Benjamin argued that "[history] is thoroughly dialectical, and threads may have

been lost for centuries that the present course of history erratically, inconspicuously picks up again" (in Campbell 2000: 12). And Foucault, in *Power/Knowledge*, expresses himself in similar terms when he rejects the "functionalist coherence or formal systematization [of history]" (1980: 81) and denounces the fact that in the writing of history, some particular local stories, episodes, or incidents are obscured and hidden while others are exalted, elevated, and made somehow dominant.

All these landmarks had a decisive effect on the understanding of historicism. History (or the past) is not immobile. On the contrary, it is always in the making from the vantage point of the present, and challenges such as the impact of social reforms or postmodern theory mentioned above force society to distrust and question coherent historical arrangements and their interpretation, and, in the case of the West, its mythic representation. When the West started to be revised in the changing social context of the 1950s, a number of relationships that Turner had left out started to be articulated. This new perspective also constituted a denunciation of the theory that history was a seamless linear narrative driven inescapably by relations of cause and effect. The traditional representation of history as unfolding linearly in time excluded this revisionist movement back and forth in time that guarantees the unearthing of hidden stories and gives them visibility due to new, unexpected, and contemporary circumstances and adds new layers to the relationships between different cultures of the West. The task of the cultural critic, Campbell suggests (2000: 12), is to explore the fragmented heterogeneous threads of history, history's multiple lost stories and silenced voices, but not necessarily to rewrite them into a similar epic narrative. The significance of this approach for the narratives of the West is inspiring: to rearrange these fragments and articulate, says Campbell, "not a unified and totalizing story but one in which many voices speak, many, often contradictory, histories are told, and many ideologies cross, coexist, and collide" (2000: 20).

I will examine briefly several films in which the totalizing epic story of the West is challenged by the presence of the Mexican-American other (their values, their experiences, their points of view, etc.) These western films show that the West is more dynamic than it had been shown to be, that the historic movement identified as the "frontier" did not close in 1890, but that it is an unsettled region that calls into question the single mythic Anglo-Saxon version of history and the harmonious and unambiguous identity that supposedly emerged from it. In these films, mythic U.S.A. cannot sidestep the conflict over identity and national purpose; it is, on the contrary, forced to renegotiate its identity in the cultural clash and the tensions of the borderlands.

These films ask to be read as westerns, engaging themselves in a mythic language or formula popularized by innumerable films before them. But, as westerns, these

films are primarily about other films. The classic western formula registers how community develops out of lawlessness or how the region moves from a rural economy to capitalism (often dramatized in the building of the railroad, the telegraph and the telephone, banking, mining, commerce, trade, etc.) For John Cawelti, for instance, this formula involves a setting "on or near the frontier" (1970: 35), "at a certain moment in the development of American civilization, namely at that point when savagery and lawlessness are in decline before the advancing wave of law and order, but still strong enough to pose a local and momentarily significant challenge" (1970: 38). This narrative logic entails three significant roles, "the townspeople or agents of civilization, the savages or outlaws who threaten this group, and the heroes" (1970: 46). The western hero is defined by his courage, integrity, independence, altruism, and uncomplicated masculinity. He is the ultimate upholder of the law and the guardian of a nascent society, but he has chosen to stay away from the responsibilities this society carries. Maybe this figure has survived in the popular imagination because he corresponds to the traditional U.S. hero as described by Leslie Fiedler, "a man on the run, harried [...] anywhere to avoid 'civilization' [...] and responsibility" (1960: xx). In a brief description of western writing, Robert Rebein notes that the essential image of the western is "the lone rider traversing the western landscape", and the "classic western story, told from the perspective of this rider, is about the moment when he discovers that he is not alone" (2001: 111). Rebein, following Leslie Fiedler, who already observed that the heart of the western is the encounter with the other, writes that western stories are about landscape —who it belongs to and how it should be lived in— and the encounter in that landscape with an alien other (1968: 21). This alien other or hero's antagonist often reveals dialogical subtexts that pose problems to the general scheme of the film and to the U.S. imaginary as a whole. The films I want to examine are about "the encounter with the other", about "how [the landscape] should be lived in", and about the cultural conflicts and the values and priorities of society. As westerns, these films reveal the subjugated cultures, the shame, and the anxieties beneath the myth and the divine destiny allocated to the Anglo-Saxon race, and renegotiate the multiculturalism of the borderlands and of the country as a whole.

Men from Del Rio

In *The Ride Back!*, a low budget black and white film from 1957 directed by Allen H. Miner and produced and co-starred by William Conrad, Texas Marshall Chris Hamish (William Conrad) crosses the border down into Mexico in search of Kallen (Anthony Quinn), a fugitive who has been accused of a double murder and has fled

to the Mexican town of Cerralvo to avoid an unfair trial. Kallen is a U.S. citizen of Mexican origin and Hamish's job is to find him and take him back to justice in the United States. Arresting Kallen proves relatively easy and the rest of the film concentrates instead on the ride back to the United States referred to in the title. The film seems to follow the classic western formula outlined above: the development of community out of lawlessness, and, as Cawelti noted, this formula requires the roles of the savage or outlaw that threatens the community and of the hero who restores order. However, in the opening credits two singular key ideas become visible, the concern over geography and borders as Hamish locates the town of Cerralvo on a map and traces the course to follow, and, bracketed together with these geographical concerns, the confusion and alienation of the western hero. Hamish is not the flawless bigger-than-life U.S. hero of other Hollywood films. On the contrary, he is a tormented and dark figure; not the nation's mythic self-image but a melancholic loser. From the very beginning he is presented as a disturbed, confused and fragmented character. The film was shot in black and white and relies on expressionistic techniques for the psychological characterization of Hamish and the examination of the frontier. In the opening credit sequence, the visibly fragmented and nearly grotesque representation of the hero is matched by a stark mise-en-scene with austere contours and harsh light contrast that makes the images intense, violent, and heavy with symbolism. Hamish, the all-U.S. hero, is isolated; as Marshall he is an essential part of society but in these opening shots he is defined by his badge, gun, and shackles and represented as cut off from all social ties. Besides, this is not the conventional lively Marshall's office of a John Ford or a Howard Hawks film but a void with no links with the community. In the rest of the film the same expressionistic techniques are employed to expose the mental condition of the hero (this goes back to the early westerns by William S. Hart) and the gloomy view of the frontier. While in the opening section these techniques are blended with the anxiety over maps and geographical boundaries, in the rest of the film the dark characterization of the hero is connected with his social function and his impact on social institutions. Kallen, the Anglo-Mexican antagonist played by Anthony Quinn, conveys a number of ideas and values that act upon the myth of the West (so embedded in the U.S. imaginary) in disturbing ways. When Hamish, who has been introduced to us not only alone but fragmented and without any social bonds, arrests Kallen, his position as western hero is questioned once again, and this time in more explicit terms. Hamish is not a winner and is not the stoic lone hero of other films either; and Kallen seems everything Hamish craves for: Kallen is not alone, on the contrary, he has a woman who loves him, he has a home and a simple and satisfying way of life, he has friends who would kill the Marshall for him and, briefly, he is part of a fairly pleasant community.

In *The Ride Back!*, once Hamish has taken Kallen into custody, the two characters are forced to ride together and the spectator's sympathies shift from one to the other in an array of conventional frontier episodes. The western hero has traditionally established his moral authority in society while avoiding other social responsibilities, most notably those associated with the family. However, in a number of 1950s westerns, the hero stops wandering and fixes his attention upon a conventional harmless job and a home that in the end are denied him. The decade opened with a significant fatalistic representation of the western hero, the one portrayed by Gregory Peck in *The Gunfighter* (Henry King 1950). In *The Gunfighter*, Peck stars as a gunman who returns home with the intention of abandoning life as a drifter and marrying his former sweetheart. Yet, he cannot escape his legend and is marginalized and, eventually, killed. And similar discourses are found in *Shane* (George Stevens 1953), where the hero is not killed but whose dream of a community, a farm, and a family is denied him.

The same themes that dominate *The Ride Back!* pervade *The Bravados*, another Henry King big-budget production starred by Gregory Peck. In *The Bravados*, Jim Douglas (Gregory Peck) obsessively trails four runaway outlaws into Mexico because he believes they raped and murdered his wife. He methodically kills three of them, each time casting a darker shadow over the western hero. After his wife was murdered, Jim Douglas abandoned his ranch and his daughter in search of vengeance. Yet, Douglas had been misinformed by the real murderer and kills three people that were innocent of this particular crime. By the time he tracks down the fourth one, a Mexican citizen by the name of Luján (Henry Silva), the spectator is compelled to weigh the lunatic traditional western hero embodied by Peck against an underprivileged and yet amiable and openhanded Mexican family with obvious biblical connotations. The ending overflows with Christian imagery. Luján and his family embody the values Douglas has abandoned and show him the way to redemption.

As usual, in *The Ride Back!* and in *The Bravados*, borders are a sign of physical and cultural divisions but, as was said above, borderlands create the conditions for interaction, exchange and mixing. From this perspective, the Anglo-Mexican antagonist embodies the cultural values the U.S. hero lacks or longs for. In *The Ride Back!*, Kallen, the Hispanic antagonist, is easily recognizable as the member of a community who seems to preserve the principles traditionally associated with the land and the frontier. During the film *The Ride Back!*, while Kallen appears cool and calm, Hamish is always sweaty and nervous, and, although he seems to hate his job and the society he belongs to, he regards this assignment to bring Kallen to court as his last opportunity to have his share of the U.S. myth. Similarly, in *The Bravados*, the traditional attributes of the western hero (courageous, mysterious, and unsociable) also make him hardhearted, resentful and mean. On the contrary,

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the Hispanic character (though only in the final twist of the story) becomes a symbol of the values Jim Douglas has thrust aside, most notably the institution of the family, and grants Douglas an opportunity to redeem himself.

If the primary thematic concern of many earlier western films was the development of the community and the building of the nation, films like *The Ride Back! The Bravados*, or *Man from Del Rio*, another low-budget black and white western film that features Anthony Quinn as the antagonist of society at large, seem more concerned with the values of these nascent communities. In *Man from Del Rio*, the Anglo-Mexican character is a fast-drawing rambler (always driven by righteous motives, though) that is employed as sheriff of an unmanageable border community to keep outlaws at a distance but who is banned from the very society he helps to preserve. As Michael Coyne has observed, "during the 1950s, Westerns grew increasingly skeptical of American society's intrinsic merits" (1997: 69). In all the films mentioned so far, civilization, society, humanity, and the identity of the country as a whole seem to depend, to a certain extent, on citizens of Mexican origin and the treatment they receive, and, by extension, on the social integration of an alien local culture and on the acceptance of this culture's values and principles, that is, on some sort of *mestizaje*.

Digging up the Past

In most of the aforementioned westerns, the Hispanic characters are full U.S. citizens. One must bear in mind that the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo had made all Mexicans of the annexed territories U.S. citizens at a stroke. Since then, as contemporary films such as *Lone Star* illustrate, the question of social integration remains not fully answered. Not unlike the 1950s films dealt with above, *Lone Star* (John Sayles 1996) reveals something about the complex construction of identity in a multiethnic society. The film shares with other depictions of the New West the attempt to represent the ethnic and social variety of the western landscape, but it represents the New West as a place of divisions and borders. *Lone Star* (part western, part murder mystery, part drama) is also a film about history. In this respect, two ideas dominate the film. First, history has been written by those who held the power in each period of time —as one character puts it early in the film, "the winner gets the bragging rights". And second, the experiences and beliefs of those who have been subjugated by power and wiped out from official history remain on the margins of history, and although they are often buried and invisible, they are nonetheless part of the reality of the community, create tensions, and constantly threaten to come to the surface.

Structured around a conventional murder mystery reminiscent, for example, of *The Killers* (Robert Siodmak 1946), *Lone Star* emerges as a rich, complex and challenging story that explores present-day race relations in the small fictional town of Frontera, Texas. As opposed to Hollywood's fondness for solitary protagonists, the film is the multi-character portrait of a small border community. Its most recognizable attribute is that the investigations carried out by Sam (Chris Cooper), the local sheriff, grant exceptional visibility to U.S. citizens of diverse ethnic origins, make possible the exposition of numerous points of view, instigate a revision of the multicultural reality of the country, and ultimately promise to reexamine and weigh up the past and the role of history in the promotion of a distinctive United States national character. *Lone Star* is a conscientious and poignant analysis of the function played by history in the perpetuation of traditional concepts of the nation-state and of national identity and of its consequences. The film features Anglos, Mexican Americans, and African Americans in the major roles and endorses a revision of the country's past and national identity by bringing to light their multiple stories and the complex interactions between the different ethnic communities. In *Lone Star* the Texas borderlands become a symbolic landscape that can only be articulated as a site of conflict and interaction that has been —and is being— colonized and settled by different individuals from different cultural backgrounds with different stories to tell. But the film goes beyond the personal experiences of an ethnically diversified community and draws attention to the mechanisms employed to authorize and perpetuate the official version of history and to the purposes it serves, thus emphasizing a dilemma that besets contemporary multiethnic societies, the need to find a balance between traditional historiography and the recognition of cultural pluralism.

Lone Star is triggered off by and structured around the discovery of the corpse of Sheriff Charlie Wade (Kris Kristofferson), a metaphor for the most racist and shameful part of history erupting into the present. The investigation is led by current sheriff Sam Deeds, who interrogates everybody who might shed light on the mysterious murder of Wade. The whodunit structure of the film makes accessible different buried stories about the Southwestern community of Frontera as Sam gives voice to a number of secondary characters in these borderlands while trying to find out who killed Sheriff Wade. In this way, the spectator gains access to a multiplicity of voices and to their experience of the frontier. The narrative structure of *Lone Star* resembles conventional murder mystery narratives. It cuts back and forth between past and present and among diverse story lines to articulate its arguments about the social function of history and the role it continues to play in societies still damaged by racial tensions. Yet, for the most part, the film chooses to concentrate on the history of the West, and more particularly on the independence of Texas, and to challenge the narrow vision that views it as a

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homogeneous colonization epic in which the land was conquered and settled following a pristine logic that has come to be regarded as the initiation myth of a God-anointed race with recognizable attributes shared uniformly by all 'Americans' and where U.S.-ness can unmistakably be claimed to reside. Instead, *Lone Star* regards the West, not as a land free for the conquering by the best exemplars of one chosen race, but as a meeting place, accentuating its multicultural, dialogic, and dynamic nature. And the nation's cultural identity is here viewed, not as a recognizable static essence rooted in the country's historical accounts, but as a more vibrant and fluctuating mood and as a number of values and social and political ideals born out of contact, exchange and hybridization. Thus, the myth of the West is opened up for revision and the once excluded local experiences of the frontier provide a complex and discordant picture that stands in opposition to the dominant unitary myth. The national development that Turner associated with a West where local cultures were excluded is depicted in *Lone Star* as a composite social web created by the interconnected experiences of a multicultural community. In *Lone Star*, traditional unifying history becomes dialogue as the protagonist interrogates members of all ethnic groups. It is true that these long-buried voices are, in a sense, authorized by the leading figure of Sam, an Anglo male sheriff, but, as happened in the other films referred to above, the construction of a national identity appears here as a complex issue that can only be articulated through co-presence and through the mixture of their frontier experiences.

But *Lone Star* not only displays the aforementioned preference for dialogue, it also sides with Foucault as it questions the traditional linear representation of history and, in an effort to understand the past, combines all points of view and all kinds of knowledge. The film's generic backbone serves to reveal that different things happen simultaneously from different perspectives and, in so doing, it challenges the country's culture and historical identity by contesting the official unifying past and its control of representation, and by providing instead a complex multicultural history as the alternative to understand the distinctive national character. Not unlike the historian, who chooses to follow a number of academic protocols rooted in a particular theory of history, the heroes of the western and of the murder mystery represent two different approaches to history and society, either as a cohesive monumental narrative or as a web of multiple contradictory stories and shifting viewpoints. Traditionally, the western and the detective film feature a solitary male protagonist committed to restoring order to a community while preserving his individualism from the community and from women. The hero of the western stands up against the challenges a nascent community faces, gets justice for the people and, in the meantime, rewrites history from his point of view and redefines certain assumptions about the society. Similarly, the hero of detective fiction brings violent justice to a threatened community, although he lacks the totalizing point

of view of the western protagonist and is often deceived and mislead by a world that he cannot completely figure out. The task of these two film icons of masculinity bears a resemblance to that of the historian but, while the hero of the western rewrites history into a narrative of epic proportions that has often been regarded as a reliable record of the past of the United States, the mission of the detective protagonist is to find, contrast, and evaluate information, thus admitting to a myriad of different points of view. While the western hero has a complete hold over the events, the hero of classic murder mystery films is not always in the know. The former often focalizes the action for the spectator while the latter frequently knows less than the spectator. The protagonist of detective fiction has access to different points of view, deals with missing elements, recreates the past, restores the order of things, but is prone to defeat and ruin. Although films that relied on the conventions of the western often found it easy in narrative terms to present history as the linear monolithic version of the white male hero, *Lone Star* exploits instead the instability and the potential of the detective film structure to challenge traditional views about history and to facilitate the introduction of silenced stories and subaltern voices.

Lone Star breaks the illusion of historical continuity and liberates the forces that are locked up in a linear explanation of the past. For traditional historiography, the course of history conforms to linear relationships and corresponds to the inevitable progress of the nation-state across time. The historian has often tended to assemble a fallacious continuity that in turn deemed necessary and inescapable the uneven and inequitable forms of progress and social development that went together with Eurocentric imperialism of the sort described by Turner in the United States, and that left many social groups on the edge of society along the way. Unlike classic westerns, *Lone Star* is a multi-plot multi-protagonist film and not everything revolves around the figure of the hero or is focalized by him. Unlike early epic westerns where larger-than-life heroes lead an unequivocal narrative that mirrors traditional historical accounts about the westward expansion, *Lone Star* manages to circumvent the Eurocentrism and determinism of the western by denying the hero the possibility of channeling all the information it provides the audience with. *Lone Star*'s intricate narrative contains seven elaborate flashbacks as well as many verbal accounts about the past. In *Lone Star*, the narrative often shifts from the present to the past and back to the present without any cut or dissolve. The past enters the present sequence of events as if past and present forever happened together, as if time was done away with and past and present actions occupied the same space at the same time. This is one of the most startling visual characteristics of the film. For example, Chucho Montoya's flashback narrates the murder of Eladio Cruz, a cold-blooded homicide that so far seems to have gone ignored. After Sam symbolically crosses the border line that serves to institutionalize the

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Hispanic as a threat to the U.S. nation, to its values, and to its morals, Montoya consents to tell him what he knows about Eladio Cruz and there is then a seamless transition back in time as the camera first tracks in on Montoya's face and then left to show a bridge where Eladio is changing a flat tire sometime in the 1950s. When Montoya finishes the account of what he actually saw from under the bridge where he had hidden, the camera tracks up to show Sam on that same bridge in the present. These unobtrusive shifts in time disrupt the coherent order and the homogeneous logic often found in historical accounts. Not only do previously overlooked stories counter the old mythic representations of the country's past, thus substituting the conventional monologue found in traditional history for a multifaceted dialogue, but also argue for a new kind of history that is propelled not by simple linear cause-effect relationships but by discontinuity. *Lone Star* seems to side with Foucault (1993: 154) as it puts forward a version of the past where disruptions deprive the spectator of the "reassuring stability" found in the illusory continuity of time-honored history. The flashback structure of *Lone Star* substitutes for the linear view of history found in the western for a revisionist movement back and forth in time that both guarantees the unearthing of lost stories, undermines the homogenizing force of traditional historical accounts where national identity has been made to reside, and gives visibility to new social and cultural relationships. The activity of investigation digs up the threads of history that had been lost for many decades —the lost events and the suppressed voices of the borderlands and of the colonization of the West— and the stylish flashbacks underscore that the past holds many voices that threaten to disrupt any conformist account of the past. As was noted above, these stories are part of the reality of a community just the same and cannot be silenced forever.

Lone Star denounces the racist and chauvinistic grip on history through the affirmation of the complex relations that still hold in Frontera; its story illustrates that, as Foucault observed (1993: 154), we exist "among countless lost events". Furthermore, *Lone Star* translates social anxieties over the new wave of immigrants into film genre language. In the era of Latino immigration, *Lone Star* offers, through the manipulation of genre conventions and genre expectations, an understanding of the new social and cultural challenges that besiege U.S. society. Sayles' film lays bare the mechanisms at work behind history's apparent transparency and how these affect our everyday relationships. The unspoken fears of the classic *noir* films of the post-war years over masculinity or the red menace become, in *Lone Star*, immigration and racism. The past is more complex than historical accounts suggest and comprises many experiences that may make themselves present at different times and in different ways, usually when a society is faced with new social circumstances and is compelled to deal with new challenges and to ask itself questions that didn't occupy a significant position on the country's

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agenda before. As Walter Benjamin pointed out (1997: 362), "[history] is thoroughly dialectical, and threads may have been lost for centuries that the present course of history erratically, inconspicuously picks up again". When the West started to be revised in the changing social context of the 1950s, a number of relationships that Turner had left out, most notably the treatment of the natives and the role of women, started to be articulated. In much the same way, as the twentieth century came to its end, a series of unexpected incidents, from the 1992 Los Angeles riots that followed the acquittal of the white police officers accused of beating Rodney King to the more recent Katrina tragedy or the controversy over the new immigration bill, demystified the myth of racial harmony inherited from the Reagan administration, brought to the surface a previously hidden reality, and presented society with new challenges.

The uses to which Hollywood films are put are many and varied, but, above all, they are complex and contradictory. Ideological interpretations of popular films have tended to identify the conventions of the western film with a mythology that was to explain and justify the providence of the Anglo-American race. An assortment of miscellaneous discourses and artistic expressions have tended to associate the uniqueness of the country with the notion of a moving western frontier that discriminated between superior Anglo-Americans and vile subaltern races. But the mythological interpretation of the frontiering experience, while a feature of the western genre that is to have some bearing on the interpretations of all films past and future, took shape at a precise moment in history and was never the national ritual often associated with western films as a whole. As film historians have noted, films change alongside larger social transformations and the frontier mythology as we know it was an effect, first, of World War II and the post-war years (see for example Coyne 1997; Neale 2000; Simmon 2003) and, second, of a canon that makes some conventions stand out and ignores others and that, as a consequence, gives prominence to certain selected films. This is not to say that post-war films offered a homogeneous standardized mythical view of the expansion westward. On the contrary, films addressed social issues before the war and continued dealing with social tensions afterwards. The films examined here reveal that film conventions in general and the conventions of the western film in particular were often taken advantage of to articulate discourses that challenge any complacent view about the westward expansion or the distinctiveness of the country. Films like *The Ride Back!* do not fulfill generic expectations as regards the position and values conferred on the white male in the United States and it unmistakably compels the audience to weigh the hero (and the film genre system as a whole) against the actual deviations from the narrative formula that the audience hypothesizes. Forty years later, *Lone Star* resorts to conventional generic devices (borrowed from the western film but also from the detective film) to

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articulate numerous diverse discourses about the past and the identity of the country. U.S. society has never been monocultural, monolingual, or monoracial. Quite the opposite, as Cody, a colorful racially prejudiced bartender laments in *Lone Star*, U.S. society is a "damn *menudo*". Language betrays Cody, who ingeniously mixes English and Spanish, and who seals one of his stirring expositions bellowing "*Se habla* American, goddamn it!" to his clientele. *Lone Star* tears down the frontiers that the conquest mythology erects between the different cultures, it gives the silenced characters of the traditional western myth an opportunity to voice their version of history, and, with its manipulation of film genres and story time, it also underscores that the role of the critic is to articulate the contradictory discourses that coexist in the same cultural ground rather than succumb to the film's illusion of ideological coherence.

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Reviews

THE QUEST FOR GOD IN THE NOVELS OF JOHN BANVILLE 1973-2005: A POSTMODERN SPIRITUALITY

Brendan McNamee
Lewiston, Queenson, Lampeter: The Edwin Mellen Press. 2006
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As McNamee puts it in his study, it seems that "the ultimate aim of Banville's fiction is to elude interpretation" (6). It is perhaps this elusiveness that ensures a growing number of critical contributions on the work of a writer who has explicated his aesthetic, his view of art in general, and literature in particular, in talks, interviews and varied writings. McNamee's is the seventh monographic study of John Banville's work published to date, and claims to differ from the previous six by widening the cultural context in which the work of the Irish writer has been read. Although, to my knowledge, John Banville has never defined himself in these terms, McNamee portrays him as an essentially religious writer (13) when he foregrounds the deep spiritual yearning that Banville's fiction exhibits in combination with the many postmodern elements (paradox and parody, self-reflexivity, intertextuality) that are familiar in his novels. To McNamee, Banville's enigmatic fictions allow for a link between the disparate phenomena of pre-modern mysticism and postmodernism, suggesting that many aspects of the postmodern sensibility veer toward the spiritual. He considers the language of Banville's fiction intrinsically mystical, an artistic form of what is known as apophatic language, which he defines as "the mode of writing with which mystics attempt to say the unsayable" (170). In terms of style, Banville's writing approaches the ineffable: that which cannot be paraphrased or described.

Rather than attempting to cover each text in full, McNamee's analysis hinges around four interpretative elements which he nevertheless considers secondary to the aim of tracing the elusiveness that characterises the Banvillean world. In his introduction, he starts by elucidating the terms "significance" and "meaning", a distinction which pervades the whole of Banville's fiction, meaning being the futile imperative of consciousness to translate significance, a pre-linguistic sensation (2). This afflicts most of the main characters, struck by a sense of significance in the world around them, but unable to accommodate it into the schemes they devise to understand reality. Lying at the root of this failure is the theme of the divided self, which torments Banville's protagonists, and to which McNamee gives a religious dimension in as far as religion implies the desire for union, for a more perfect, complete version of the self. To him, all characters are "searching for God in a world where no god is to be found" (3). The third theme inherent in the previous two is that of conflict as consciousness of the fact that representations of the world or of the self only provide (usually unconvincing) analogues for the real world.

The last issue, the relationship between mysticism and postmodernism occupies a chapter of its own (Chapter 1). This novel linkage allows for an exploration of the spirituality of the postmodernist desires of Banville's characters. Both the mystical and the postmodernist are aware of the inadequacy of language to encompass reality, the difference being that the mystic believes that there is a reality, while the postmodernist believes the opposite. Banville's fiction lies in the middle: reality is neither present nor absent, but suspended. Thus, Banville's characters are driven by the need to replace a powerfully felt absence. McNamee extends this drive to Banville's project and his use of language, which can be said to be apophatic (instead of cataphatic or paraphrasable) in that it is not about anything, it just *is* (31). When apophatic language is used the referential element is suspended, style becomes an event in itself, the fiction turns into a "supreme fiction", with its mystical overtones: "Through the medium of literature, the referential becomes the reverential, and the fiction becomes supreme" (35). And this is the only medium through which presence can be recovered, the presence of the particular, which is where the essence of Banville's project lies: to articulate nothing but to display the particular in all its splendour.

This original theoretical exposition is successfully combined with references to particular characters and events from the novels. However, as the book proceeds to survey the texts consecutively and separately, often close stylistic analysis and more conventional critical discussion take over leaving the philosophical and theological contexts propounded slightly in suspension. There are exceptions: the chapters devoted to the first two volumes of the "Science Tetralogy" and to the "Art Trilogy", Chapters 3 and 6 respectively, where the analysis is focused from this illuminating critical perspective.

Previous critical discussion on *Dr. Copernicus* (1976) and *Kepler* (1981) has hinged around the theme of the nature of scientific and artistic pursuits, evidencing the ordering impulse that underlies both discourses. Here McNamee introduces the element of religion, as he identifies the main characters' desire for order and perfection with mystic rapture. The two astronomers desire to reach absolute reality, a mystic state of plenitude (religion), through relative phenomena and therefore through a constructed necessary lie (science). In other words, they are souls seeking God through science. They are tempted to believe that the forms they create are real, but this confusion is necessary to arrive at the truth of accommodation. This shows Banville's work occupying a middle ground between mysticism and postmodernism. McNamee also argues that the novels conflate science, religion and art to "bring out the ludic qualities" (65) in all three forms of ordering chaos.

The study is at its most innovative in the chapter that deals with the three volumes of the "Art Trilogy": *The Book of Evidence* (1989), *Ghosts* (1993), and *Athena* (1995), as McNamee considers their symbolic perspective. He introduces the idea of the visionary dimension of the story that opens the Trilogy, the brutal murdering of an innocent young woman as told by her remorseless killer, Freddie Montgomery. As has often been pointed out in many critical approaches to the novel, Montgomery identifies his worst, most shameful crime as a crime of the imagination, that he never imagined the young woman and thus failed to perceive her in all her alterity. That an act of imagination would be enough for atonement is questionable at a realistic level. McNamee points out that it only makes sense in a vision of life that escapes the (Cartesian/Christian) world of crime and punishment (the world of time and space and referential language), a vision which has to be associated with a pre-Socratic mythological landscape. From this perspective, the victim acquires a symbolic dimension and the murder represents "the loss of belief in certainty and in the ability of Socratic knowledge (dialectic reasoning, science, logic) to fully comprehend the world" (154). In this light, Montgomery's torment is the realisation that his act of murder has permanently exiled him from the world. The suspended narrative that follows, *Ghosts*, is Montgomery's apophatic attempt to ease the pain of exile; and the volume that closes the Trilogy, *Athena*, is devoted to an absence (of the real, of the world, of the other) that is felt, and so must be spoken in the form of a long letter to a symbolic A. (a woman whose I-status as real or imaginary remains ambiguous from beginning to end).

Part of McNamee's book runs along the trodden path of the accepted wisdom on Banville, overlooking the focus suggested by its title. In addition, as is common in previous approaches to this writer's fiction (with few exceptions), one has the feeling that sometimes characters are mere mouthpieces for authorial ideas, that

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there is no room for any ideological distance between the author and his work. A further shortcoming might be that it is slightly disconcerting to find an occasional incomplete or missing reference (likewise, as bibliographical lists on John Banville proliferate, a list of "works cited" would be more clarifying than a bibliography). Nevertheless McNamee's comprehensive study is still a highly worthwhile and original contribution in that it manages to pinpoint the element that has always made Banville's work fall short of being labelled 'postmodern': its deep spirituality, an unspoken spirituality that transcends any cultural movement, this mysterious, elusive something that keeps attracting more and more critical and reader attention.

JEANETTE WINTERSON
Susana Onega
Manchester: Manchester U.P. Contemporary British Novelists. 2006
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In the series *Contemporary British Novelists* published by Manchester University Press, Susana Onega offers a full-length study of Jeanette Winterson's work, the first to be published in English. A bibliography of Winterson's works and a substantial general one is appended to the book as well as an index of authors and concepts quoted.

After evoking Jeanette Winterson's life and career and situating her within the landscape of contemporary writers, Susana Onega launches into a detailed and chronological analysis of the author's novels. Each chapter opens with an overall assessment of the reception of the novel examined and a few quotations from reviewers which are contrasted with the author's own appreciation of her book. Then follows a close scrutiny of the novel itself, of each of its chapters or sections, narratological comments on its structure and voices, and —the main part— an intertextual analysis of the text. Onega thus scrupulously traces the main sources of *Oranges Are not the Only Fruit* from the Bible to Blake and D. H. Lawrence. She does justice to *Boating for Beginners*, too often ignored by critics, and examines its Swiftian, Shelleyian, Eliotian or Beckettian intertext. This enables her to give a thorough account of the narrative, to follow the intricate developments of the plot and the way it feeds on former texts, thus highlighting the satiric and parodic effects.

Likewise, she is attentive to the mechanisms of intertextuality in *The Passion* whose mythical intertext she chooses to explore while reading the characters' selves in

terms of fragmentation in the light of Jung and Lacan's theories and scrutinising all the symbols Winterson uses. The narratological analysis of *Sexing the Cherry* and the way in which the four voices enter into a dialogue across the centuries is similarly complemented by a Lacanian reading which also borrows from Kristeva's concept of the abject and shows what Winterson owes to Cixous's "écriture feminine". This is followed in the chapter about *Written on the Body* by a discussion, in relation to the sexual indeterminacy of the narrator, of the myth of the androgyne and its development from Plato to Cixous, which leads to a reading of the characters informed by Cixous's theory of bi-sexuality; Jacqueline or Inge are thus seen as "a parodic example of Cixous's 'excessive woman' [...], as 'a butch' in the invert tradition of the butch/femme couple of early lesbian fiction" (116). *Gut Symmetries* is examined at length. Resorting to the arcane of the Tarot, to Jewish cabbala, Hermetic alchemy, and New Physics, Onega threads her way through each chapter, accounting for their intricacies. *The.Powerbook*, whose narration adopts the interactive logic of the internet, is analysed as a rewriting of Woolf's *Orlando* while *Lighthousekeeping* is shown to be based on Victorian novels such as *Treasure Island*.
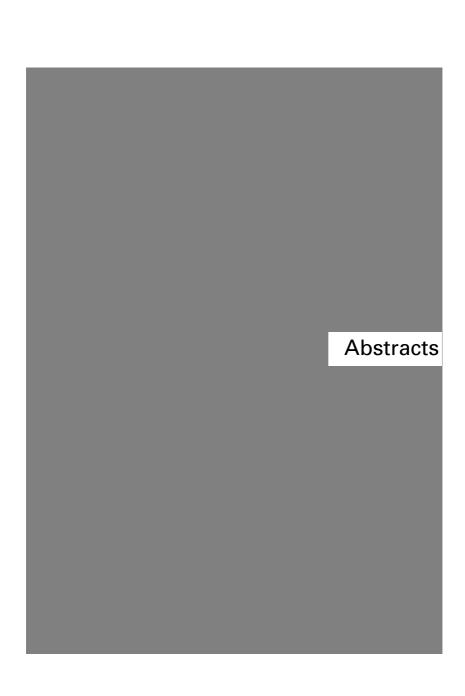
On the whole, like many critics before her, Onega places subjectivity at the centre of Winterson's work and reads her characters as following an archetypal quest pattern and shifting from fragmentation to unification. She also manages to show that Winterson's novels blend real and unreal worlds, history and story-telling, fantasy and scientific discourse, fiction and metafiction —embedded stories abounding and reflecting on the main story-line— while hinting at a criss-crossing between her novels and her short stories that produces a baroque effect of repetition and excess. Excess also stems from the overflowing intertextual echoes which Onega undertakes to analyse at length, in a pedagogical impulse that students of Winterson will undoubtedly appreciate. She thus offers an erudite reading of the author's work revealing its wealth, yet often tending, through the use of an assertive tone, to close interpretation and leave little room to the reader's own personal reading. The choice of a running commentary of the novels, in the chronological order of publication, certainly has its virtues even if it tends to blur the recurring themes and topoï of Winterson's fiction, conceived, as the author herself pointed out, to be "a cycle", and thus fails to come to terms with a fundamental structure. The political dimension and its contradictions are toned down, the critic choosing to focus on a psycho-analytical analysis of *Sexing the Cherry*, for example, rather than bring out the rage of the author against all forms of fanaticism and coercion, which is itself at odds with her own overwhelming and directive presence in the narrative. Similarly, the ethical dimension of the work, linked with Winterson's concept of love, is broached only in the last lines of the book. One also wishes that the stimulating analysis of *Art and Lies* as a Babel

Tower and a self-reflexive book highlighting the mechanisms of writing and art at large, had been used to illuminate the reading of the other novels, such as the essays *Art Objects*. Most of all, one wishes Onega had explored what Winterson owes to the modernists who, as she mentions in her introduction, believed that language is "a self-sufficient and autonomous sign-system without meaning or referent" (12) and had conveyed the writer's enjoyment in couching words on the page and making language stutter, for the reader's own pleasure.

As it stands, Onega's book provides a most valuable mass of information, a detailed running commentary of the whole of Winterson's work and constitutes a welcome guidebook to the intricacies of Winterson's fiction. It comes as a rich complement to my *Jeanette Winterson. Le miracle ordinaire*, published two years before in France, and which deliberately adopts a synthetic approach to the author's work. They both open the path to future full-length studies of Winterson's novels.

Abstracts

TOO VISIBLE: RACE, GENDER AND RESISTANCE IN THE CONSTRUCTION OF A CANADIAN IDENTITY IN THE POETRY OF HIMANI BANNERJI

María Laura Arce Álvarez

Canadian literature stands as an example of postcolonial writing. The literature of the Diaspora questions and reshapes basic concepts of multicultural societies like national identity, community and race. These establish a division between the white European identities accepted by the colonial governments and the others, those who in exile try to find a space to live in this new multicultural society. Canada, as a postcolonial society, is a space where different cultures and religions meet but which does not seem to fit in the definition of the Canadian individual imposed by white European cultural imperialism. Thus the others, that is, the exiled individuals, write literature to create a space suitable for their condition as immigrants and, in it, construct their own identities as 'double-consciousness' people. The intention of this paper is to analyze the poetry of the South-Asian Canadian writer and critic Himani Bannerji especially focusing on the use of metaphors related to race and gender in her attempt to use them as the elements that build the space and identity of the second type of individual referred to above. They are also weapons of resistance against the suffering, marginalization and subordination imposed by cultural imperialism.

Key Words: Postcolonial Literature, Canadian Poetry, Gender and Racial Studies, Social Multiculturalism.

La literatura Canadiense es uno de los ejemplos que se puede incluir dentro de la definición de los estudios poscoloniales. La literatura de la Diáspora cuestiona y re-

define conceptos básicos de las sociedades multiculturales como la identidad nacional, la comunidad y la raza. Estos establecen una división entre la identidad del individuo Europeo blanco impuesta por los gobiernos coloniales y los otros, aquellos que en el exilio intentan encontrar un espacio en el que vivir en esta sociedad multicultural. Canadá, como ejemplo a su vez de sociedad multicultural, es un espacio donde diferentes culturas y religiones se mezclan pero no llegan a encajar dentro de la definición de individuo Canadiense impuesta por el imperialismo cultural del hombre blanco Europeo. Así los otros, esto es, los individuos exiliados, escriben literatura para crear con ella un espacio conforme a su condición como inmigrantes y construir en él sus propias identidades como individuos que poseen una 'doble conciencia'. La intención de este artículo es analizar la poesía de la escritora y crítica Asiático-Canadiense Himani Bannerji, especialmente centrándome en el uso de metáforas relacionadas con los conceptos de raza y género, en un intento de emplearlos como elementos que construyen el espacio y la identidad de los otros. Asimismo, son armas de resistencia contra el sufrimiento, la marginación y la subordinación impuesta por el imperialismo cultural.

Palabras Clave: Literatura Poscolonial, Poesía Canadiense, Estudios de Género y Raza, Multiculturalismo Social.

SHAKESPEARE'S PLAUSIBLE COMMUNITY: THE FIRST ACT OF *TITUS ANDRONICUS* AND ITS KYDIAN PRECEDENT

Jordi Coral Escolà

This article re-examines the relationship between Thomas Kyd's *The Spanish Tragedy* and Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus*. In the past decades the original credit of these two revenge plays of the 1590s has been restored. However, their parallel rediscovery has obscured the originality of Shakespeare's first tragedy, which is often presented as an inferior derivative of *The Spanish Tragedy*. As a result, the historical significance of Shakespeare's new representation of the self in the community has been insufficiently recognized. Shakespeare assimilated the Kydian discovery of character as the product of interactive dramatic context and developed the representation of the social basis of individual identity, an identity that grows even as it reveals itself in dialogical action. The tragic expression of this revolutionary conception of selfhood is revenge. In this perspective, *Titus Andronicus* ceases to appear as imitative melodrama and becomes a play that reinvents tragedy for the English Renaissance.

Key Words: Elizabethan revenge tragedy, Kyd, the early Shakespeare, revenge, early modern identity.

Este artículo re-explora la relación existente entre *The Spanish Tragedy* de Thomas Kyd y *Titus Andronicus* de William Shakespeare. Durante los últimos años la crítica ha restablecido el crédito de que gozaron en su día estas dos tragedias de la venganza producidas durante la última década del siglo dieciséis. Sin embargo, su redescubrimiento se ha entendido principalmente como la reivindicación de la originalidad de *The Spanish Tragedy* a expensas de la de *Titus Andronicus*, a menudo considerada una obra meramente derivativa de la anterior. Como consecuencia, la importancia histórica que tiene la representación innovadora del individuo como ser constituido socialmente en *Titus Andronicus* sigue siendo insuficientemente apreciada. Shakespeare asimiló el ejemplo del teatro interactivo de Kyd y desarrolló a partir de éste una dramaturgia basada en la interdependencia de la identidad individual y el contexto social. La expresión trágica por excelencia de este concepto complejo de la identidad es la venganza. Desde esta perspectiva, *Titus Andronicus* deja de percibirse como un melodrama imitativo para convertirse en una obra que reinventa el significado de la tragedia isabelina.

Palabras clave: Tragedia de la venganza isabelina, Kyd, principios de Shakespeare, identidad, primera modernidad.

"CIVIL WAR INSIDE MY BODY". TWO NARRATIVES OF DYING IN CONTEMPORARY ANGLOPHONE FILM

Marta Fernández Morales

After the sexual revolution of the 1970s, death is the ultimate taboo in contemporary Western societies. It is present, yet silenced in our everyday lives. As a theme in culture, "the end" has been a leitmotiv for centuries. However, *the process* of dying is something feared and under-represented even today. Over the last two decades, books and films have appeared opening new debates on death and dying, palliative care, and euthanasia. This article analyzes two examples of female narratives of dying in the light of the theories of illness and death specialists like David Morris, Ira Byock or Susan Sontag, with her classic *Illness as Metaphor*.

Wit offers an ironic and profound insight on the dying process of Vivian Bearing, a professor of metaphysical poetry. Diagnosed with ovarian cancer in a terminal stage, she re-defines her illness as an intellectual challenge, facing it as a battle for knowledge.

The protagonist of *My Life Without Me* is totally different from Bearing: without a formal education, she lives in a trailer with her husband and daughters. Upon being diagnosed with metastasized ovarian cancer, she decides to make a list of

"things to do" and she tries to prepare everything for "her life" to continue without her.

Keywords: death and dying, sick role, body politics, biomedical model, contemporary film

Tras la revolución sexual de los años setenta, la muerte aparece ahora como el último tabú en las sociedades contemporáneas. Está por supuesto presente en nuestra vida cotidiana, pero se hace lo posible por silenciarla. "El fin" ha sido un tema recurrente desde el punto de vista cultural durante siglos. Sin embargo, el *proceso* de morir sigue siendo temido e infrarrepresentado a día de hoy. Durante las dos últimas décadas han aparecido libros y películas que han abierto nuevos debates sobre la muerte y el proceso de morir, sobre los cuidados paliativos y sobre la eutanasia. El presente artículo analiza dos ejemplos de narrativas femeninas de la muerte apoyándose en teorías de especialistas en la enfermedad y la muerte como David Morris, Ira Byock o Susan Sontag, autora del clásico *La enfermedad y sus metáforas.*

Wit (*Ingenio*) ofrece una visión irónica y profunda del proceso de la muerte de Vivian Bearing, catedrática de poesía metafísica. Tras un diagnóstico de cáncer de ovario en fase terminal, Bearing redefine su enfermedad como reto intelectual, enfrentándose a ella como a una batalla por el conocimiento.

La protagonista de *My Life Without Me* (*Mi vida sin mí*) es totalmente diferente de Bearing: sin educación formal, vive en una caravana con su marido y sus hijas. Tras ser diagnosticada de cáncer de ovario con metástasis, decide hacer una lista de "cosas que hacer" y trata de prepararlo todo para que "su vida" siga sin ella.

Palabras clave: Muerte y proceso de morir, rol de persona enferma, política del cuerpo, modelo biomédico, cine contemporáneo

THE SUBALTERN ETHNOGRAPHER: BLURRING THE BOUNDARIES THROUGH AMITAV GHOSH'S WRITING
María Elena Martos Hueso

This study aims to interpret Amitav Ghosh's works as an alternative positioning within the post-colonial debate. His role as an ethnographer is particularly outstanding in this respect, and I may go as far as to suggest the figure of Calcutta-born novelist Amitav Ghosh as incarnating the role of the subaltern anthropologist who is able to effectively contest the traditional discursive practices inspired by orientalist ethnography. Two parallel strategies will be used to achieve this objective: (1) turning ethnographic discourse from "a discourse that narrativizes"

into "a discourse that narrates", in the direction of Hayden White's *The Content of the Form*; and (2) revitalising the "anthropological spirit" within Benedict Anderson's definition of the nation as an "imagined political community". To that purpose we will examine two relevant works in Ghosh's early writings, *The Shadow Lines* (1988) and *In an Antique Land* (1992), as examples of the implementation of "thick description" in both literary and non-fictional texts. Ghosh's overall strategy is to "write back to the centre" through means other than metafiction, parody or the Bakhtinian carnivalesque —i.e., strictly literary devices widely popular in current post-colonial fiction— and use the practices of contemporary anthropology —traditionally associated with Empire— in the construction of subaltern identity.

Key Words: Amitav Ghosh, *The Shadow Lines*, *In An Antique Land*, Subaltern, Post-colonial

El presente trabajo interpreta las obras de Amitav Ghosh como una postura alternativa dentro del debate post-colonial. En este sentido, es destacable el papel de etnógrafo que desempeña el novelista de Calcuta, y que nos permite acercarnos al antropólogo subalterno que hace frente a las prácticas discursivas tradicionales enraizadas en la etnografía orientalista. Ghosh alcanza este objetivo mediante dos estrategias paralelas: (1) tomando el discurso etnográfico, que es, en el sentido expresado por Hayden White en *The Content of the Form*, "un discurso narrativizante", esto es, que busca una mímesis de la realidad, y convirtiéndolo en un "discurso narrativo", que simplemente la describe de acuerdo a la percepción del sujeto; y (2) revitalizando el "espíritu antropológico" contenido en la definición de nación como "comunidad política imaginaria" propuesta por Benedict Anderson. Para ello examinaremos *The Shadow Lines* (1988) y *In an Antique Land* (1992) como ejemplos del uso de la "descripción densa" en textos de carácter literario y ensayístico. En resumen, la estrategia de Ghosh consiste en "escribir en respuesta a la metrópoli" utilizando recursos alternativos a los que ha venido usando la novela post-colonial actual, tales como la metaficción, la parodia o el carnaval bajtiniano. Ghosh utiliza en su lugar las prácticas de la antropología contemporánea, en otro tiempo aliada de la política imperial.

Palabras Clave: Amitav Ghosh, *The Shadow Lines*, *In An Antique Land*, Subalterno, Post-colonial

THE BELOVED PURPLE OF THEIR EYES: INHERITING BESSIE SMITH'S POLITICS OF SEXUALITY

Marta Miquel-Baldellou

Bessie Smith has traditionally been regarded as The Empress of the Blues. Armed with a potent voice and a daring performance, she became one of the first and most popular African-American artists of all time. Through the lyrics of her songs, she underlined the difficulties many African-American women underwent at the time, focusing on their sorrows, their sexuality and the relationships they established with both males and other females. The politics of gender tackled in Bessie Smith's songs are also often repeated in novels written by canonical African-American writers such as Zora Neale Huston, Alice Walker and Toni Morrison. Zora Neale Hurston was Bessie's contemporary writer and met her during one of her journeys, while both Alice Walker and Toni Morrison acknowledged the influence Bessie Smith exerted over their writings. The aim of this article is to identify Bessie Smith's politics of sexuality in Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching*, Alice Walker's *The Colour Purple* and Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, in accordance with the new perspectives of Black Feminist Studies today.

Keywords: Black Feminism; blues; gender and sexuality; Bessie Smith; Zora Neale Hurston; Alice Walker; Toni Morrison.

A Bessie Smith se la conoce tradicionalmente como la Emperatriz del Blues. Gracias a su potente voz y a su atrevida puesta en escena, llegó a ser la primera y más popular de las artistas afroamericanas de todos los tiempos. A través de las letras de sus canciones, ponía de manifiesto las dificultades a las que se exponían las mujeres afroamericanas de su tiempo, centrando sus letras en las adversidades, la sexualidad y las relaciones que establecían con hombres y otras mujeres. Las políticas de género desarrolladas en las canciones de Bessie Smith también se repiten a menudo en las novelas de escritoras canónicas como Zora Neale Hurston, Alice Walker y Toni Morrison. Zora Neale Hurston fue contemporánea de Bessie y la conoció durante uno de sus viajes, mientras que Alice Walker y Toni Morrison admitieron la influencia que Bessie Smith ejerció sobre sus obras. El objetivo de este artículo consiste en identificar las políticas sexuales de Bessie Smith en las novelas *Their Eyes Were Watching God* de Zora Neale Hurston, *The Colour Purple* de Alice Walker y *Beloved* de Toni Morrison, de acuerdo con las nuevas perspectivas dentro de los estudios feministas afroamericanos actuales.

Palabras clave: Feminismo afroamericano; blues; género y sexualidad; Bessie Smith; Zora Neale Hurston; Alice Walker; Toni Morrison.

FOREVER YOUNG: CONSUMER CULTURE AND THE AGEING BODY IN HANIF KUREISHI'S "THE BODY"

Maricel Oró Piqueras

Contemporary British society is growing older and older. However, the blind veneration for the youthful and beautiful body, reflection of a range of good personality attributes, is becoming more and more equivocal. Whereas the industrial revolution contributed to the undermining of the social and cultural status of those reaching old age, a contemporary society based on a postmodernist ideology and consumerist culture seems to give an opportunity to those who keep the signs of age at bay from their bodies with the use and abuse of rejuvenatory products and techniques.

In this paper, I aim to analyse the contradictions existing in relation to the conceptions of the young and old body and, by extension, of youth and old age in contemporary British and contemporary Western society by analysing Hanif Kureishi's short story "The Body." Kureishi pushes such contradictions to an extreme by presenting a surrealist story in which a desire to remain young forever merges with the need to keep one's sense of self and identity within a community that is increasingly changing ethics for aesthetics.

Keywords: ageing process, consumer culture, the cult of youth, external appearance, Western society.

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La sociedad británica contemporánea está envejeciendo. No obstante, la veneración por el cuerpo joven y bello, reflejo de atributos personales positivos, se vuelve cada vez más equívoca. Mientras que la revolución industrial perjudicó al estatus social y cultural de aquellos que llegaban a la vejez, una sociedad contemporánea basada en una ideología postmodernista y una cultura de consumo parece favorecer a aquellos que disimulan los signos físicos del envejecimiento mediante el uso y abuso de productos y técnicas rejuvenecedoras.

Este artículo pretende analizar las contradicciones que existen en cuanto a las concepciones del cuerpo joven y viejo y, por extensión, de juventud y vejez en la sociedad británica —y occidental— contemporánea a través del análisis de la historia corta de Hanif Kureishi titulada "The Body." Kureishi lleva estas contradicciones al extremo presentándonos una historia surrealista en la que el deseo de permanecer siempre joven se confunde con la necesidad de mantener los rasgos y la personalidad que definen a uno mismo como persona individual y como miembro de una comunidad que, progresivamente, está cambiando la ética por la estética.

Palabras clave: proceso de envejecimiento, cultura de consumo, el culto a la juventud, apariencia física, sociedad occidental.

SE HABLA ESPAÑOL: A CERTAIN TENDENCY
IN THE WESTERN FILM
Juan A. Tarancón

If, at any moment, the traditional Turnerian West thesis wavered in its assertion of the significance of the epic frontier narrative in U.S. history, the texts that followed, Hollywood's films among them, helped solidify and perpetuate a set of values and certainties about gender, race, and land that became a synonym for United States national identity and purpose. Drawing upon these general widespread assumptions, this article examines the role and the impact of frontier narratives in the Hollywood western film. Hollywood films have not always endorsed the official version of history and they often retaliate by challenging in multiple ways the homogeneous mythical view of the frontier experience regarded as dominant and genuine. The writer argues that a number of 1950s films such as *The Ride Back!* (Allen H. Miner, 1957), *The Bravados* (Henry King, 1958) or *Man from Del Rio* (Harry Horner, 1956), focus on the alienation of the traditional hero and on the social tensions in the borderlands of South Texas and portray the West both as the site where the genuine U.S.-ness is to be found and, at the same time, as an empty signifier where the struggle for meaning is played out in the encounter with the other. In addition, this article explores a contemporary border narrative such as *Lone Star* (John Sayles, 1996) to illustrate how genre films find the mechanisms to call into question the channels that validate and sanction some discourses to the detriment of others.
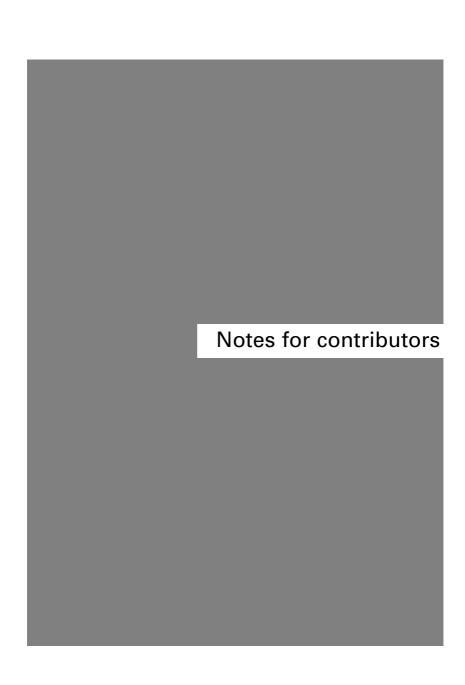
Key words: Film studies, film genre, the West, identity, U.S. society, Mexico/U.S. border, Chicana/o studies, John Sayles

Si en algún momento la tesis de Frederick Jackson Turner sobre la colonización del Oeste titubeó en la confirmación de la importancia de la épica de la frontera en la historia estadounidense, las expresiones culturales que le siguieron, las películas de Hollywood entre ellas, sin duda ayudaron a fraguar y perpetuar una serie de valores e ideales sobre el género, la raza y la tierra que se convirtieron en sinónimo de identidad y designio nacional. Partiendo de estos supuestos tan vagos como reiterados, este artículo examina el papel y el impacto de las narrativas fronterizas en algunos *westerns* de Hollywood. Las películas estadounidenses no siempre han refrendado la versión oficial de la historia, y a menudo contradicen de diferentes formas la visión homogénea y mítica de la experiencia de la frontera que reiteradamente se ha dado en considerar como genuina y depositaria de la identidad nacional. El autor argumenta que películas como *The Ride Back!* (Allen H. Miner, 1957), *The Bravados* (Henry King, 1958) o *Man from Del Rio* (Harry Horner, 1956), se centran en la alienación del héroe tradicional y en las tensiones sociales

en las áreas fronterizas del país y representan el Oeste como el espacio donde localizar la esencia de los Estados Unidos y, al mismo tiempo, como un significante vacío donde se lleva a cabo una disputa por el significado en el encuentro con el otro. Además, este artículo examina una película contemporánea como *Lone Star* (John Sayles, 1996) para ilustrar en qué medida las películas se sustentan en el lenguaje de los géneros cinematográficos para cuestionar los canales que validan y sancionan unos discursos en detrimento de otros.

Palabras clave: cine, géneros cinematográficos, el Oeste norteamericano, identidad, sociedad estadounidense, tierras de frontera, estudios chicanos, John Sayles

Notes for contributors

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