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PALINODES, PALINDROMES AND PALIMPSESTS: STRATEGIES OF DELIBERATE SELF-CONTRADICTION IN POSTMODERN BRITISH FICTION

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"Words once spoke can never be recall'd" declared Wentworth Dillon in his classical *Art of Poetry* (1680), little thinking that his statement along with many other canonical truisms would be challenged and overturned by postmodernist fiction. To simultaneously say and unsay, tell and untell, assert and negate, propose and retract is precisely the type of paradoxical privilege contemporary literature likes to claim for itself. The consequence of these self-contradictory practices, which is manifestly also its purpose, is a lack of committment, of selection, of assertiveness, foremost on the narrative level but also and crucially in the aesthetic and ideological fields. It is my contention that if postmodernism has given rise to such polemical definitions and analyses and if it continues to be such a complex cultural phenomenon to grasp, it is in particular because of its paradigmatic association of contradictory statements, modalities, and literary traditions. The logic of self-contradiction stems from what one might call, to transpose Lyotard's renowned phrase, an incredulity towards all meta-ideologies, or in other words a fundamental political weariness and wariness.

Defined as a song and by extension a text which retracts, negates or contradicts that which has previously been stated, the palinode is, according to Antoine Compagnon (1990: 151), what characterizes postmodernism and its retraction of modernist purity, balance and messianism. Rather than choose one guiding line, contemporary art explores one type of tradition, style or dogma before questioning

it and exploring an opposed tendency. Concretely, palinodes can take two textual forms, one isolated and syntagmatic, the other narrative and structural. In *Ever After*, for example, Graham Swift (1992: 120, 249, 259) uses palinodes as a strikingly repetitive figure of speech: "It's not the end of the world. It is the end of the world". "Life goes on. It doesn't go on". "It's not the end of the world. It is. Life goes on. It doesn't". "Nothing is meant to be. Everything is meant to be". Voiced by the wavering, hesitating, suicidal narrator, these antithetical declarations appear initially as a means of self-characterization: Bill Unwin who has lost all certainty stands on "groundless grounds" (55) and nourishes contradictory hopes. The same device is employed again in *Out of this World* and *Shuttlecock* ("The facts of life, my darlings. Your parents fuck. They don't fuck", Swift 1988: 139), but it becomes evident however that what is at stake is not merely the depiction of the protagonists, and this is underscored by the fact that retractions can also be found in the structural unfolding. In *Ever After*, the double-layered narrative starts by accounting for the conjugal, albeit provisional, happiness of the two main characters before dwelling on the opposite likelihood, i.e., unfaithfulness and woeful cuckoldry. One state of affairs does not cancel the other: a possibility and its opposite are presented concomitantly, neither being more definitive than the other. The same process is at work in *Shuttlecock* where the initial portrait of the protagonist's father as a war hero is later retracted and replaced by the description of a traitor and a coward, leaving the reader like the narrator with questions that can never be answered (Swift 1981: 184) and the only revelation that "uncertainty is always better than either certainty or ignorance" (197).

Using palinodes as a mode of narration enables Swift to deconstruct the unicity and dogmatism of traditional finite story lines and to underline the crucial ambiguity distinguishing the perception and reconstruction of any event. Swift's narratives being set in a specific historical context, the contradictions inscribed therein are meant to express the heterogeneous possibilities of reconstituting historical episodes. The presentation of two opposite accounts is not restricted to the narration, it extends to the aesthetic and ideological fields. In *Ever After*, mainly through the celebration of the transcendental power of love ("*amor vincit omnia*", 46 and *passim*) and of poetry as a "redeeming balm" (71), the romantic tradition is explored[1] and then discarded in favour of the temptation of nihilism. The sense of exaltation felt on contemplatingin man's artistic creations is replaced by a lack of faith in humanity, the loveliness of literature "which strikes our hearts at such a magic angle" (234) is followed by "an apprehension that the universe holds nothing sacred" (84). What appears fundamental here, is that the novel does not choose between these opposed tendencies but juxtaposes them and suggests, as a result, a striking confrontation of opposites, an oxymoronic synthesis, a definitely postmodern, nihilistic romanticism.

Another illustration of postmodern palinodes can be found in Julian Barnes's *Flaubert's Parrot*.[2] In the single chapter dealing with his private life, the narrator repeats as if it were an obsessive conundrum, "we were happy; we were unhappy" (161, 162, 163, 165), unable to decide between the two contrary alternatives. The narrator's uncertainty in the most personal realm reflects his doubts in his field of research: historical knowledge.[3] The evidence he has gathered on the subject of Flaubert leads him to construct a euphoric chronology of the French novelist, based on his achievements and successes, which is immediately afterwards questioned and negated by a dysphoric chronolgy insisting on the frustrations and disasters of his life. The very existence of two contradictory biographical summaries demonstrates Barnes's disavowal of an objective and reliable epistemology, a typically postmodern stance indeed. Again, these microstructural contradictions find echoes on a broader ideological scale.

In a first stage, the postmodern conception of history seems confirmed by the structural organization of the novel which, in keeping with the spirit of its time, proves highly unteleological and aporetic, leading as it does to an epistemological dead end and an absence of revelations. In opposition to this progressist design, one finds in *Flaubert's Parrot* conservative forces nowhere more evident than in the panegyric of the French realist and the modes of writing. When the chapters do not consist of a collage of quotations by Flaubert, they imitate his style, cite, comment upon, allude to, parody, repeat his ideas and words, so much so that the whole text appears derivative and second hand, as if there were no contemporary stylistic model available. So the structure follows a contemporary pattern and the writing relies on an antiquated paragon, the past is deemed unknowable and yet it becomes a paradigmatic source of inspiration, the ideology is both progressivist and conservative. Here also, I wish to insist, the contradictory parts of the postmodern palinodes do not cancel each other out, nor does one prevail over the other: they add up, combine and merge to make up a form of art which refuses to choose between different traditions of writing and thinking.

In the palindrome transposed onto the narrative level —that is, a narrative progession followed by a symmetrical narrative regression— postmodernism finds another way of circumventing the binary choice. Martin Amis's *Time's Arrow* does not really qualify as a palindromic narrative[4] in so far as it consists only of the second part of the palindrome, namely the backwards account: it is a novel which is entirely regressive, telling all the events backwards, presenting the dialogues in the inverted order, showing the hero becoming young, the feces becoming food and the tortured becoming intact; it is a novel that imitates the rewinding of a video tape. What proves fascinating is that in order to make sense of the topsy-turvy unfolding the reader has to reconstitute the second part of the palindrome; as

Madalena Cropley-Gonzalez rightly remarks, "we have to read twice, the backward narrative forward *and* backward to be able to retrace in our minds the steps in the sequence putting them the *right* way round for us" (Duperray 1996: 124). So *Time's Arrow* has to be read like a palindrome, and an inverted one at that. The inverted process gives birth to cruelly ironic effects since the civil doctors seem to be damaging their patients and the gestapo officers to be liberating the Jew internees. For the reader, this form of black irony "highlights the absence of cause and effect and thus the senselessness of the hero's behaviour" (Cropley-Gonzalez 1996: 125). Similarly, the reversal of narrative order throws into relief the inversion of the ethical rules as practised by the protagonist and his Nazi companions. The narrative disorderliness is a metaphor of the chaotic condition of humanity as it appears in this novel. The particular logic of the palindrome is once more deliberately paradoxical: the horrors of the second world war are at one and the same time retraced and undone, the Holocaust is recorded and erased, torture is described and cancelled, as if the inversion of time's arrow were an attempt to invert the course of history, as if the backward narrative represented a determined refusal to record the actual historical events. *Time's Arrow* is an acknowledgement and a refusal of the irreversible, the record and the negation of man's powerlessness, "hope and no-hope, both at the same time" (Amis 1991: 32).

Angela Carter is another specialist in inverted processes where "things uncreated themselves" (1968: 29). "Reflections", a fantastico-philosophico-mythico-allegorical short story, relates the tale of a wanderer who finds a shell whose "spirals were reversed" (1974: 83), who is arrested by a powerful woman and her dog and is then led to an old lady weaving an endless yarn. Having destroyed the initial harmony, the wanderer has to kiss a magic mirror, "the symbolic matrix of this and that, hither and thither, outside and inside" (92), for things to revert to their original order: the yarn is then unwoven, the shell returns to its place and the captive walks backwards towards his freedom. The whole piece revolves around the palindromic woman called Anna "because she can go both ways" (89) and possesses "an absolute symmetry" (94), and her aunt-uncle, a hermaphrodite, an entity that David Lodge (1981: 13) describes as "one of the most powerful emblems of contradiction, defying the most fundamental binary system of all". When the prosaic protagonist, who proves unable to cope with the contradictions at work in this ambiguous world, ultimately kills the old lady, "the synthesis in person" (101), he also destroys her work, a fatal destruction implicitly condemned by the short story.[5] The universe of contradictions (including Carter's universe) is revealed as *creative* and the representative of literal-mindedness as *reductive*. What is artfully put forward then in this palindromic piece is the fruitful synthesis of male and female identities, of destruction and creation, of realism and the fantastic.

In *Several Perceptions*, Carter starts by scattering her narrative with arresting palindromic images, like that of a new-born "who took one look at the world and returned immediately into his mother's womb (38) and that of "woolen clothes gone back to fleece of friendly sheep" (29). She then unravels a tale where the end seems to undo the beginning, in the typical process of inverted symmetry: the hero who tried to commit suicide is reconciled with life, his limping neighbour is uncrippled and walks again, the ageing prostitute becomes a virgin figure and is reunited with her old lover, and the old tramp who had lost his violin retrieves it miraculously. The opening scene of death, desolation and despair in contemporary society is mirrored by the closing scene of a carnivalesque Christmas nativity where a joyous counterforce and counterculture are made possible.[6] Here again, a hopeless portrait of society and humanity is associated with a buoyant suggestion of regeneration; here again, the two concepts of life have to be combined and not opposed, hyphenated and not separated. Such is postmodernism's peculiarly contradictory *Weltanschauung*.

The ambiguity of contemporary fiction, which Genette (1997: 398) calls "duplicity", "can be represented", according to the French critic, "by the old analogy of the palimpsest", a superimposition of one text upon another or several others. The ambiguity may be "caused by the fact that a hypertext can be read both for itself and in its relation to its hypotext" (Genette 1997: 397), it may also stem from the conflicting nature of the various textual layers. The latter case is exemplified in D.M. Thomas's revisionist novel, *Charlotte: The final journey of Jane Eyre,* a triple-layered narrative where a contemporary account is grafted onto a nineteenth-century text which is itself a rewriting of Charlotte Brontë's canonical novel. It could even be argued that this palimpsest includes a fourth stratum since Jean Rhys's earlier revision of *Jane Eyre, Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966), is aknowledged, exploited and played with. In this conflation of texts several opposed versions and visions of the facts are presented to the reader. The opening chapters constitute a copy and a counterfeit, an imitation and a refutation of Brontë's novel: in fact, a rewriting in the form of a palinode. *Charlotte* starts by plagiarizing *Jane Eyre*, literally reproducing the account of the heroine's marriage. Plagiarism is then replaced by pastiche where the narrator describes her life with Rochester. Soon though, alternative Jane Eyre interrupts her narrative and confides: "Reader, this is a very different picture of my marriage from that which you were presented with in what I would call my 'romantic' version" (Thomas 2000: 44). What follows is an utter refutation of Brontë's novel not only in the letter (there is no offspring, Rochester proves impotent, the marriage is a disaster) but also in the spirit: religious and imperialistic values are rejected and what is celebrated is exotic sensuality —precisely what Brontë implicitly condemned as a token of insanity and a destructive threat to Victorian conventions. Besides its

anti-Victorian iconoclasm, this revision of *Jane Eyre* does however preserve the notion of personal fulfilment through love since in its politically correct conclusion Jane is seen blissfully, though briefly, united with the Creole son of Bertha Mason. In the superimposed narrative of the contemporary heroine, no such gratification seems attainable. Depression, disenchantment, loss of orientation and possibly of sanity are ruling the end-of-millenium world of the English protagonist, Miranda Stevenson, a figure manifestly parallel to, if not a reembodiment of, the Victorian heroine. The opposing outlooks of the two texts can be seen nowhere better than in Miranda's relationships with Creole men which echo Jane's symmetrical love encounter. In the contemporary layer, the celebration of complementarity is substituted for by a cynical record of sexual transactions yielding neither betterment nor solace.[7] Also taking part in Miranda's post-ethic universe is her father who, not exactly in tune with the ideological consensus of the times, insists on his right to "tickle [his granddaughter's] little pussy" (Thomas 2000: 145).

A great mistake in comprehending a novel such as D.M. Thomas's would be to associate the contemporary narrative with a contemporary vision of the world and the Victorian pastiche with a criticism of a bygone ethos. The postmodern text is the sum of the various sub-texts and their ideologies; it superimposes the contemporary, the mock-Victorian and the Victorian texts in order to combine their perspectives and messages and to take stock of both anarchy and harmony, to suggest both disorientation and sources of plenitude, to voice at the same time the hopelessness and the hopefulness of human relations. The heterogeneous quality of the various textual strata making up Thomas's novel represents very aptly the composite nature of postmodernism's axiology.

"Morpho Eugenia", the first of the two novellas composing A.S. Byatt's *Angels and Insects,* provides our final example of a multi-layered narration propounding the inconsistency of its various arguments. Here is a text displaying numerous Victorian fragments produced by characters with very different outlooks. These passages reproducing Victorian language and preoccupations are all pastiche which, as Genette (1997: 399) aptly reminds us, automatically designate literature as a palimpsest. In addition to these Victorian passages, one finds a narrative voice whose task it is to account for the main diegetic events and whose modernity is established from the outset by its breach of decorum in sexual matters. Clearly a confrontation between two epochs is thus again called for —and this all the more so since the addressee necessarily belongs to an epoch that is not the mid-nineteenth century.

What do the Victorian documents testify to? In the extracts from his theological essay, Sir Harald Alabaster is seen striving to reconcile the existence of God's

design with the reality of worldly affairs. Entomologist William Adamson, on the other hand, adopts an explicitly Darwinian position, using in his diaries and biological tale examples and quotations from the famous Victorian scientist, and arguing against the concept of man as a divine creation. To complete this "survey" of Victorian conceptions of life, the reader is offered Matty Campton's tale tracing the links between human behaviour and mythological patterns. And what is the world picture conveyed by the modern voice? Astonishing though it may seem, it abstains from any ideological, philosophical or metaphysical remark. The guiding instance restricts itself to orchestrating the narrative revelations and piecing together the various arguments of the main characters. The system of characterization proves crucial in the determination of the narrator's preference and it seems evident in that respect that the three Victorian witnesses are depicted as benign and knowledgeable. If none of the textual fragments can therefore be deemed redundant, it is, once more, because contemporary ideology refuses to choose between different visions and insists on offering a plurality of possibilities. The Victorian excerpts uphold a religious, scientific or mythological conception of life and humanity, the (post-)modern text fuses the three accounts and presents this patchwork as the only viable explanation of the world. This pluralistic solution does not, or perhaps does not merely, spring from a lack of commitment or conviction, it is simply the expression of a defiance in the face of singular and definitive explanations.

If I have concentrated on palinodes, palindromes and palimpsests, it is because their common prefix indicates a backward movement, a retroaction, an operation in reverse, which seem to crystallize the main strategy of contemporary British fiction. Just as postmodern novels retract, unsay or contradict what they stated earlier, so do they go back on and revisit earlier literary traditions. Naturally, the literatures of the past spring from very dissimilar aesthetic tenets, ideological principles and political assumptions, and the fiction which decides to recycle them *in toto* inevitably and deliberately opts for heterogeneity and indiscrimination. So the contradictions conveyed in the form of palinodes, palindromes and palimpsests constitute the mere textual expression of wider cultural and axiological contradictions. Adopting concepts from both romanticism and nihilism, mixing lyricism and slang, exploiting the avant-garde and realism, imitating and subverting the canon, harnessing the commodification of art and challenging capitalistic liberalism, "Janus-like"[8] postmodernism displays contradiction as the central motif of its poetics and politics. Eclecticism might be another way of identifying the contradictory plurality of contemporary fiction, but it need not signify, as Lyotard is renowned for claiming, "the degree zero of contemporary general culture", it need not mean that "anything goes" and that "the epoch is one of slackening" (1983: 334-335). Admittedly, certain artistic combinations

may prove jarring and a hybrid methodology may prove superficial in philosophy (which is probably what influenced Lyotard, a philosopher), but artistic eclecticism cannot be intrinsically nefarious, as is convincingly demonstrated by the multifarious works of Carter, Swift, Barnes, Amis and Rushdie, and many others before them.

Postmodernism's foregrounding of contradictions is straightforwardly expressed by one of Rushdie's narrators: "I myself manage to hold large numbers of wholly irreconcilable views simultaneously, without the least difficulty. I do not think others are less versatile" (Rushdie 1983: 242). What is the explanation of this tendency? One type of explanation may reside in the referential function of art, postmodern fiction reflecting the cultural reality of its epoch which joyously and indiscriminately mingles very dissimilar influences with very dissimilar ideological implications. The syncretism of contemporary fiction could then be read as an illustration of the syncretism of contemporary society. More importantly, it seems to me, the systematic combination of contraries enables postmodern art to eschew the monolithic. Taking stock of the failure of the dominant ideologies, contemporary fiction has made the choice of becoming "politically ambidextrous" thus rendering "unlikely the possible extremes of both political quietism and radical revolution" (Hutcheon 1988: 207-209). So postmodern British literature refuses to commit itself to any determined ideology, and in that sense it heralds the relinquishment of ideology and politics[9] —even though, as Brecht had predicted, "the struggle against ideology has become a new ideology".[10] By favouring combination and contradiction rather than selection and identification, postmodernism, as illustrated by contemporary British fiction, shuns fixed artistic traditions and schools of thought and celebrates a pan-aesthetic and pan-political form of art. Ultimately, contradictions are mainly contra-doxas.

Notes

1. For the traces of romanticism in *Ever After*, see also Germanos Thomas (Duperray 1994: 214-215) and Gutleben (2001: 150-151).

2. Martin Amis resorts to palinodes in order to highlight undecidability in yet another field, namely ontology:

"When I awoke, Martin was still in the room, and still talking.

When I awoke, Martin was gone and there was no sound anywhere" (1984: 349).

"It happens - it doesn't happen" (1991: 149)

3. As Vanessa Guignery rightly remarks, Julian Barnes also employs palinodes in *A History of the World in 10 1/2 Chapters* in the chapter entitled 'Parenthesis' where he contradicts what he previously asserted about the working of History (2001: 469).

4. The idea of a narrative palindrome is voiced by Michel Morel in "*Time's Arrow* ou le récit palindrome". Interestingly, Morel's (1995: 51) analysis also ends up taking stock of the fundamental contradiction lying at the heart of Amis's system of signification.

5. See Marina Warner's analysis in "Angela Carter: Bottle Blond, Double Drag" (1994: 252).

6. For an interpretation of the final scene as carnivalesque counterculture see Marc O'Day's paper "'Mutability is Having a Field Day': The Sixties Aura of Angela Carter's Bristol Trilogy" (1994: 44-45).

7. See for example pp.81, 83, 126-127 (Thomas 2000).

8. It is Lance Olsen's main contention that postmodernism produces Janus-texts (1990: 71, 146 and *passim*).

9. On the evidence of postmodern British literature, one simply cannot agree with Hans Bertens when he asserts that postmodernism has "effectuated a welcome, if rather haphazard, repoliticization of contemporary art" (Bertens 1995: 247).

10. Quoted in Hutcheon (1988: 203).

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GENRE, AUTEUR AND IDENTITY IN CONTEMPORARY HOLLYWOOD CINEMA: CLINT EASTWOOD'S *WHITE HUNTER, BLACK HEART*[1]

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In keeping with contemporary enthusiasm for popular culture products, recent US American film criticism has shown great interest in the study of clearly codified artistic forms, with special emphasis on generic conventions and their attendant ideologies. This interest seems to be based on a distinction between generic and personal films, the assumption being that the former are more appropriate objects of study because they show a consistency and predictability that the latter lack. Critical interest does not, however, run parallel with Hollywood's production, and the truth is that genre pieces do still coexist with a considerable number of more personal films, which show a relatively more realistic approach and pay more attention than the average Hollywood narrative to the construction of their characters. These films, presumably targeted at more mature audiences than the generic majority, seem to join forces with the independent cinema of the 80s and 90s, which has often exhibited a return to well-crafted stories and characters typical of classical cinema. In this paper I would like to concentrate on the study of Clint Eastwood's *White Hunter, Black Heart* (1990) as a film with an interest in portraying the experience of the "self" through textual forms that fall outside Hollywood's generic codes. The mention of Clint Eastwood already indicates the relevance of his presence, both as actor and director, to the understanding of the film, illustrating the persistence of forms of auteurism in contemporary Hollywood. Despite the waning of auteurism as a critical concept in film studies,

it is undeniable that, perhaps as a vestige of the popularity of auteurs in the 1970s, the figure of the director is still associated with some Hollywood films.

British sociologist Anthony Giddens represents a fecund branch of social theory that focuses on the analysis of the changes experienced by the individual in the passage from traditional societies to contemporary ones and sees in the notion of reflexivity a major defining feature of such societies (1991, Gergen 1991, Lash and Urry 1994). His thesis is that modern societies have created a new kind of self built through self-reflexive life projects, in which individuals constantly reassess their position within the world and plan their future life accordingly. This reflexivity has led individuals to a life in which their own desires and appreciations become the only basis of their existence, contemporary societies thereby entering a constant conflict between those personal philosophies of life and the more traditional morality, which had reappeared in response to the demands of both social life and nature, implying concepts such as responsibility towards others that were basic to the survival of premodern societies (1991). In *White Hunter, Black Heart* (1990) the notion of the self crystallises into an exploration of reponsibility, a value which, as Eastwood and contemporary social critics have said, is frequently shunned in contemporary US American society. My aim is to use the discourse that emerges from this tension between reflexivity and responsibility as a basis from which to explore the film's implications for genre and the auteur: how does the auteur influence genre in the presentation of that conflict? The central thesis of the paper is to prove the relevance of a joint genre-auteur analysis which draws on the empirical evidence of the persistent figure of the auteur in contemporary cinema by tracing its impact on the dynamics of genre, rendering *White Hunter, Black Heart* amenable to cultural criticism. Analysis will progress from a consideration of the interplay of reflexivity and masculinity in the film to a discussion of reflexivity and genre inflected by the preceding study of masculinity.

Before engaging in a more detailed discussion of the film, I would like to outline the contexts that provide the set of discourses at work in the film. These contexts are authorship, self-identity, and Clint Eastwood as actor and director. Authorship is, together with genres, one of the most useful structuring devices of the cinematic experience, since it helps audiences come to an understanding of film texts by creating expectations about them. The attention of film criticism to authorship has moved from an initial stage, in which auteurism and the so-called "auteur-structuralism" saw the cinema as the more or less covert expression of the directors' artistic personality, to a subsequent concentration on the author as expression of industrial, historical and social circumstances that seep through films.[2] As a director, Clint Eastwood illustrates both the industry's practice of attaching meanings to a personality for marketing purposes and the gradual

construction of film icons as centres of potent ideological strategies. In Eastwood's case that ideological discourse revolves around the idea of truthfulness.[3]

Traditionally, auteur-oriented film analysis has perceived cinema as an expression of a personal worldview. Film directors have often been regarded as the most accessible entrances to cinema and its mysteries, and the attention received from critics and audiences has partly been related to a search for identity: the film's identity that critics want to penetrate through investigation of its director, the director's identity that emanates from his/her films, even the identity of critics and audiences, who look to the director as a cult figure that will help define their worldview by identification with or rejection of the director's discourse. Given the value placed on the individual as both creator and possessor of an identity, authorship and identity may be seen, then, as two sides of the same coin. *White Hunter, Black Heart* exhibits a set of discourses on identity that make reflexivity and its attendant notions the centre of the characters' conflicts. Contemporary societies characteristically show a dynamism caused by, among other elements, reflexivity, defined by Giddens as the "susceptibility of social activity to constant revision in the light of new information or knowledge" (1991: 10-34). This reflexivity is essential to the constitution of modern self-identity, which involves continual observation of oneself in order to create a life trajectory through the elaboration of a narrative of the self, a story of one's life that develops from past events to future projects. Life is seen as a series of stages that are consciously lived through as part of a project of continual actualisation. A moral dimension is usually attached to this process since improvement is regarded as being true to oneself, which places the moral value of authenticity at the centre of self-reflexivity. Authenticity becomes an asset in a world where certainties are suspect.[4]

This contemporary identity is not free from tensions. Life actualisation is characterised by its reliance on values which are internally referential, that is, values which are not sanctioned by external social norms and customs but whose vigour is to be found in their own internal mechanisms. Giddens gives what he calls the "pure relationship" as an example: a personal relationship which is built on mutual trust and affection, is not necessarily sanctioned by the external social norm of marriage, and is subject to constant revision and actualisation of the participants' feelings and attitudes within the relationship. These mechanisms of self-actualisation tend to exclude fundamental existential issues which raise central moral dilemmas for human beings: death, madness, sexuality or the traditional bond with nature are systematically excluded. Most clearly, the internally referential project of the self tends to invest individuals with a seemingly complete power to decide about their own lives, so that decisions about their selves are

perceived as far more relevant than any external influence or social rule. This results in a concept of the self that justifies actions exclusively in terms of their impact on the person, independently of any external frame, of any morality that is not personally fabricated by the individual (Giddens 1991: 70-108). This account of the formation of self-identity in contemporary societies is faithfully reproduced by the narratives that circulate in the media. Capitalist societies commodify the project of the self by providing the illusion that self-definition can be achieved through possession of market-offered goods: lifestyle is invested with the power to create identity, and media narratives provide such lifestyles, offering identity models that audiences imitate in pursuit of their selves. By mixing uncertainty and security these narratives also allow individuals to achieve a feeling of reflexive control over their lives, as spectators are led to identify with characters, who are seen to gradually shape their identities through continual revision of themselves in the light of new events (Giddens 1991: 181-208). Film genres provide similar models for the elaboration of self-identity since, in their simulation of everyday life experiences, they mix predictability and contingency in formulaic narrative forms that are both destabilising and reassuring of audiences' expectations.

It is these discourses, about the concern with the formation of the self and its vicissitudes, that are found in Eastwood's *White Hunter, Black Heart*, a film that departs from the most clearly generic output of the film industry by engaging in a close inspection of the processes at work in its main character's life trajectory. In this film, the protagonist's reflexive assessment of his life is given weight as he (Clint Eastwood) is seen to face situations that lead to a reconsideration of his past and future life. These vital turning points are negotiated through the character's exploration and discovery of his self, of what is most authentic in himself. The film exhibits an interest in the conflict between the character's personal morality and the more external, social morality in the shape of responsibility towards others. It shares the formulaic Hollywood concentration on the individual, but the extraordinary attention given to the creation and development of the main character's personality and internal life separates it from the more generic films, in which characters tend to become types with clearly defined functions within well-known narrative patterns. Its effort to faithfully represent real-life material and psychological states, and its avoidance of a direct exploitation of violence or sexuality also deviate from contemporary genres.This attempt at realism becomes an insight into the complexity of reality, its obstacles and rewards, that illustrates the function of media narratives as surrogate narratives of the self. Extra coherence stems from the fact that it is at the same time a film associated with its director by both industry and audiences, and a film whose protagonist is a director in the story: it would seem to take us back to an auteurism in which the films' interest in the intricacies of life is to be attributed to the personal concerns of the directors behind them.

Before discussing the film in detail, a few remarks on Eastwood and his work are necessary, since his presence provides another set of meanings employed by the film. Clint Eastwood has been classified within the category of the commercial auteur, which includes stars who have become directors, such as Eastwood himself or Kevin Costner, and directors whose celebrity has turned them into stars, for example Steven Spielberg or Woody Allen. What defines these auteurs is the fact that, by virtue of their popularity, their films are invested with a set of meanings which condition both their production and reception (Corrigan 1991: 107). Clint Eastwood has come to represent both an economical production method tied to his film company, Malpaso, and a set of meanings attached to him through the different films he has acted in.[5] Among those meanings it is relevant to note the cultural debate over Eastwood as a father-figure that crystallised around his two 1990 films, *The Rookie* and *White Hunter, Black Heart*: the first showed how the rookie (Charlie Sheen) grew into the job that the older policeman, played by Eastwood, was about to leave, and the second dealt with the main character's gradual acceptance of responsibilities that seemed at first to be clearly incompatible with his way of life.[6]

Eastwood's status as a father was in fact a mere development of his cultural position as a paradigm of US American masculinity, a paradigm which had been in place since the 1970s.[7] His masculinity was from the beginning associated with his performance, as critics invariably stressed his incapacity to act and argued that his masculine image relied on his mere presence.[8] His impassive looks associated with his screen image have given rise to critical analyses of his masculinity as masochistic. For Paul Smith, Eastwood stands for the law of the father, for authority and control, and the masochistic moments in which he is so often involved in his films are not subversive of it but are in fact necessary for his final access to the role of patriarch: they are tests for the meanings to which males accede in patriarchy. However, Smith also sees traces of weakness that emerge through male hysteria and are expressed in moments of powerlessness, when Eastwood is seen to lack control. It is this ambivalent masculinity, the oscillation between potency and weakness suggested through both confident and troubled performances, that has become Eastwood's most recent staple image.[9]

White Hunter, Black Heart is a 1990 film set in the fifties whose subject is an expedition led by American film director John Wilson (Clint Eastwood) to Africa in order to shoot a film titled *The African Trader*, starring "Kay Gibson" (Marisa Berenson) and "Phil Duncan" (Richard Vanstone). The film is actually based on a novel of the same title written by Peter Viertel in 1953 which dealt with the events surrounding the shooting of *The African Queen* (1951) by John Huston, starring Katharine Hepburn and Humphrey Bogart: the real names are to be read

behind those used in the film. Peter Viertel actually took part in the elaboration of Huston's script and was present during the shooting(s).[10] Eastwood's story is an account of Wilson's growing obsession with killing an elephant, as he gradually begins to devote all his time to hunting and neglects the film he is supposed to be directing. Wilson sees in hunting a way to show his courage and become a real man, and it is only at the end, after his reckless behaviour causes the death of his black tracker Kivu (Boy Mathais Chuma), that he returns to the safe haven of filmmaking. The film resorts to issues of masculinity and performance to organise its meanings: the definition of Eastwood's masculinity as the lonely westerner is again present in the Wilson character; however, he is far from silent here, and Wilson is described as an outspoken, talkative person who manages to draw his friends and crew along in his hunting craze. To some critics it is this expansive personality that draws attention towards Eastwood's performance (Smith 1993: 221). Thus the film has been explained as part of Eastwood's revisionist cinema, particularly in its treatment of masculinity: Dennis Bingham (1993: 48-49) has argued that the film emphasises the effort involved in the attempt to imitate Huston, an icon of masculine behaviour whose inadequacy is proved at the end.

On the other hand, the film's themes and motifs largely coincide with accounts of the men's movement and its ethos, a movement which was most operative around the early 1990s, precisely when *White Hunter* was made. The movement, led by figures like Robert Bly and Sam Keen, has been described as a response to the feeling that white American masculinity (usually of middle-class origins) was not working, that it was without substance, emotional sensitivity or depth, and that it needed to be healed by a return to the wilderness.[11] The film is, then, a response to that feeling of failed masculinity, which is to be healed by contact with nature and natural people, in a process of self-discovery and personal fulfilment that entails emotional growth. However, this process is qualified negatively: Wilson is seen to equate self-discovery with the violence of the elephant hunt and, when that violence turns against him by causing Kivu's death, the film shows the inappropriateness of Wilson's notion of masculinity, and therefore of his turning to nature for self-discovery. Wilson's masculinity is in fact portrayed as a copy of Hemingwayesque perceptions of Africa and suffering, which are in the end revealed to be childish rather than transcendent, reckless rather than courageous. The ending stands as a critique of such a search for spiritual renewal in what is wild in man.

Self-discovery is, however, not the only ingredient of Wilson's masculinity. As was said above, the character is very close to the tough loner of Eastwood's previous roles, but Wilson seems to realign those established meanings. Drawing on the previously mentioned description of Eastwood as a masochist on his way to the

law of the father, who cannot however avoid the occasional potentially disruptive hysterical moment of weakness, Wilson can be analysed from a double perspective. One would centre on Wilson as hysterical male, visible in the moments of lack of body control and weakness during the hunt, and in his performance itself that points at a masculinity in process. Wilson thus becomes a revisionist attempt to modify Eastwood's previous set of meanings as powerful male, a revisionism that contains a return to nature which is criticised. A second perspective would be that of Wilson as paradigmatic masochistic character: the moments of weakness during the hunt would not be traces of hysteria but steps towards the final blow represented by Kivu's death, all of them part of a masochistic process that leads Wilson to the position of father-figure.

Two different readings of the film are possible, according to the weight given to Wilson's return to filmmaking as director. If we consider that the final scene lacks the potency to dissipate the vividness of Kivu's death, the film must be seen as being about Wilson's irresponsible nature and about the lesson he learns: the fact that, unlike the fantasies of his films or the fantasy of authenticity, the hardships of life are real. It would mean the return of a moral issue, responsibility towards others, which Wilson's life trajectory, the aim of which is the search for authenticity, has tried to repress. If we consider the final scene, his becoming a director, as the proper end, then the film would imply that Kivu's death was a natural step in the process of Wilson's access to patriarchy. It would mean the climax of a masochism that had already surfaced in a previous fight with a racist hotel manager: you have to fight when you think you have to, even if you know you are going to be defeated. The return to shoot a film would not be a return: his becoming a director would be his moment of access to patriarchy, to the position of the auteur-father. In fact, performance seems to support this view since it is at the closing of the film that Eastwood adopts the taciturnity he has long been associated with: he stops being Wilson to become Eastwood. The film seems to occupy a very ambivalent position, oscillating as it does between revisionism and embracing the values traditionally associated with the Eastwood persona.

The previous account of masculinity and performance has brought to the surface the film's reliance on self-referentiality: to the figure of Huston behind Wilson, to *The African Queen* behind *The African Trader*, to the actors and to Eastwood's previous roles. In fact, critics have often used Eastwood's films as filters through which to view his previous work retrospectively, and Eastwood himself has admitted to a degree of reflexivity in his films, for example in his identification with Wilson's ethos of independence in filmmaking.[12] Several elements of *White Hunter* centre on the reflexivity surrounding the Wilson character: masculinity appears as the real thing, to be achieved by whether they are true to oneself and

facing the dangers of hunting, and consequently Wilson guides his actions by their being true to his personality. In this his character echoes a self-identity that depends on reflexivity, on self-evaluation and change in the light of new information and events. In the film, this reflexivity is articulated around authenticity, the notion of being true to oneself, as for example in the scene in which Wilson argues with the producers about the use of black and white stock for the film: the real thing is personality and independence. The most apparent effect of reflexivity is therefore the film's reliance on the ethos of authenticity. Moreover, the film uses this search for authenticity as justification for Wilson's self-destructive and self-contradictory nature, which in turn is made to justify his rude behaviour. He is allowed to be rude and self-contradictory, and he will accordingly not be punished with a shift of audience identification, because through contact with the black natives, he is seen to be engaged in a search for the authenticity that cannot be found in Europe or the US. This is particularly noticeable in the scene between Wilson and Pete Verrill (Jeff Fahey), the Viertel character, in which Wilson says killing an elephant is a sin: the scene ends as he walks away from Verrill towards a group of black natives gathered around a fire. The contradiction, his wanting to kill an elephant and at the same time considering it a sin, is condoned through the search for authenticity suggested by his comradeship with the black natives. The condonation of self-contradiction extends to the whole film, since the contradictory nature of a film that exalts authenticity by means of Eastwood's Hollywood-created meanings is resolved by invoking the film's claim to be an auteur piece in search of an authentic meaning.

Another expression of masculinity in *White Hunter, Black Heart* is independence. Here, too, the film borrows from the discourse on reflexivity and depends on a self-directed look for moral principles, a reflexivity that blocks itself off from the external world and its morality. What matters in the film is Wilson's own personal wishes, which dictate his moral code. He acts according to a view of the modern world in which morality is replaced by authenticity: what makes an action good is that it is true to the individual's desires. The end of the film is a return to external moral values, a moral lesson that shows Wilson that other people also exist in themselves and morality is not a personal affair. The film is therefore a film about responsibility too: it represents Eastwood's concern about the state of a current society in which, as he complained to *Psychology Today*,

> […] whether it's the old deal of saying, Jeez, my mother whipped me when I was little or my father yelled at me or something. Everybody is looking for a reason not to take responsibility for their own actions in hand, anyway. […] we are in a sort of fall-guy generation. We are always looking for someone else's fault as to why everything is. Everybody is looking to blame everybody (Fischoff 1993: 76-77).

This idea seemed very potent in the early 1990s, as the popularity of Robert Hugues' *Culture of Complaint* was to prove.[13] Thus, while for most of the film violence is condoned by invoking authenticity, at the end Wilson's internally referential moral code is criticised because it results in Kivu's death. At this point, as was said above, the film oscillates between the power of the last scene, a condonation of the consequences of Wilson's search for authenticity, and the vividness of the previous events, a critique of Wilson's irresponsible behaviour.

The issue of authenticity is to a certain extent always relative in this film, since the freedom of the film artist is conveyed through an Eastwood presence that at the same time invokes his star status, his belonging to a market-oriented art. However, the strength of the film's recreation of a search for authenticity is not invalidated by this. What is most relevant in the film is not the final definition of Wilson's personality, which, given Eastwood's meanings behind the character, we already knew, but the trope of the search for authenticity and its attendant metaphors: hunting, Africa, contact with the racially different, courage tests, and the Hemingwayesque ethos of suffering. It is these motifs of authenticity that, despite the intertextual presence of Eastwood, assert the artistic, auteurist quality of the film. The auteur status is also a consequence of the connotations of revisionism accreting to the film, of the aura of commentary on Eastwood and his previous career contained in it. The fact that the film departs from previous Eastwood works, while at the same time resembling them, makes it revisionist, a self-conscious commentary on itself, disclosing an auteur who has a conscious concern with the meanings he represents. This combination of similarity and difference is close to the ingredients of genre: both auteur and genre offer structures to guide audience expectations, and changes are brought in to maintain their interest. This is the way the star-auteur film works.

I would now like to link the previous account of reflexivity and masculinity to a discussion of genre. The aim of this next step in the analysis will be to argue, first, that genre works as a mechanism of self-reflexivity; second, that this function is reflected in the film's generic configuration, which is traversed by the tension between self-reflexivity and moral issues, and, third, that this tension is articulated through the meanings of a masculinity that is reflexively considered. The first impression about *White Hunter* is that it is a less generic film than the average Hollywood piece. There are several ingredients that bring it close to a few genres, although this hybridity in fact contributes to the seeming lack of a clear generic affiliation. The film resembles the biopic: it fits the category of post World War II biopics, which were dominated by figures from the world of entertainment, and Wilson embodies the tension between the innovative individual and established institutions and traditions which is usually found in the films of the genre. On the

other hand, the whole narrative shares essential features of the adventure film, which tends to reflect imperialist views and a traditional masculinity since the ideology of adventure developed alongside the spread of empires in the nineteenth century.[14] Finally, *White Hunter* bears similarities to the subgenre of films about filmmaking, such as King Vidor's *Show People* (1928), Preston Sturges's *Sullivan's Travels* (1941), Vincente Minnelli's *The Bad and the Beautiful* (1952), François Truffaut's *La nuit américaine* (1973), or Robert Altman's *The Player* (1992).

The film's hybridity is even enhanced by its focus on the main character's personality. The search for the self becomes another set of generic formulae: recurrent motifs and patterns that mix predictability and contingency in order to provide an experience that mimics real life's combination of disturbance and reassurance. Through the function of the star-auteur and the presence of a personal narrative, *White Hunter* offers a heightened form which foregrounds the reflexivity provided by Eastwood: as an actor, the meanings attached to him are invoked as source material to be reworked; and, as a director, the film deals with his auteur status and his similarity to Huston. The film emerges as a paradigm of contemporary identity: the mixture of the highly charged intertextual references and the echoes of the authentic experience that may take unexpected turns lies at the base of the set of defining features of such identity. This combination of irony and sincerity recalls Jim Collins' formulation of the ironic and the sincere film as standing in tension: *White Hunter* draws on both generic possibilities at once, shaping a compound of generic connotations that constitute the film's appeal.[15] The new auteurism of the star-auteur kind represented by Eastwood brings together the ironic and the new sincerity moods: it mixes intertextual connotations that shape Eastwood's meaning in the film with the promise of a search for authenticity and a moving away from the insincerity of culture. The previously mentioned ambivalence of the film, its oscillation between criticism and praise of Wilson, is facilitated by the complexity of the stance maintained by Wilson-Eastwood-auteur at the end, which is an extension of this mixture of irony and sincerity: the stance and the film itself are both authentic and ironic.

The film's association of masculinity with genre provides two interesting perspectives which echo the tension between the concentration of reflexivity on the self and the attention to the external world that is demanded by morality. This tension is present in the film's ambivalence between the action/buddy film and the "sensitive guy" film: both are sustained by the story and reinforced by the complexity of Eastwood's meanings. First, it is surprising how many of the features of the action and the buddy films are at first sight shared by *White Hunter*. They may not appear in their purest versions, but they are nevertheless present and seem particularly centred around a revisionist reading of the film

which engages with Wilson's independence, and with his view of violence as an expression of masculinity, in order to rework them into a critique. Considering the action films' use of violence as catalyst of ambiguities about masculinity through their emphasis on the muscular body's performance, the relevance given by *White Hunter* to violent action deserves some attention.[16] The film deprives violence of its potential for male display by channelling it through the hunt, which replaces the action-film chase and is presented as a civilised affair because of its broader aim: a transcendental search for the hunter's self. Wilson's body is not spectacular but weak, preventing the potential feminisation of the action film, while his anti-institutional and misogynous attitude is associated with his masculine way of life, which is seen to clash with the world of filmmaking. The equation between feminisation and filmmaking is very clear in the case of Landers, the producer (George Dzundza), or the Englishman Lockhart (Alum Armstrong), and it also extends to Pete Verrill.

The bond between Wilson and Pete is pointed out at moments such as when Wilson remarks that they will grow old together looking for gold and telling each other stories about their lives, but the film reworks the structures of the buddy film regarding this homosocial bond.[17] Here we have two buddies for Wilson: the son-figure represented by Pete, and the symbol of the wild and of virility represented by Kivu. This separation helps the film define Wilson as both father (responsibility, authority) and man (violence, irresponsibility) and to punish him by killing Kivu without damaging his still potent aura of authority. The buddy film also surfaces in the function given to masquerade: Eastwood mimics Wilson while Wilson mimics Hemingwayesque models of masculinity. Such a quest for virility actually discloses anxieties about masculinity and its constructedness, since it is to be achieved through physical and courage tests, in a move that matches the concerns of both the buddy and the action film. However, the film departs from the buddy formula in the absence of action-film tropes, displays of male bodies, and of an unambiguous final victory. It remains close to the ethos of the men's movement and their recuperation of the wild in man as essence of their masculinity, and conflates such celebration of the masculine return to nature with the buddy film. *White Hunter* has transformed the buddy film's violence into a presumably more socially acceptable form by associating it with a return to nature, and by coupling violence with the contemporary concerns of the men's movement. It shows the motifs of both the action and the buddy film but deprives them of their potential disruptive power. The constructed, provisional nature of masculinity is openly acknowledged but this does not prevent the film from reinforcing the masculine paradigm associated with the Eastwood persona.[18] As a partial conclusion, the film's articulation of autonomy and violent masculinity draws on the motifs of the action/buddy films and results in a picture of Wilson

as highly irresponsible, matching the exclusive concentration on the self attributed to the modern individual. At the same time, those action/buddy film motifs are sanitised, and their potential denunciation of masculinity as a construct is opposed by its association with the ethos of the men's movement.

The combination of masculinity and genre still suggests a second perspective, which resembles another strand of contemporary cinema. I am referring to what Fred Pfeil has called the "sensitive-guy" films, and to the action films of the 1990s as defined by Susan Jeffords. To take up the issue of the film's ambivalence again, this Hollywood strand matches the second of the possible readings of the film: the film as a final sanction of Wilson's violence and masculinity, as we see him accede to the position of auteur-father. Pfeil centres on a group of films from 1991 (*Regarding Henry*, *City Slickers*, *The Fisher King*) which characteristically present a man who undergoes a process of suffering and trial that leads to the acknowledgement of his former insensitivity. That return to sensitivity is qualified as a return to his true self, but in fact these films sustain the fantasy that men may recover their lost sensitivity without actually having to renounce their privileged position as patriarchal figures, echoing one of Sam Keen's arguments.[19] Susan Jeffords (1993b: 245-262) describes the action films of the 1990s, such as *Terminator 2: Judgment Day* (1991), as narratives that enact both men's rejection of violence, which is blamed on the circumstances they had to endure at the time, and their adoption of paternal roles. These fathers guarantee a better future for their children by exploiting individualism, which is revalued in an increasingly anonymous technological world. Jeffords criticises a tendency which she also finds in other Hollywood genres: these men, once they reform themselves, are not forced to take responsibility for the consequences of their former lives, but are seen to retreat from conflict and concentrate on their personal lives.

In *White Hunter* we see Wilson fail to live up to the role of hunter he has created for himself and return to the position of filmmaker, which is the only thing he is good at; he concentrates on his art and not, for example, on fighting the concept of masculinity that has caused Kivu's death. The final scene means a rejection of violence, as he manifestly becomes the father figure he had actually been throughout, and the extension of which he will seek in the future through the individual action here represented by filmmaking. Although the film does not offer a return to family life as a conclusion, both the rejection of action and the final embracing of a personal life are clear enough to associate this film with Pfeil's and Jeffords' categories. The process of trial and suffering towards a final moment of recognition of his former insensitivity is clear too, although this is not viewed as a return to the true self, which remains an unattainable fantasy of virility, but as a failure to achieve it, as an impossible masquerade. Nevertheless, Wilson is

reempowered as he accedes to the position of father-auteur. As a second partial conclusion, the motifs of the "sensitive-guy" film articulate Wilson's final acceptance of responsibility, a return of the moral issue of responsibility towards others that stands in tension with the previously mentioned exclusive concentration on the self. At the same time, this return to responsibility is also suspect of merely concealing a final attention to the self that is, through the final, even empowered.

As a conclusion, *White Hunter* can be located at the intersection of the action/buddy films of the 1980s and the new representations of masculinity of the early 1990s. It provides an interest in performance and the masquerade, apparently laying bare the constructed nature of masculinity but also looking towards the recuperation of a masculinity that has been forced to undergo suffering. The film seems to be both celebration and critique: highly contradictory, it shows the transition from the representation of masculinity of the 1980s to that of the early 1990s, an ambivalent position created through the possibilities offered by the star-auteur, non-generic film. *White Hunter* can thereby criticise Wilson's individualism and violence, and consequently revise Eastwood's persona, while at the same time celebrating that independence and spontaneity, his anti-bureaucratic stance, which he is seen to embrace at the end by becoming a director. This final move echoes Eastwood's alleged independence as a filmmaker, now even cynically enhanced by the film's aura of revisionism.

We can now attempt to provide an answer to the question posed at the beginning of the paper: what does the auteur's presence do to genre in the presentation of the tension between personal and external morality? It first reveals the role of genre as a mechanism of self-reflexivity, which is illustrated by the film's ambivalence between two genres of the 1980s and early 1990s that mirrors the tension between self-reflexivity and moral matters in the contemporary individual: the anti-responsibility "buddy film" and the pro-responsibility "sensitive guy" film. Responsibility is articulated as both celebration and critique of male social responsibility, which, on a different front, is offered by the film as both a sanction and a revision of Eastwood's traditional set of meanings as an independent, violent, irresponsible man. This ambivalence is presented as the result of the complexity of the artist, a Romantic notion that in fact conceals the potential of the film to arrest cultural change, since both the sanitising of the "buddy film" effected by *White Hunter, Black Heart* and its partial adoption of the "sensitive guy" film are repressive tendencies: they act against the male display and homosociality of the buddy film, and in favour of a sensitivity that in fact conceals empowerment. Such ambiguity is a sign of the film's reactionary politics facilitated

by the auteur's function as both director and star, a function that provides a less generic film than the usual Hollywood output, more ambivalence about the meanings he stands for and more complex connotations suggested by the star-auteur's cultural presence.

Notes

[1]. Research for this paper has been funded by the DGICYT project no. BF2001-2564.

[2]. John Caughie's *Theories of Authorship: A Reader* (1981/1999) probably provides the best historical overview of authorship. Roland Barthes' "The Death of the Author" (1968) and Michel Foucault's "What Is an Author?" (1969) are reproduced in it, together with seminal contributions by Jean-Louis Comolli, Jean Narboni, Geoffrey Nowell-Smith, Brian Henderson and others. Foucault's idea that it was the function performed by the author, its role within the circulation of the text, that mattered has proved very useful for ideological analysis. For two discussions on the implications of this idea, see Stephen Crofts (1998: 310-326) and James Naremore (1990: 14-23).

[3]. For studies on the auteur as a commercial or ideological presence in contemporary cinema, see Corrigan (1991: 101-134) and Crofts (1998).

[4]. For an account of authenticity as a value in times of crisis, see Marina (2000: 104-107).

[5]. For a complete account of Eastwood's position within the film industry, see Smith (1993: 59-67). His first appearances, in the "spaghetti" westerns of Sergio Leone, provided him with a star image as a calm, quiet, wild man. His Dirty Harry films lent that initial image added connotations of fascism, vigilantism and anti-bureaucracy (Smith 1993: 85-99). Although critics have shown how the several films in the Dirty Harry series moved in the direction of gradually accommodating to the social climate of the time, even promoting the rights of women and minorities (Smith 1993: 101-107), or how the last films (*Sudden Impact*, 1983, and *The Dead Pool*, 1988) adopted an increasingly parodic tone (Gallafent 1993: 54-61), the fact remains that Eastwood continued to be identified with the fascistic Harry Callahan. The critical reworking of the Eastwood persona has led to assessments of his work as increasingly more self-conscious about the meanings set by earlier films, to the point where Eastwood's revisionism has become a critical commonplace. This was so especially after the release of *Unforgiven* (1992). That film confirmed Eastwood's conscious reformulation of his previous image as the western's loner or the fascistic cop, a reformulation which to some critics had always been part of the Eastwood persona, in the ironic western heroes and in the recreations of masculinity that, in his 1980s films, were in fact reactions against the restrictive masculine ideal of the time (Combs 1992: 12-16; Bingham 1993: 40-53). Not all critics support this view, though: Paul Smith (1993: 263-268) disagrees with the reading of Eastwood's cinema as revisionist, pointing out how films like *Unforgiven* are in fact very much in tune with the realism and authenticity promoted by the Hollywood tradition.

[6]. Between 1988 and 1990 Eastwood released five films which alternated between the openly commercial —*The Dead Pool* (1988), *Pink Cadillac* (1989), and *The Rookie* (1990)— and the more personal —*Bird*

(1988), and *White Hunter, Black Heart* (1990), following a production pattern he has since adhered to. All of them bombed at the box office, which has been explained as the consequence of discrepancies between Eastwood's image as an auteur-father and his real life. Eastwood's image started to change with the release of *Pale Rider* (19859 and *Heartbreak Ridge* (1986) and the critical reputation he gained in Europe. It was then that the American media started to consider him as a serious filmmaker. In 1990, at the Walker Art Center retrospective in Minneapolis, Eastwood was hailed as an auteur by Richard Schikel. This position of authority contrasted with the media coverage of his private life, in which he was presented as the authoritarian mayor of Carmel, his hometown in California, and as an unsuitable father: he was accused by his exgirlfriend Sondra Locke of forcing her to have two abortions (Smith 1993: 243-262). Smith notes how the father-like role of the Eastwood character in *The Rookie* was even reinforced by a documentary on the making of the film in which Eastwood was presented as a real father to Charlie Sheen, who played the rookie, at a time in which Sheen was going through difficult times because of his addiction to drugs and alcohol. Smith (1993: 259-261) also draws attention to the fact that *White Hunter, Black Heart* revealed Eastwood's desire to assert himself as an auteur by drawing on the image of John Huston, on whose life the film was based, as a creative artist.

7. Joan Mellen (1977: 294-301) described him as a silent loner who distrusted red tape. In the 1990s Christine Gledhill (1995: 73-93) still saw Eastwood as example of a purified, intense masculinity that emerged as a reaction to the contemporary atmosphere of contested gender roles.

8. See Smith for Eastwood's presence and his debt to the heroes of Siegel's cinema (1993: 209, 214).

9. See Smith (1993: 151-172); this combination of patriarchal authority and underlying vulnerability is also pointed out by Taubin (1993) and Bingham (1993: 42-43).

10. See Gallafent on the details of the real events borrowed by the film (1993: 207-209).

11. Such a return to nature was necessary for men to mature. Another possible way of healing masculinity was to go back to a state of immaturity in which men could enjoy the sensitivity they had before they were socialised (Pfeil 1995: 167-232).

12. David Breskin (1992: 102-110) mentions the retrospective assessment of Eastwood's films as the way in which they affect our consciousness, and *Unforgiven* as the film that changed how we view his previous films. Eastwood has admitted that his roles, especially the anti-bureaucratic stance of *Dirty Harry*, have affected the way he thinks (Fischoff 1993).

13. Hugues' (1993: 1-70) jeremiad against both conservatives and progressives explains how, to him, both have managed to end at the same point after their apparently different "cultural" politics: both the old ideology of order and the new creed of political correctness have finally coincided in their desire to deny the basic freedom of speech. In the process, a culture of victimisation has appeared, in which complaint has become an argument to curtail other people's freedom, masking what is actually a tactic towards empowerment. See "Culture and the Broken Polity".

14. See Neale's use of Custen's ideas and Neale's comments on the biopic and the adventure film (2000: 60-65).

15. Jim Collins (1993) has defined ironic films as those that contain intertextual references to other films or genres, and sincerity films as those that reject the ironic manipulation of contemporary genres and look in such avoidance for a primaeval authenticity.

16. To Yvonne Tasker (1993: 231-233, 236-238), the action film presents the

muscular body of the male action hero as self-conscious performance that stands out as unmanly decoration, thereby creating anxieties over sexuality which are alleviated through images of physical torture or through comedy. See also Pfeil (1995: 1-36).

17. The motif of the male couple has been discussed by Cynthia Fuchs (1993: 194-195, 205), who defines what she calls the "buddy film" as narratives that both fulfil and deny male homosocial desire: they work to both represent and conceal the differences that threaten the buddy alliance by providing an all-male unit as answer to sexual difference. However, the all-male unit actually foregrounds the tensions between the two men and within society at large regarding masculinity: the male unit reveals the underlying homosocial desire that sustains it.

18. The fact that masculinity is a masquerade does not mean it is not a powerful and effective fantasy. See Holmlund (1993: 225-226).

19. They are actually expected to show enough initiative to retain their roles as husbands and fathers (Pfeil, 1995: 37-709). Susan Jeffords (1993a: 196-208) had already noted this contradiction.

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'SOME OF ALL OF US IN YOU': INTRA-RACIAL RELATIONS, PAN-AFRICANISM AND DIASPORA IN PAULE MARSHALL'S *THE FISHER KING*

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1. Introduction

In her latest novel to date,[1] Marshall offers the story of two black American families, the Paynes and the McCullums —of Caribbean and American Southern immigrant background respectively— over four generations. At the heart of central Brooklyn, Macon Street has witnessed the feud between the two families, whose beloved children Everett Payne, a talented jazz pianist, and Cherisse McCullum eloped to Paris in 1949, fleeing racism and in search of a less stifling cultural climate. Yet the action is set in the spring of 1984, as Edgar Payne, a successful Brooklyn businessman, organizes a memorial concert for his brother Everett, now dead, who had risen to stardom in the Parisian jazz scene. Edgar Payne lures Hattie Carmichael, Everett Payne and Cherisse McCullum's best friend who had joined them in Paris, back to the States for the event. Hattie brings little Sonny, Everett and Cherisse's great-grandson whom she had brought up in Paris, along with her. In keeping with the contrapuntal style characteristic of Marshall's fiction, the narrative shuttles between the present and the past, as Hattie and other characters remember Everett's unconventional life in Paris, and also the long-standing family feud between the Paynes and the McCullums, which is kept raging by the elderly heads of the households, Ulene Payne and Florence McCullum. This family conflict partly stems from and is set against the frictions

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that developed between the different black ethnic groups —'native' blacks, black Southerners, Afro-Caribbeans— competing for space and resources in Brooklyn's ghettoes in 1930s and 1940s.

Although it is the rise and fall of jazz in the African-American and black expatriate French scenes that shapes *The Fisher King* (2000), what really draws the reader's attention in the novel is Marshall's revisiting of her old neighbourhood of Bedford-Stuyvesant, in Central Brooklyn, the setting of her first novel, *Brown Girl, Brownstones* (1959). Accordingly, the brownstone, an icon of success in American society for Marshall's immigrants, becomes a central figure again. Significantly, the brownstones are described in the early pages of the novel with the same warfare imagery Marshall had used in *Brown Girl, Brownstones*, as "brown uniform houses […] an army goosestepping toward an enemy that was a mirror image of itself across the street" (16). After recreating an ambience her readers are familiar with, Marshall plunges into a more thorough analysis of the Brooklyn multi-ethnic black community she had introduced us to in *Brown Girl, Brownstones.*

In fact, *The Fisher King* marks a departure from the first novel in that the author moves the focus away from the parochial Barbadian immigrant community in Brooklyn onto African-American/Afro-Caribbean relations. What makes *The Fisher King* an excellent companion to *Brown Girl Brownstones* is the fact that it not merely hints at the Afro-Caribbean/Black American conflict, but brings it to the forefront. Critics have noticed Marshall's tendency, in the course of her writing career, towards widening the ethnic scope of her black characters. In the words of Toby Rose:

> Marshall's fiction has evolved in time and space from first-generation immigrants who are closeted in a parochial neighborhood of Brooklyn and trying to mediate between cultural identities and imperatives, to second and third-generation transcultural representatives of the African diaspora who are now secure in their racial skins (1999: 120).

Indeed, in *The Fisher King* —which, published in 2000, is beyond the chronological scope of Toby Rose's 1999 essay— Marshall expands her ever-widening referential circle to include the third and fourth generation offspring of African-American/Afro-Caribbean unions and even the multifarious black communities rooted in European cities such as Paris. Her focus is therefore not on the tribalism of first generation Caribbean immigrants and the identity conundrum of the hyphenated second generation, but rather on the problems posed by the interaction between blacks from different ethnic groups. In effect, in her latest novel Marshall forcefully tackles the issue of intra-racial conflict, which is somehow overlooked by critics who, like Rose, are bent on praising her diaspora

sensibility and her relentless call for black solidarity across ethnic lines. In this paper I argue that *The Fisher King* completes Marshall's trajectory of widening and problematising the notion of the monolithic black subject and its community.[2]

Section One of this paper provides the reader with the necessary historical background to grasp Marshall's handling of black intra-racial conflict in New York ghettoes, and goes on to tackle her treatment of the issue in *The Fisher King*, which is read against *Brown Girl, Brownstones*. The arena where conflict is played out is the focus of Section Two, where I connect Marshall's in-depth portrait of the Bedford-Stuyvesant setting with her complex analysis of Brooklyn's black community. In Section Three I locate Marshall's discussion of black intra-racial relations and politics within the ongoing debate over Pan-Africanism and ethnic absolutisms, elaborating on the author's increasing black diaspora sensibility and her recourse to, for the first time in her work, one of the diaspora's European branches in *The Fisher King*.

2. Intra-racial relations in New York's black ghetto neighbourhoods

At this juncture, some historical background on black intra-racial interactions becomes necessary. The frictions between African-Americans and Afro-Caribbeans have to be traced back to the development of a multi-ethnic black community in the New York ghettoes of the early twentieth century. The post-war economic boom attracted the migration of Afro-Caribbeans to New York in the 1920s, which coincided with the so-called *Great Migration* of Southern blacks to the Northern metropolis. Therefore, Caribbeans migrating to the US in the early decades of the twentieth century joined the country's large black population, which was at this time replenishing itself with new arrivals from the American South. Speaking of Harlem's evolving black community, Watkins-Owens points out that in addition to many migrants from the southeastern seaboard states, residents living in the area came from islands such as Jamaica, Barbados, Monserrat, Antigua, Bermuda, the Bahamas, Martinique, Haiti, Guadeloupe, Puerto Rico, Cuba, and other countries in South America and West Africa (1996: 2). In fact, eighty-two per cent of the black immigrants came from the English-speaking Caribbean (4). This migration, Watkins-Owens rightly points out, gave rise to "a new historical development in American urban life, an African intra-racial ethnic community" (29). The relationship that developed between native and immigrant blacks was nonetheless marred by ambivalence.

On the one hand, Caribbean immigrants joined in and benefited from the African-American struggle to achieve civil rights. In fact, educated Caribbeans played a prominent role in the political activity of the wider black community, being attracted to the black elite circles in Harlem. Marcus Garvey formed the *Universal Negro Improvement Association*, and W.E.B. Du Bois was a prominent Civil Rights leader. Caribbean immigrant writers such as Eric Walrond or Claude McKay made unique contributions to the literary *Harlem Renaissance* in poetry and fiction. However, Caribbeans were also seen as outsiders and competitors by the native black population. Afro-Caribbeans are known for their professional and business accomplishments in the US; thus the popularity of the label "Jewmaicans", applied to Afro-Caribbeans in the US (Foner 1979, Cohen 1997). African-Americans, in turn, stereotyped Caribbeans as "stingy", "craftier than the Jew", "British", or "clannish" (Hathaway 1999: 21). Caribbean immigrants soon realized that black Americans were a low-status group in a white society with which they were inevitably associated on racial grounds. They had received a British education and came from societies where, in spite of the colonial racial bias, blacks were a majority. Thus, they saw black Americans as lacking the racial pride and militancy they possessed; in the words of a Jamaican journalist and writer of the period who regarded Caribbean immigrants as a "gift from the tropics", "they [Caribbeans] do not suffer from the local anesthesia of custom and pride which makes otherwise intolerable situations bearable for the home-staying majorities" (Domingo 1927: 347-8). The growing hostility between Afro-Caribbean immigrants and native blacks led a well-known African-American magazine, *Opportunity: A Journal of Negro Life*, to publish a "Special Caribbean Issue" in 1926. The contributors to this issue intended to familiarize the magazine's African-American readers with the newcomers, and thus improve relations between the two groups. In the context of black America, Caribbean immigrants were subject to the cross-pressures of their allegiance to their Caribbean peers and to the larger black community. Hence, competition over the scarce resources of a segregated community on the one hand and cooperation on political and social levels on the other characterize the relationship that developed between the African-American and the Caribbean communities in New York ghettoes.

In a 1985 article published in the *New York Times Magazine,* Marshall shows her preoccupation with racial conflict in the black community, "Mother Africa's children" (67), of her old Bedford-Stuyvesant neighbourhood. She summarizes their biases as follows:

> The West Indians criticized their American counterparts for not being more ambitious and for being too easily intimidated by white people. The African-Americans retaliated by calling the Islanders 'monkey chasers' and ridiculing them for

> the too-bright 'West Indian colors' they wore on dress-up occasions. This was the kind of talk I heard as a girl, and I found it painful and confusing, for although I was West Indian by parentage, I was also part of the larger Afro-American culture (78).

Given its narrow focus on the Barbadian community, the issue of intra-racial conflict is secondary to *Brown Girl, Brownstones.* There are, however, some instances where Marshall does take up the issue, as in her clear assault on the *Barbadian Home Owner's Association* for its refusal to accept American blacks. Despite the Association's banner showing two black hands in a firm clasp against a yellow background, at one of their meetings, the audience disapproves of Claremont Sealey's suggestion that they should change the word 'Barbadian' for 'Negro' in the Association's logo and open their doors to "any colored person that qualify" (222). The community perceives Sealy's suggestion as subversive, and brands him as a "commonist" (223). Intermarriage is also discouraged, as seen in Agatha Steed's decision to involve her daughter in a loveless marriage rather than allow her to marry "some boy from down South" (73). The Afro-Caribbean perception of black Americans as lazy and complacent is revealed through Barbadian Seifert Yearwood's complaint that he loses his African-American clients to the clubs on Saturday nights: "I tell you, this people from down South does work for the Jew all week and give the money right back to he on Sat'day night like it does burn their hand to keep it" (38). Thus, though Marshall brings the Barbadian community and their cultural distinctiveness to the forefront in her first novel, she does not overlook the tribalism of her islanders.

In *Brown Girl, Brownstones,* therefore, we already perceive Marshall's penchant for ethnic harmony and cooperation, as well as her deployment of certain characters as agents of reconciliation between warring ethnic groups, although this is not the main point on her agenda. Miss Thomson, the only named African-American character in the novel, is a hardworking immigrant from the South who owns the beauty shop in Fulton Street, at the heart of Bed-Stuy, where she caters for the beauty needs of both black American and Afro-Caribbean women. Her conciliatory role is revealed in her exchanges with Selina, the protagonist, in her beauty shop. While Selina criticizes her mother and the Barbadian community's "dog eat dog" philosophy, Miss Thompson, who knows what it is like to be black and immigrant in white America, tries to justify the Barbadians' behaviour: "Honey, I know. West Indian peoples are sure peculiar, but you got to hand it to them, they knows how to get ahead [...] maybe some day you'll understand your moma and then you'll see why she does some of these things" (215). In her first novel, then, we already get the first intimations of Marshall's rejection of tribal solidarity for the good of the overall black community.

Let us turn now to a discussion of *The Fisher King* which, as I pointed out in the introductory section, testifies to Paule Marshall's increasing concern with the complex relations between different black communities, and manifests her penchant for fostering collaboration across ethnic lines.

Whereas intra-racial conflict is a subsidiary theme in Marshall's first novel, it becomes central to *The Fisher King*, featuring prominently in the very first chapter of the novel where the long-standing feud between the Paynes and the McCullums is foregrounded. These two families of black immigrants are paradigmatic of the two ethnic groups who added to the native black population of New York at the turn of the century and after World War I, Afro-Caribbeans and black Southerners respectively. Edgar Payne's decision to celebrate a memorial concert for his deceased brother Everett stirs the age-old feud between the "the two warring houses on Macon Street" (2000: 188), the McCullums and the Paynes, caused by their competition for success as minorities in American society as well as their perceived cultural differences despite their racial kinship, and fuelled by the marriage and elopement of their artistic children Everett Payne and Cherisse McCullum, "their homegrown Romeo and Juliet" (188), to Paris. The surviving strategists of the "[black] American-West Indian war" (51) still raging in 1984 on Macon Street are the aging heads of the Payne and McCullum households, Ulene Payne and Florence McCullum who, after more than thirty years, still blame each other for the loss of the children who should have redeemed their toils in America, but fled together to Europe instead.

Florence resorts to the all-too familiar stereotypes about Caribbeans as islanders, "monkey chasers" (38), and "money-hungry" people "always wheeling and dealing" (40), "her [Ulene] and all those other old West Indians! Came flooding in here years ago and ruined the block" (41). Here Florence is alluding to the Caribbean immigrant's propensity for renting out the rooms of their brownstones in order to pay the mortgages on them. Her statement epitomizes the native blacks' reluctance to accept the foreign blacks who joined the city's black ghettoes. Ulene, proud of her Caribbean traits, as her assertive use of the Caribbean dialect reveals, perceives Florence as an "American woman" (172). Indeed, Florence appears to be more colour-prejudiced than Ulene. When Florence sees her daughter's grandchild ?the result of prescribed African-American/Afro-Caribbean intermarriage? for the first time, she examines his face, concluding:

> He's got the McCullum eyes! There's no getting around the fact those old W.I.s [West Indians] across the street put their mark on him, poor baby, but he's got the McCullum eyes, and that's what counts! […] At one point she wiped his cheek with the tip of her finger, as if expecting the color there to come off like soot […] Who's the daddy? … African? (36).

Florence is uneasy about little Sonny's dark complexion and the Afro-Caribbean blood in him. Proud of her light complexion —"a tawny yellow-brown" (36)—, Florence personifies and identifies herself with the big magnolia tree outside her house that her father had brought from Georgia, Miss Grandiflora, who, "like all southern ladies […] never tires of attention" (119). Florence's pride makes her silence the views that black Northerners hold about black Southern immigrants and their descendants —like herself. In turn, Viney, a character in Marshall's previous novel, *Daughters,* gives us a good insight into this prejudice against Southern blacks:

> I'm kind of a foreigner myself. And I know the hard time they sometimes give us in this place. Petersburg, Virginia, that's where I am from. You see, I'd forget sometimes and come out with a y'all in class, and everybody would look at me like I just crawled out of a bale of cotton and still had lint in all my nappy hair […] I used to feel like more of a foreigner than the real ones on campus (1992: 65).

Through Florence McCullum, Marshall stirs the debate over the troubled status of the Black Southerner in Northern black ghettoes in her 2000 novel.

The rather unflattering views that Ulene and Florence continue to hold of each other's communities contradict Marshall's remarks concerning this issue in her 1985 article —which, curiously enough, is close to the year the novel is set:

> There has been a lessening of the tensions and conflicts between West Indians and black Americans in recent years […] the heightened political awareness and militancy of the last two decades has led […] to a greater emphasis on racial rather than ethnic identity, on being black rather than West Indian. This, in turn, has led to a desire to have West Indian economic success seen not as a source of rivalry but as an achievement for blacks in general (1985: 82).

As I suggested earlier, the pervasiveness of the stereotypes about Afro-Caribbeans and African-Americans well into the 1980s is also revealed in *Daughters,* which also has a mid-1980s setting. After spending about two decades in New York, Ursa complains that she is thought "pushy, arrogant, different […] monkey chaser" (1992: 210) as soon as her faint Caribbean accent is detected; her friend Viney, herself a Southern black, resorts to Ursa's alleged Britishness to account for her arrogance: "Massa really did a good job on you folks down there" (86). Yet there is a hint in Marshall's new novel that prejudice is not impervious to dilution over the generations.

Thus, even if it is true that in *The Fisher King* Marshall foregrounds the ongoing conflicts breaching the black community, at the same time she preaches the need for reconciliation. There is a suggestion in the novel that the long-standing feud between the McCullums and the Paynes is confined to the first generation

represented by old quirky Ulene and Florence, and is losing force in the new generations, represented by Edgar Payne and little Sonny.

Though portrayed as opposites, Ulene and Florence are equally dysfunctional and grotesque old women. One could picture Ulene Payne as an aged and senile Silla Boyce —the head of the Caribbean household in *Brown Girl, Brownstones*— whose zest for owning a brownstone and bringing up their children to be successful members of American society has taken a heavy toll on her, causing her to lose her beloved child Everett and to end up alone in a derelict house screaming at the now invisible roomers she once had —"'You think I own Con Edison? Damn roomers! You's more trouble than profit!'" (2000: 20). The brownstone's state of neglect parallels Ulene's own self-neglect and her frail sanity, her mind shuttling unpredictably from the present to a past peopled by memories of her arrival as an immigrant to Ellis Island in the 1920s, the hardships experienced as a domestic working for the Jews of Flatbush, and her rejection of her musical son Everett, too artistic to be accepted in an upwardly mobile community; her reproachful words "[He] Had the brass-face to come round me playing the Sodom and Gomorrah music!" (15) resonate throughout the novel. Ulene's uncombed hair and food-stained clothes clash with Florence's overdressed, "doll-like" (33) countenance, in accordance with the inlaid marble floors and oak wainscoted walls of her house. So proud is Florence of her Southern roots and the achievements of her father —a black Georgian landowner in Jim Crow times, that she appears to recreate an obsolete Southern splendour in her Brooklyn house, which otherwise conceals her own struggle as the daughter of a Southern black immigrant in the North. Both women remain unreconciled with each other and with the course events have taken, keeping the West-Indian/Black American war raging.

Edgar, Ulene's son, becomes Marshall's mouthpiece when he claims that "people in our [their] situation cannot afford that kind of divisive nonsense" (51). In fact, standing as a counterpoint to the grudge Ulene and Florence harbour against each other, is Marshall's claim that these women share more than they would like to admit. Separately, they both reminisce about their waiting at "Franklin Avenue El" at "Albemarle Road" to be hired by a Jewish woman for a day's domestic work (101, 120). Furthermore, there is a suggestion that Ulene and Florence's great-grandson Sonny will be instrumental in the reconciliation of the two families, although such resolution is beyond the scope of the novel. His uncle Edgar claims that "he's the one hopeful thing that's come out of the thirty-year war and disunity on this block" (219). Raised in Paris, Sonny's lack of prejudice —as evinced in his innocent question "What is a W. I. [West Indian]?" (43)— finds an echo in the adults surrounding him, underlining its arbitrariness and futility.

"You got some of all of us in you, dontcha? What you gonna do with all that Colored from all over creation you got in you? Better be somethin' good" (36). Surprisingly, the disappointment experienced by Florence at her great-grandson's phenotype, as we mentioned above, is tempered by her realization of the richness that all the strands that went into his making have bestowed on him. Young Sonny, whose mother Jojo was the daughter of Caribbean-American Everett and African-American Cherisse, and whose father was an African "*sanspapiers*" (79) —an illegal immigrant sent back home by French authorities— brings together the different branches of the African diaspora: Africa, the Caribbean, North America and Europe. His youth, the unawareness of American race politics thanks to his French upbringing, and the fact that both Ulene and Florence lay claim on him since it is through him that they may reach out to the children they have lost, make Sonny instrumental in the reconciliation between the McCullums and the Paynes.

3. Bedford-Stuyvesant

In accordance with her deeper analysis of New York's layered black community, Marshall pays special attention to the Brooklyn setting in her new novel. Although Brooklyn's neighbourhoods feature prominently among Marshall's American settings, in her latest novel she dwells on the Northern neighbourhood of Bedford-Stuyvesant —colloquially known as Bed-Stuy, home to the Afro-Caribbean/African-American community she first depicted in *Brown Girl, Brownstones,* and New York City's largest black neighbourhood by the 1990's. In *The Fisher King* Marshall chooses to ascribe more weight to the history of Bedford-Stuyvesant, furnishing the reader with a more in-depth portrait of the origins and development of her native neighbourhood. Founded by Dutch settlers, hence its name,[3] Bedford-Stuyvesant had been one of the most elegant neighbourhoods in the city, with its emblematic Romanesque Revival brownstones. The opening of the Brooklyn Bridge and later the construction of the A train brought a massive influx of blacks from Harlem into the area, causing the white population to leave gradually in the early decades of the twentieth century. Consequently, Bedford-Stuyvesant's black community is nowadays the biggest in New York City, larger than that of Harlem.

Ulene's remarks on the different immigrant groups taking over the neighbourhood highlight the way it was shaped:

> the Jew […] taking over Flatbush and the Gentile running from them out to Long Island. And all of them running from us [West Indian and black American alike]. A country where everybody always running from the next body feeling they's better […] one of these days they gon all run out of where-to-run (101).

Ulene's words are accurate in describing the way the neighbourhood was configured. The Jews, who had previously replaced the American white descendants of the first European settlers ("the Gentile"), were the last ones to leave Bedford-Stuyvesant for Flatbush, another neighbourhood in Central Brooklyn, as blacks moved in. Nevertheless, Ulene's remarks may also be taken as an indictment of racial politics in America, where, as Paul Gilroy would put it, different racial groups function as "national encampments", "heavily defended islands of particularity and their equally well fortified neighbours" (2001: 103) split by a gulf across which the possibility of communication is closed down.

Through Edgar Payne's business "The Three R's Group of Central Brooklyn: Reclamation. Restoration. Rebirth" and Florence McCullum's involvement in the "Landmark Conservancy Tours" venture, Marshall acquaints readers with the history and present reality of the Bedford-Stuyvesant neighbourhood. Marshall connects these institutions, albeit implicitly, with the actual *Bedford-Stuyvesant Restoration Corporation* and the *Society for the Preservation of Weeksville and Bedford-Stuyvesant* respectively.[4] Edgar displays proudly in his office a picture of himself shaking hands with Senator Robert F. Kennedy. Back in the 1960s, Edgar became involved in Kennedy's nationwide plan for rebuilding America's inner cities by rehabilitating the housing and developing community resources, pioneered by the *Bedford-Stuyvesant Restoration Corporation*. His modern "Three R's Group", however, is a flourishing real state corporation, far removed from the philanthropist spirit of Kennedy's community development policies. Despite his claim of "saving" black properties and preserving an emblematic black neighbourhood (51), Edgar perceives himself as a "Dutch burgher whose only talent is buying and selling" (90). Furthermore, Edgar is portrayed as a de-ghettoized assimilated middle-class black. Paradoxically, following mainstream trends, Edgar has preferred Long Island over central Brooklyn, where he lives somehow encamped in a magnificent house surrounded by tall trees which, Hattie perceptively observes, allow him to forget "what color his neighbors are" (149), and serves the same purpose for his neighbours.

Florence's house on Macon Street, in turn, is emblematic of the African-American experience at the turn of the nineteenth century. Her father, Gayton McCullum, migrated North from Georgia around 1889 succumbing to white pressure on black landowners during Jim Crow times. In the course of time, the McCullums became "the first Coloreds to own a house on Macon Street" (122), planting a magnolia tree in their Brooklyn front garden as a memento of their Georgian roots. Florence struggled for her family history to be acknowledged and, consequently, for the house her father had left her to be designated a historical landmark by the "Landmark Conservancy". This organization is presumably

Marshall's fictional counterpart of the *Society for the Preservation of Weeksville and Bedford-Stuyvesant,* whose mission is to preserve the buildings and disseminate information about Weeksville, a historical nineteenth century settlement of free African-Americans located at what is today Bedford-Stuyvesant. Marshall uses Florence to embody this piece of African-American history, but, in keeping with the author's disdain for black elites, Florence is made to appear a quirky and pretentious old woman.

Despite her "vivid recreation of contemporary Brooklyn" in *The Fisher King*, as a reviewer has noted (Lynch 2001: par. 9), it should be pointed out that Marshall is silent on the seamier side of her chosen setting. In fact, according to a recent report published online by the *Pratt Institute Center for Community and Environmental Development* (PICCED), Bedford-Stuyvesant suffers all the evils characteristic of American inner city areas —poverty, teen pregnancy, infant mortality, substance abuse, high crime and aids rates, and the like,[5] regardless of its status as a historical landmark within New York. In contrast, inner city problems feature prominently in *Daughters* probably Marshall's most overtly political novel, whose militant protagonist is heavily engaged in a community development project jeopardized by the corruption of the local authorities. Marshall's slightly romanticized portrait of Bedford-Stuyvesant is due to the fact that it is ethnic relations and their history, rather than politics, that concern Marshall in her latest novel.

4. Paule Marshall and Pan-Africanism

The centrality of the relations between different black ethnic communities in her latest novel is symptomatic of Marshall's increasing concern with the diaspora formed by people of African descent, as I pointed out in the Introduction. In fact, the statement by Florence I quoted at the end of Section One —"You got some of all of us in you, dontcha? What you gonna do with all that Colored from all over creation you got in you? Better be somethin' good"— is given prominence as the novel's epigraph. Marshall believes that the whole thrust of her work is to touch upon the commonalities between the African-American and the Afro-Caribbean experiences, rather than to underline what is distinctive about each of these ethnic groups. Furthermore, she sees them as one single cultural expression:

> I see similarities —they are all the same culture with some variations on the theme. That is the statement I am trying to make in my work. I have no patience with West Indian writers who feel their situation is unique and apart from the Black American experience. Similarly, I have no patience with Black American writers who feel that the Caribbean

> is exotic and curious and different. To me, it's all part of the same thing. There may be differences of expression but at the base, it's the same cultural expression [...] This is what my work is about —to bring about a synthesis of the two cultures and in addition, to connect them up with the African experience (Ogundipe 1989: 34).

Hence her tendency to portray characters who, given their mobility or their cultural hybridity, bridge different black cultures.

Thus, we may relate Sonny in *The Fisher King* to the protagonist of *Daughters* Ursa Mackenzie, the daughter of an African-American woman and a Caribbean Prime Minister. Ursa moves freely between New York City and Triunion, the fictional Caribbean island on which she was raised and where her family still lives, illustrating the patterns of *transnationalism* (Basch et al.: 1994). As a transnational, Ursa is not only involved in a project to develop a New York inner city area, but also helps to sabotage the re-election of her father, who is complicit in the American neo-colonial exploitation of Triunion. Through the heroines of *Praisesong for the Widow* (1983) and *The Chosen Place, The Timeless People* (1969), Avey Johnson and Merle Kimbona respectively, Marshall explores the connections between the different foci of the black diaspora. Avey Johnson is a wealthy African-American who awakens to her long-forgotten black self once she is exposed to black cultural practices in a cruise trough the Caribbean. Merle is a Caribbean immigrant in London who, after a stay in her native island, decides to head for Uganda to reunite herself with her African husband and their child.

Marshall's Pan-Africanist stance has been latent since the beginning of her writing carreer, but has been more overt since the publication of *Daughters*. I would now like to qualify and contextualize Marshall's Pan-Africanism, for different trends fall under this rubric, which has lately been placed under scrutiny by cultural critics and writers. Marshall's aforementioned refusal to accept the "uniqueness" of the Caribbean cultural experience, or of the African-American experience for that matter, also harmonizes with Paul Gilroy's thesis in his work *The Black Atlantic* (1999). Gilroy encourages intellectuals studying black culture "to take the Atlantic as one single, complex unit of analysis and use it to produce an explicitly transnational and intercultural perspective" (15). The creation of national canons such as the African-American or the Anglo-Caribbean to study "African diaspora cultures of America and the Caribbean" (15) is for Gilroy an act of "ethnic abolutism» which takes for granted the existence of, for instance, some «authentic African-American essence" (34). Accordingly, Gilroy criticizes the co-optation of Toni Morrison's novel *Beloved,* a black diaspora project, by the African-American literary establishment:

> much of the precious intellectual legacy claimed by African-American intellectuals as the substance of their particularity is in fact only partly their absolute ethnic property

> [...] the idea of the black Atlantic can be used to show that there are other claims to it which can be based on the structure of the African diaspora into the western hemisphere (1997:15).

Gilroy brings into his argument the recent debate over the origins of hip hop culture, an expression of black Atlantic creativity, transplanted from Jamaica to the South Bronx (33), which is now claimed as quintessentially black American.

Naturally, one cannot postulate a homogeneous Pan-African transatlantic community without reservations. Gilroy's critique of ethnic absolutisms is coextensive with his acknowledgement of the cultural heterogeneity and complexity of the black Atlantic and the complexity of the black subject —crisscrossed by class, sexual orientation, gender, and the like, very much on the same line as other contemporary identity theorists (Hall 1994, Cohen 1997) and writers.[6] Besides, in keeping with his anti-essentialist argument, Gilroy criticizes the type of Pan-Africanism that simply reverses the agents of domination. Thus, he opposes the *Africentric* outlook, whose advocates romanticise African history and culture, and set out on a blind journey into a tradition which, Gilroy warns, may imply a return to a no longer viable patriarchy (193-194). At this point it should be pointed out that the persuasiveness of Gilroy's argument is counteracted by the contradictions underlying it. One of its most blatant inconsistencies is that his readers are left to reconcile his critique of Africentricity with his praise of black nationalist thinkers who are notorious for their racial radicalism. Thus, Gilroy praises figures such as Martin Delaney, W.E.B. Du Bois or Marcus Garvey for their ability to "dissolve their African-American sensibility into an explicitly Pan-Africanist discourse" (19).[7] Early in his volume, however, Gilroy acknowledges the instability of his rubric, underlining the "heuristic" character of his concerns and the "provisionality" of his conclusions (x).

Actually, recent studies on black transnationalism (Stephens 1998, San Juan 1999) approach the struggle to produce international political and cultural conceptions of black collective identity as a response to very specific historical conditions during the opening decades of the twentieth century, namely, the exclusion of black subjects from the new world order emerging in the aftermath of World War I —nationhood, self-determination, democracy— and from the ensuing League of Nations. Indeed, Garvey's first UNIA International Convention for the Negro in 1920 was understood to be the black counterpart to the League of Nations, gathering delegates from all the black nations which had been excluded from the 1919 international peace conference (Stephens: 601). Excluded from the nation building processes of both the United States and their imperial European motherlands, Caribbean immigrants to America were forced to imagine alternatives to European nationalism.

These remarks on the strategic nature of Pan-African stances may be instructive when considering Marshall's privileging of a black collective identity over ethnic exceptionalisms, which may be understood as a strategy to negotiate her own identity as the daughter of Barbadian immigrants to the USA:

> I think that I am in a unique position. I know that people have trouble defining me as a Black American or Caribbean writer. I fall between two stools, I'm neither West Indian nor Black American. My parents were from the West Indies and they gave me a very strong sense of the culture out of which they came. That was one of the things that moulded me as a person and a writer. Yet on the other hand, I was born in Brooklyn, went to public schools and I'm very much a Black American. I have got my feet in both camps so that I am able to understand and respond to Black American culture as well as West Indian culture (Ogundipe 1989: 33).

She insists on the idea that hers is a "combined heritage [...] at once African-American, Afro-Caribbean, and to a much lesser degree American" (1973: 107). Marshall's fluid definition of cultural identity allows her to amalgamate her black American and Caribbean strands without having to tilt the balance. In the same vein as Gilroy, Marshall opposes ethnic exceptionalism, brandishing a Pan-African, diasporan sensibility that, however, unveils ethnic chauvinisms and class cleavages and conflicts within her imagined black community to a greater extent than Gilroy's.[8]

In addition to deepening her analysis of the New York black community, in *The Fisher King* Marshall extends her diasporan scope to cover the European branches of the black diaspora. In fact, her concern with the life of a black expatriate jazz musician and his family in Paris affords her a unique opportunity to connect the lives of blacks in America with those living elsewhere in the 'Old Continent'.[9]

Prior to their American sojourn, Hattie and young Sonny inhabited an immigrant Parisian ghetto at Rue Sauffroy, where a variegated black community formed after subsequent accretions of different immigrant groups. Hattie, an expatriate African-American who considers France her home and sails gracefully through the Parisian bohemian night, is perceived as "*Une Américaine noire*. A non-believer" (62) by the immigrants —both legals and *sans papiers* (61)— from former French colonies in Africa who dressed in their "long traditional djellabahs and kufi skullcaps" (62) publicize their witchcraft services on the street. Through Madame Moulineaux, a neighbour of Hattie's and Sonny's on Rue Sauffroy, we get a glimpse of French colonial history. Madame Moulineaux, old and alcoholic, clings desperately to the memory of her first husband, a native from Mali —former French Sudan, who died for his Mother Country in the Indochina War. Surprisingly, despite the colonial origin of her own husband, in her alcoholic ravings Madame Moulineaux lashes the Algerian immigrants in these terms:

> They had killed the cream of France in their stupid war and now that they were free, independent, instead of staying in the dessert where they belonged, they were pouring into la belle France […] into Paris, into *le quartier*. They had ruined it, *le quartier*. She had lived and worked there all her life and they had ruined it (66).

Madame Moulineaux takes the biased stance of the native black who has witnessed the arrival of black immigrants at the ghetto. However, for all her French chauvinism and bigotry, also evinced by the French flag hanging above her front door, Madame Moulineaux fails to stir our hatred. Her loneliness and destitution prove her love for France to be unrequited.

Marshall's thesis on the sameness of the black experience across national borders is reinforced in her depiction of the Sauffroy ghetto, which is described as "Bed-Stuy at its worst" (215). This move is reminiscent of, for instance, Ursa's juxtaposition —"double exposures […] the same thing repeated everywhere she went" (292)— of the poverty caused by the neo-colonial exploitation of Triunion by the tourism industry, and the bleakness of the ghetto she is working to rehabilitate in *Daughters*.

Marshall appears to deliver a harsher judgment on the racism inflicted by Europe than on its American counterpart. Whereas Paris and other European cities eagerly welcomed and promoted black jazz musicians who, like Everett Payne, fled American racism and the country's lack of a congenial cultural climate in the 1950s,[10] there was a racist backlash in the mid-1960s, an upsurge of French nationalism perhaps caused by the loss of Algeria earlier that decade. Thus, Everett died half destitute in the subway station in 1969, as he was being chased by policemen who accused him of being an illegal. In contrast, Edgar, Everett's brother, fared much better in Brooklyn, where he became a wealthy real estate agent. Furthermore, there is a suggestion at the end of the novel that Edgar intends to adopt little Sonny in order to give him a better life than the one awaiting him in the French ghetto where he lived before coming to New York.

5. Conclusion

The appendage of a layered Parisian black ghetto —made up of native blacks, African-American expatriates, blacks from the former French colonies, African *sans papiers*— to the diasporan map drawn by Marshall in *The Fisher King* attests to the increasing diaspora sensibility that unfolds as her novels progress. The 'European encroachment' that Marshall launches in her first novel for nine years, and for the first time in her writing career, reinforces her analysis of the similarities between black experiences across ethnic lines and geographical borders. Thus, Marshall's

voice joins the ongoing debate over Pan-Africanism and diaspora led by cultural critics like Paul Gilroy or Stuart Hall, and other black writers of Caribbean descent like Caryl Phillips. In addition, by engaging in a close study of a black New York neighbourhood, Marshall makes a strong statement on the diversity within black communities themselves, and the deeply-entrenched rifts that continue to breach different black ethnic groups over the years. As I had tried to show, *The Fisher King* enlarges upon many of the questions that Marshall had originally posed in *Brown Girl, Brownstones,* her trajectory coming full circle in the new novel.

Notes

1. Paule Marshall's literary work spans more than four decades. She chose Barbadian Brooklyn (Barbadian referring to the Caribbean island of Barbados) as the subject of her first novel, *Brown Girl, Brownstones* (1959). Her second publication, the collection of novellas titled *Soul Clap Hands and Sing* (1961), moves from "Brooklyn" to "Barbados" to "British Guiana" to "Brazil". Here Marshall works with a wide canvas that stretches from Brooklyn to Brazil, including the Caribbean, in order to examine the connections between different people in different parts of the world. Though the Caribbean figures prominently in the Marshall's next two novels, *The Chosen Place, The Timeless People* (1969) and *Praisesong for the Widow* (1983), these are more concerned with exploring the diaspora formed by people of African descent. In the same year the latter was published, a selection of short stories came out under the title of *Reena and Other Stories* (1983), which was followed by *Daughters* (1991), Marshall's forth novel. After a silence of nine years the author has published her fifth novel, *The Fisher King* (2000).

2. The terms *race* and *ethnicity* are often used interchangeably. After the fascist excesses of the 1930s and 1940s, Werner Sollors explains, race began to be discussed as ethnicity, a less loaded term (1986). For the purpose of my argument, I attach different meanings to race and ethnicity, using the latter to refer to the regional and cultural peculiarities that differentiate people belonging to the same race. The label *intra-racial* thus points to the differences and conflicts within black communities on ethnic grounds.

3. The north central Brooklyn neighbourhood of Bedford-Stuyvesant derives its name from two 19th century middle-class neighbourhoods. Bedford began as a farming hamlet in woodlands that the Dutch West India Company purchased from the Canarsee Indians in the 1600s, historians speculate it was named after the Duke of Bedford. Stuyvesant Heights bears the name of Peter Stuyvesant, director general of New Netherland during the 1600s (Blair 2003).

4. For further information about these corporations check
www.ritecenter.org/bsrchistory.html
and
www.loc.gov/bicentennial/propage/NY/ny-10_h_towns1.html.

5. For further information regarding the *PICCED* report, check wysiwyg://50/http://www.picced.org/NewDesign/ccpcb.htm.

6. See "Travel Writing and Postcoloniality: Caryl Phillips's The Atlantic

Sound" (López Ropero 2003) for an exploration of Black British writer —of Caribbean descent— Caryl Phillips's sharp critique of Pan-Africanism and contemporary black Zionist movements.

7. Pan-African movements advocate the return to Africa and the idea of a common fate for African people scattered throughout the world by the transatlantic slave trade. Some of the most prominent pan-African intellectuals and activists —Edward Blyden, Marcus Garvey and Aimé Césaire— are from the Caribbean-American community. Throughout the nineteenth century, an emergent black nationalism combined with the abolitionist ideology that eventually put an end to slavery, favoured the creation of pioneer settlements in Africa, mainly in Sierra Leone, Liberia and Kenia. These settlements were populated by African repatriates from all over the world. Edward Blyden, from the Dutch West Indies, became Liberia's Prime Minister and most distinguished citizen. After living through the abolition of slavery in the Caribbean and the Reconstruction period in US with its Jim Crow laws, Blyden became an advocate of the return idea, seeing himself as a Black Moses leading an exodus of blacks to Africa. Another important Caribbean visionary was Jamaican Marcus Garvey. In the 1920s he created the largest Pan-African organization, the *Universal Negro Improvement Association* (*UNIA*), with headquarters in Harlem, but spread all over the world. Garvey's dream was a strong and united African continent —the 'United States of Africa'— that would be respected by all nations. He also established a foothold in Liberia. The *Négritude* movement, created by Martinican Aimé Césaire —Francophone Caribbean— in 1945, drew upon all these sources, emphasizing self-pride, African heritage and a spiritual return to the homeland (Harris 1993).

8. Marshall's wish to detach herself from any specific ethnic group contrasts with the claims made on her by both the Caribbean and the African-American literary establishments. She is thus included in works as different as Emmanuel Nelson's *Contemporary African American Novelists. A Bio-Bibliographical Critical Sourcebook* (1999), Katherine Payant and Toby Rose's *The Immingrant Experience in North American Literature* (1999) or in Boyce and Fido's *Out of the Kumbla. Caribbean Women and Literature* (1990) and Simon Gikandi's *Writing in Limbo: Modernism and Caribbean* Literature (1992), although she is conspicuous by her absence in Daryl Dance's *Fifty Caribbean Writers*. Reviewers of her latest novel, who praise Marshall as one of the premier African-American voices, go so far as to dissolve the Paynes and MacCullums into one "African-American family" (Lynch 2001: par. 4).

9. The author has focused on the Caribbean and the US, mainly Brooklyn, as the setting for her novels. European settings are scarce in her fiction, with the sole exception of Merle Kimbona's non-narrated London sojourn in *The Chosen Place, The Timeless People.*

10. The novel's title comes from an Arthurian legend about a wounded king who is imprisoned in his castle, waiting for a knight to come and heal him and protect him. Marshall has acknowledged her recourse to this legend as a metaphor for the need for the community to protect the black artist (Stander 2001, par. 5).

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MY BEAUTIFUL LAUNDRETTE: HYBRID "IDENTITY", OR THE PARADOX OF CONFLICTING IDENTIFICATIONS IN "THIRD SPACE" ASIAN-BRITISH CINEMA OF THE 1980s[1]

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The aim of this essay is to interpret Stephen Frears' *My Beautiful Laundrette* (1985) as a hybrid film that explores the inescapably paradoxical quality of "third space" diaspora identifications. For that purpose, I shall first contextualise the film as an instance of mid-1980s Black British cinema discourse that somehow counteracts the homogenisation of "Black identity" imposed both by colonial discourse and by earlier Black cinema in Great Britain. Then, I shall study the way in which the film concentrates on the development of the protagonist's Asian-British "identity" and the features that position him as oscillating between two cultures.[2] Finally, I shall analyse how the film foregrounds the protagonist's "identity" as the fluid site for the interaction of the elements of ethnic difference and class, and the effects of their interrelation upon the power relations that are established between him and his white, lower-class, ex-fascist male lover.

Minority struggle requires cohesion. When the different immigrant communities in Britain started fighting for their rights, they adopted the generic term "Black" as a political category to define themselves in opposition to the white majority (cf. Mercer 1990: 55). Parallel with this, as some members of these groups gained access to the means of cinematic representation in the 1960s and 1970s, these new Black subjects-of-their-own-enunciations felt responsible for their respective communities and their "common interests". One of their prime aims was to counteract the negative representations that whites had made of them by

providing a "positive image" of their ethnic groups. Film productions of this kind were labelled as "cinema of duty" by Cameron Bailey (Malik 1996: 203), and were determined in content by what Kobena Mercer has termed the "burden of representation", i. e. "the sense that any film made by a Black film-maker has to solve all the problems of Black representation at once" (1990: 206).

Yet, cohesion frequently involves *homogenisation*. Firstly, unitarian representations of any immigrant community, of its interests and problems with an exclusive focus on the "race" issue might be seen as reinforcing the process of "racial stereotyping" of the colonised peoples carried out by colonial discourse, which "produced" those peoples "as a fixed reality which is at once an 'other' and yet entirely knowable and visible" (Bhabha in Young 1993: 143) so that they could be easily "appropriated and controlled" (Young 1993: 143). Black British film director Isaac Julien [*Territories* (1985), *Young Soul Rebels* (1991)] agrees that earlier films' exclusive focus on blackness and class in fact corroborates "the whole way that white society has looked at the black subject, as being 'other'" (1988: 57). Secondly, representations of an ethnic group as a monolithic entity inevitably bring about the *desarticulation of diversity* within the group, and silence about the existence of members within the community, like women and homosexuals, who are doubly marginalised since discrimination on account of gender and/or sexuality is added to that caused by ethnic difference. As Andrew Higson stresses, "national [and ethnic] identity is by no means a fixed phenomenon, but constantly shifting, constantly in the process of becoming. The shared, *collective identity* which is implied always *masks* a whole range of *internal differences and potential antagonisms*" (1997: 4; emphasis added).

Yet, *My Beautiful Laundrette*, released in 1985, belongs in a different context. In the 1980s, Black filmmakers started gaining wider access to production (Pines 1997: 213). This circumstance released some of them from the "burden of representation" and allowed them to counterbalance its effects by opening a space for diversity within Black representation. As Kobena Mercer puts it,

> Within the British context, the hybridised accents of black British voices begin to unravel the heteroglossia, the many-voicedness and variousness of British cultural identity *as it is lived,* against the centrifugal and centralising monologism of traditional versions of national identity (1988: 12; emphasis in the original).

It is in this move to de-essentialize "Black identity" as monolithic, and in the context of Thatcherite government's refusal "to articulate the discourse of sexuality" in its attempt to detach itself "from the sexual 'permissiveness' of the 1960s" (Hill 1999: 12-13), that a sector of the new wave of black independent film-making, in which *My Beautiful Laundrette* may be included, engaged in the

articulation of homosexual voices in the 1980s. Indeed, Kobena Mercer argues how it is "by foregrounding conflicts around gender and sexuality from black feminist and gay perspectives at the level of character" that "the story dismantles the *myth* of a *homogeneous* 'black community' and emphasises the *plurality of identities* within black society" (1988: 11; emphasis added). Indeed, the recent articulation of discordant voices from within a supposedly homogeneous community becomes a denunciation of the previous hegemonic discourses of Blackness. As Stuart Hall puts it,

> This brings to the surface the unwelcome fact that a great deal of black politics, constructed, addressed and developed directly in relation to questions of race and ethnicity, has been predicated on the assumption that the categories of gender and sexuality would stay the same and remain fixed and secured (1988: 29).

In this climate of challenge to earlier monologist notions about "identity" as stable and fixed, John Hill explains how the Kureishi/Frears films usually portray characters' identities as "constructed across different axes [...] (of race, class, gender, sexual orientation, and generation)", which are not "simply overlaid, or added on top of each other, but are themselves 'interstitial'" and locate those characters "in 'different' and complicated 'positionalities' to others" (1999: 208).

My Beautiful Laundrette's focus on the representation of Omar's "identity" and its distinctive traces is brought to the fore from the very beginning. The first scene after the credit sequence overtly points to it, as the first image depicts Omar (Gordon Warnecke) passing in front of a mirror —with the Lacanian implication that his "identity" is in the process of constitution. The next shot is a close-up of his Pakistani father's (Roshan Seth) hand pouring gin into a glass and raising the bottle to drink straight from it, followed by a close-up of a picture of Omar's white, English mother. The protagonist's family context is thus established as determining his mixed identity right from birth. Another aspect of Omar's personality is exposed right away. His homosexuality is overtly suggested by a close-up of his usually smiling face suddenly turning serious when his father, Papa, asks Omar's uncle Nasser (Saeed Jaffrey) to "try and fix him with a nice girl". As the film advances, a retrospective glance may confirm the importance of sexual orientation in the constitution of "identity", since the film begins with a scene previous to the credits presenting Johnny (Daniel Day Lewis), Omar's lover-to-be. In addition, this initial scene introduces the third factor that will play an important role in the two main characters' relative status and in their relationship: Johnny is a dispossessed squatter brutally expelled from an abandoned house by Omar's cousin Salim (Derrick Branche). Significantly, each of these shots is linked to —or set off from— the next one through the insertion of a shot of moving *trains* seen from a window in Omar's flat. Trains running in all directions might

symbolise the fluidity of Omar's hybrid "identity" as the site of conflict and struggle for predominance between his identifications as *both* a Pakistani *and* an Englishman —or as *neither* of them but as a *new* space resulting from the interaction of both. However, although trains may stand for the possibility of change and progress, their movement is always limited by the railway track; they cannot get out of the pattern that is determined before they are set in motion. To continue with the analogy, the concept of "identity" is represented as malleable only within the limits imposed by the subjects' ethnic origin, by their social and economic context and situation, and by the relations these subjects establish. The recurrent appearance of trains, indeed, calls attention to the different points of inflection in the constitution of Omar's "identity".

Kureishi and Frears' representation of Omar's "national" or "ethnic identity" as a process of negotiation of its different components may be interpreted in the light of Homi Bhabha's notion of the "third space" as a new position that emerges from the interaction of two or more "original moments" whose histories are simultaneously *displaced* and *traceable* in the subject's different "identifications" (Rutherford 1990b: 211). There is an element of individual freedom of choice implicit in this view of the (re)construction of one's hybrid "identity" that is perfectly illustrated by Iain Chambers' statement that "diverse *roots* are now displaced and transformed into particular *routes* through the present" (1990: 75; emphasis in the original). Omar's relative identifications with both his Pakistani and English heritage undergoes a process of continuous negotiation until the limits between both dissolve into his particular, individualistic *route*.

In a sense, within the context of the film, both Asian and Thatcherite ethos may be said to have much in common as regards two different issues central in Frears' film. First, the important role that the above mentioned ideological frameworks attach both to private initiative in business and economic affairs, and to the reliance on one's "own resources, avoiding as far as possible dependency on state aid" (Hand 1994: 11). And second, the centrality of "the family and its maintenance [...] not only in your personal life but in the life of any community, because this is the unit on which the whole nation is built" (Thatcher in Rutherford 1990a: 12).

Omar's identification is positioned somewhere between the two cultures — Britishness and Asianness— and varies according to his interests. He enjoys the zeal for economic enterprise and ambition typically attributed to Asian immigrants,[3] and his rise in social status is initially set in motion through help from his Pakistani relatives in London. Yet he departs from the behaviour usual in Pakistani communities, where individuals work for their families rather than for personal improvement (cf. Hand 1994: 11; Stopes-Roe & Cochrane 1990: 72).

The importance that Omar assigns to the individual highlights his British identification, as individualism is said to be "growing out of the complex religious, intellectual, scientific and economic changes in Europe of the sixteenth through the eighteenth centuries" (Stopes-Roe & Cochrane 1990: 29) —a change that "has not yet overtaken the prevailing Asian view of the relative positions of the individual and his or her immediate community" (29).

Omar's departure from the values of the Asian extended family in economic matters goes hand in hand with a stronger transgression against the rules of this institution: the rejection of the Pakistani tradition of the arranged marriage on account of his love for Johnny. The implicit association between the two transgressions is established in Omar's first visit to Salim's house. Left alone in his Mafia-type cousin's living room, Omar unknowingly plays a video concerning some illegal business of Salim's. What makes the connection overt is the self-conscious manner in which the scene is presented. The purpose of the sequence is not to show the viewer where Salim's enormous economic success stems from, as the television screen only offers grey lines moving up and down. It stands as a background symbol of Omar's intrusion in family affairs, since the TV set appears behind Omar's head while he uses Salim's phone in his search for Johnny —the same Johnny who, thanks to Omar, gained entry to family. Indeed, Salim will be equally enraged by both acts of defiance on his cousin's part. Transgression of paternal rules goes hand in hand with unintentional aggression when Papa is hurt as Omar's attention is suddenly diverted by Johnny's phone call when he is cutting his father's toe nails. Omar also defies his uncle Nasser, to whom he owes his entrance in the world of business, when he receives his dowry on getting engaged to Nasser's daughter Tania (Rita Wolf) —whom he never marries. The association between Omar's unscrupulous personal ambition, his relationship with Johnny and disrespect for his ethnic network is most conspicuous when he steals the cocaine hidden in a false beard that Salim had told him to fetch from the airport. The money they get from Johnny's sale of the drug is invested in the improvement of the laundrette. Omar's attitude is daring —and dangerous— as he not only steals the cocaine but also goes to Salim's house wearing the empty beard and waits until his cousin discovers the fraud. The subsequent shots graphically show Omar's present position with respect to his community. Salim and Omar are reflected together on a big mirror, but a line separates the two reflected figures: Salim appears *within* his room, while the line that sets them off turns out to be the reflection of the *doorframe* that shows Omar's location behind it, *outside* his relative's room. Omar's in-between-ness is underlined as Salim threatens him in the corridor —a place of transition— while Omar is moving away from the room, the door of which is slammed behind him, towards the street door, under the

amazed stare of Salim's wife Cherry (Souad Faress) —who had stated earlier that she was "sick of hearing about these in-betweens, [and that people] should make up their minds where they are". In fact, it is in a metaphorical "in-between" space that Omar accommodates the new identifications he is creating for himself. And the laundrette, where both his ambition and his relationship with Johnny acquire strength and significance, is activated as an emblem for that "new beginning" in Omar's character from the moment he decides to destroy everything inside the place in order to build it anew with Johnny's help.

An interesting aspect of Omar's relationship with Johnny is that the film renders it transgressive not because the two men are homosexual but because it leads Omar to reject the Pakistani tradition of marrying a member of his family. Perhaps his challenge is less dangerous than it might be; for someone living in London, Asian traditions seem to be looser than they would be in smaller areas, as the fact that the wedding was not arranged in an orthodox fashion suggests (cf. Stopes-Roe & Cochrane 1990: 30). Yet he is all the same defying his father and uncle's authority and thus putting in danger their "izzat" ("the family's reputation, its prestige, honour, good name" [75]),[4] and risking the withdrawal of community support (49) —something we never know, because Nasser finds out only at the end of the film. Omar's attitude at the level of emotional relations therefore defines him more clearly as being "English" rather than as "Asian" since, according to Felicity Hand, the deliberate choice of one's partner is "one of the sure signs of integration into English life" (1994: 10).

Despite the subversive power attached to Omar's and Johnny's mutual feelings in the film, homosexuality itself is never questioned or turned into an issue. Rather, it is "naturalised" or presented as just as natural —if problematic— an option as a Pakistani boy's attraction to a white English girl might be. The emphasis lies on the fact that the "object" of Omar's choice is *English*. The significance of his refusal of the Asian custom of marrying within his ethnic group is subtly foregrounded by the passing of trains every time he meets or talks about Johnny.[5]

The protagonists' homosexuality is visually enhanced and projected onto some elements of the *mise-en-scène*: they paint the *façade* of the laundrette pale blue — the "gay colour" *par excellence*. And the *pastel colours* inside and on the washing machines are conventionally associated with male homosexuals as well, as these are not considered "masculine" colours by the heterosexist ideology that tends to conflate and confuse the categories of gender and sexuality (cf. Dyer 1993: 31). Moreover, this display of mild, blended colours marks a contrast between the men's idyllic, romantic space of the laundrette and the aggressive atmosphere outside. Yet, this "gay space" is created without causing any trouble as such, since there is no homophobic tinge in any of the attacks represented in the film.

What *is* overtly foregrounded and turned into an issue is the problematic arising from ethnic difference. The xenophobic racist violence embodied in the attitude and aggressions on the part of Johnny's National Front friends toward Omar's family is a constant in the film. This foregrounding of inter-ethnic tension prepares the setting for the exploration of Omar's more profound inner conflicts. Omar's feelings towards his boyfriend are depicted as being in a state of constant development, varying and increasing in ambivalence as his economic status improves. John Hill argues that the film marks a clear contrast between "an unemployed white 'lumpenproletariat', or 'underclass' (the victims of deindustrialization) [Johnny's National Front friends], who aimlessly wander the streets, and an Asian business class who have succeeded in becoming the new 'masters'" (1999: 211; my interpolation), and that this division "invert[s] old imperial power relations" (210).

Yet, this reversal of roles is more complex as it materialises in Omar's and Johnny's ongoing relationship. When they first meet in the film, the car in which Omar and his family are travelling is being assaulted by Johnny's fascist friends. Johnny is on the dole and Omar has just become a car-cleaner. Their relative positions in the socio-economic ladder are not distant, though Johnny's whiteness places him in a position of social privilege, as his higher location in the frame suggests. Besides, the extradiegetic "romantic" music that accompanies Omar in his journey from the car towards Johnny, as well as the former's admiring expression, provide a sense of closeness and balance that is reinforced by the fact that their conversation is shown in shot/reverse-shots that include both of them in the frame.[6] Omar's innocent, sincere admiration and love for his (still) only friend is reasserted by a close up of his bright smile and sparkling eyes the first time Johnny phones him, and by his eagerness to meet him again.

Significantly, Omar's attitude changes as soon as he is promoted to laundrette manager. Omar's statement that "much good can come from fucking" just after he hires Johnny as his employee and before using him to sell the cocaine he steals from Salim, somehow suggests how Omar intends to profit financially from his relationship with his now subordinate lover. Only a bit later does Omar become *aware* of the paradoxical position he holds in his emotional identification with Johnny. Omar suddenly gets serious when, after kissing Johnny in the car, the latter asks him about Papa and declares that he wants to forget his fascist past and previous ill treatment of both Omar and his relatives. In-between self-consciousness is rendered explicit in Omar's reaction when he returns home: after caressing Papa's face, he drinks from his father's bottle of gin (an index of Papa's frustration, provoked by English hatred of Black immigrants) and then throws it at the passing trains. The English/Pakistani young man directs towards the

symbol of his shifting fluid identifications, his rage against his own contradictory feelings, which have made him forget about the past "race problem" and his inescapable identification as a non-white in a white xenophobic place. Yet, Omar's positionality can never be unambiguous, and his paradoxical state of mind is emphasised by the loud extradiegetic music that accompanies the whole scene — the "romantic" tunes that heightened his emotions in the first meeting with Johnny. Omar's new awareness thus arouses his desire to take revenge on Johnny. Having gained economic power through family help and personal ambition, Omar verbalises his pride on how the roles have been reversed. After reproaching Johnny with the way he and his friends kicked him around at school, Omar regretfully adds: "And what are you doing now? Washing my floor!"

However, despite his will to assert his power over his repentant aggressor, Omar's character is once again portrayed as inevitably paradoxical, torn between his need to avenge the pain inflicted upon his relatives and his love for Johnny. The film's focus on his "identity" as a site of conflicting identifications is once again brought to the fore when his image is reflected in a mirror in a particularly tense scene: Omar has just shouted at Johnny in his bedroom that he is fired unless he returns to the laundrette immediately, and then turns his back on Johnny and stares through a window. We can see both Omar's face in close-up and his reflection in the mirror while he holds back his tears. His pain may betray regret for ill-treating the man he loves *or* anger at Johnny's fascist attitude in the past *or* self-hatred for loving him in spite of their past... We never know —as perhaps Omar does not, either.

My Beautiful Laundrette thus presents Omar's feelings as inescapably uncertain and contradictory and refuses to provide any definitive answer to any of the questions it raises. Rather, the film parallels in its formal construction the ambiguities upon which Omar's hybrid identifications are constantly re-negotiated. The film's concern with the nature of "identity" as being always in the process of construction and transformation goes hand in hand with its self-consciousness about the constructed nature of film discourse. In keeping with this idea, John Hill defines Frears and Kureishi's film as a "generic hybrid" (1999: 217) which "both carr[ies] on a tradition of 1960s social realism and deviate[s] from it" (205).[7] Hill describes this new kind of realism as characteristic of British films in the 1980s and points to its innovation in terms of both content and form. Taking on Raymond Williams' views on this "new realism", Hill suggests that innovation in content involves, most outstandingly, the "inclusion of hitherto 'invisible' social groups" (135). This, he goes on, allows for "a 'new' politics of difference which seeks to recognise the plurality of lines of social tension and social identities characteristic of modern societies: not just those of class but gender,

ethnicity, and sexual orientation" (135). For its part, the traditional concern of English documentary realism with the representation and criticism of social conditions extends to the film's portrayal of Thatcherite capitalism, unemployment, squatting, and inter-ethnic conflict, as well as its "chillingly real [...] recollection of the marches in the early Eighties, of the neo-Nazi National Front skinheads (who specialised in 'Paki bashing')" (Fuller 1988: 65).

However, social realism blends in *My Beautiful Laundrette* with features characteristic of other film genres. The love story of Omar and Johnny follows the pattern of traditional romantic comedies: two people fall in love, get together after overcoming a series of obstacles, quarrel, make it up and live happily ever after. Yet, these conventions are simultaneously undermined by the facts that the couple is homosexual, and that the ending is more ambiguous than "happy". There are also some echoes of slapstick comedy, like Omar's clumsiness and tendency to fall over when Nasser first instructs him about business in Britain. And, as Hill points out, a gangster element "in the plot-line concerning the drug-dealing of Salim (and the iconography of his house)" (217).

At the formal level, Frears' film makes use of certain mechanisms of representation borrowed from European "art cinema" (cf. Hill 1999: 65). Particularly in its attempt to develop a new kind of "realism", not as the viewer is used to understanding it due to the hegemony of Hollywood conventions, but as a representation of experience *as it is perceived* by the human eye. This is achieved, for instance, through the presence or movement of obstacles —objects, walls, people— between the camera and its target, or through the use of uneasily long shots instead of "artificial" Hollywood editing techniques. Moreover, this break with the conventions of realist discourse has ideological consequences. According to Homi Bhabha, "colonial power [...] employs a system of representation, a regime of truth, that is structurally similar to realism" for stereotyping the colonised (cf. Chambers 1990: 26). Thus, the film's self-conscious formal experimentation poses a challenge to colonial power of representation, and also to the "cinema of duty" produced in previous decades for the opposite purpose but with equally flattening result (cf. Mercer 1988: 11). As Julian Henriques puts it,

> A break with realism allows [...] the possibility of dealing with the issue of contradiction. [...] If reality is contradictory, if we feel different feelings at the same time (funny and serious, for example), if at any moment we can appreciate opposite forces at work, then the language of realism breaks down. [...] What the imaginative contradictory world of *Laundrette* points to is the possibility of change. *It is only when reality is taken as being full of contradictory tendencies and forces* [...] *that there can be any place for struggle*. Once we break with realism's notion that reality is really just one thing that can be more or less adequately represented then criticism and progress become possible (1988: 19; emphasis added).

The multiple, contradictory character of "reality" is further reflected in the opening of the laundrette. The dramatic tone of the shots that depict Tania's argument with her father's English mistress Rachel (Shirley Anne Field) alternates with the comic shots of Nasser telling Omar to marry Tania, and Omar's funny grins when his uncle asks him whether his penis works or not, after he has been making love with Johnny just before the opening of the laundrette. The contrasting reactions which the sequence brings out in the viewer foregrounds the generic hybridity of the film in its blending of humour and melodrama. Likewise, the paradoxical nature both of the "integration" of the Pakistani community in England and of inter-generational conflict within the Pakistani family are reasserted as the film approaches the end. First, Nasser's defence directed to Papa of England as their home and "a little heaven" where, unlike their homeland, religion does not interfere with business, is countered by a simultaneous sequence in which Salim is brutally attacked by members of the National Front who also smash the laundrette window. And, furthermore, Nasser's reassurance that Omar will marry Tania is countered as Nasser and Papa unexpectedly witness the woman's sudden disappearance and implied escape behind the moving trains.

Similarly, the film eventually refuses to solve the conflictual relationship between Omar and Johnny after Johnny is beaten up by his former friends in his attempt to defend Salim. The end, totally open and ambivalent, just reasserts the state of hybrid and inter-ethnic identifications as inescapably unstable and paradoxical.

To sum up, *My Beautiful Laundrette* may be described as a mid-1980s British-Asian film that escapes the "burden of representation" that characterised earlier Black British cinema in two main ways. Firstly, through the representation of the British-Asian protagonist as a homosexual with a "Thatcherite" entrepreneurial drive, the film subverts the notion of the Black community as the homogeneous entity which the "cinema of duty" set out to portray in its attempt to fight for the whole group's "common interests". And then, the film's generic and technical hybridity breaks with the "realism" of those earlier films and, through its representation of "reality" as fragmentary, relative and contradictory, creates a space for the questioning of received notions of "identity". Thus, the British-Asian protagonist is represented in his individualistic struggle as reconstructing his sense of "identity" out of the traces he finds most convenient from each of the different cultures that inform his ethnic hybridity.

Finally, the film's emphasis lies most conspicuously on its portrayal of hybrid "identity" as a site of conflict between the individual's different national identifications. Thus, through its contrast between comic and dramatic scenes, as well as through the non-resolution of the protagonist's ambivalent attitude towards his white ex-fascist partner, the film highlights the paradoxical nature of an "identity" inevitably slipping away between two worlds.

Notes

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[2]. Throughout the paper I shall use inverted commas to enhance my view of the notion of "identity" as a fluid site of conflicting axes always-already immersed in a process of construction and self-deconstruction.

[3]. The Asian-British entrepeneurial impulse may be read in the light of Chambers' idea that "black or Asian people can be acceptable to Mrs. Thatcher and much of the Conservative party if they respect a particular sense of "Britishness". [...] They are expected to become the mirror of a homogeneous, white Britain; the invisible men and women of the black diaspora and the post-colonial world who are *required to mimic* their allotted roles in the interpretative circle to which they have been assigned" (1990: 28; emphasis added). This assumption is confirmed in the film by Salim's remark that he and Nasser will get Omar out of the dole queue to enter family business, "and Mrs. Thatcher will be happy with me".

This tendency to mimic the official ideology, imposed upon the immigrant subject to allow for integration in the host society has two different implications in *My Beautiful Laundrette*. First, it represents a threat to British domination, as the Asian community seems to enjoy greater economic success than the white British represented in the film. And second, the distinction between Thatcherite and Asian business policies is blurred to such an extent that it is hard to decide which one Omar is so successfully imitating.

[4]. According to the research carried out by Mary Stopes-Roe and Raymond Cochrane, "young Asians justified obedience in themselves by reference to valued parental attributes, their caring and concern, the work and effort they put into the family and its welfare" (1990: 33). So, Omar's behavior may not be so censurable even from a Pakistani perspective, as Papa is presented as an alcoholic unable even to cut his toe nails. And Nasser, a more positive father figure in every other respect, is unfaithful to his Pakistani wife —as many Pakistani men are, given their double standard of morality (cf. Hand 1994: 10).

[5]. When Omar and Johnny first meet on the street, Salim's car is stationary because trains are passing. Trains also appear in the background when Omar tells Papa that he has seen Johnny and then that he has been promoted from Nasser's garage to his laundrette. Both elements, Omar's economic ambition and Johnny, are linked and highlighted here. And also when the two men kiss and Omar reminds Johnny of the fascist marches he joined in in the past.

[6]. This framing technique is meaningfully replaced by a conventional shot/reverse-shot sequence —in which each shot shows only one of the two characters— as soon as the neo-Nazi gang approaches the two men. The separation implied by this slight formal variation very subtly introduces one of the main ingredients of the protagonist's paradoxical ethnic identifications and of his contradictory feelings as regards his relationship with his friend: Johnny's earlier racism.

[7]. *My Beautiful Launderette* is hybrid even in the human component of its production, as script-writer Hanif Kureishi is a third generation British-Pakistani, and director Stephen Frears is an Englishman (cf. Henriques 1988: 17).

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SERIAL MURDER, SERIAL CONSUMERISM: BRET EASTON ELLIS'S *AMERICAN PSYCHO* (1991)[1]

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Bret Easton Ellis's *American Psycho* (1991) features a very characteristic figure in US popular culture —the serial killer— and, formally, it mixes popular genres and the language of different media. Mass culture is inextricably linked to the concept of seriality since talk shows, daily news, advertisements, pop music and magazines, among other mass culture products, are consumed in a serial and repetitive way. They rely on a structure known to the audience, which results in feelings both of reassurance and anticipation. In *American Psycho* mass culture references constantly appear and serve as a linking structure to the sixty short chapters into which the book is divided. As part of this seriality we find the consumerist patterns followed by the main character, a serial killer called Patrick Bateman, who consumes in all possible ways: buying, eating and destroying. The three forms of consumption are produced in series, the text thus building a close link between the seriality of the serial killer and the seriality of mass culture, a link that may account for the interest aroused by the figure of the serial killer in Western societies, and especially in US society.

American Psycho is to be understood within the literary context that has favoured its creation: Ellis belongs to a generation of writers that Elizabeth Young and Graham Caveney (1992) have called the "blank generation", a generation that includes Jay McInerney, Joel Rose, Tama Janowitz, Dennis Cooper or Susanna Moore, authors who became especially prominent in the USA during the 80s and

90s. The subject-matter of their novels is usually violence, indulgence, sexual excess, decadence, drugs, consumerism and commerce which they deal with through dense plots and elaborate styles but in a flat, affectless, atonal prose. Characters are usually undeveloped, something characteristic of our postmodern culture where "character" "comes to us in wraiths, projections, pastiche, mutating entities, archetypes, comic cut-outs and intertextual refugees from history, film, fiction and myth" (Young 1992a: 20). These novels are urban in focus and are loaded with images of the excesses of New York in the 80s: the world of cocaine, Wall Street, exotic eateries and expensive major-label suits (Annesley 1998: 5). This was a decade of extreme conspicuous consumption for rich, status-conscious yuppies, which increased the gap between them and the underprivileged masses. Even though not all blank fiction writers deal with yuppies, all of them point out the specifics of time and place, and are in direct relation to the social, cultural and political dynamics of late 20th century US life. This direct relation is especially seen in their use of products, personalities, places and mass cultural references of the time. They write about the reality they live in, freely incorporating plain language and mass culture into their writings, since, as Elisabeth Young believes, "their entire lives have been lived out within a milieu wherein art and pop music, advertising, films and fiction have always been inextricably intertwined, inseparable one from the other" (1992a: 14).

In blank fiction we see a mixture and use of styles characteristic of popular and mass culture, such as that of advertisements, cinema, TV or music. Several critics have noticed how blank fiction and literature in general have progressively adopted features corresponding to mass-cultural forms, although, of course, this use of non-literary materials in literature is not something new: Edgar Allan Poe included newspaper accounts in his Dupin stories and non-literary materials were also used by a number of 20s and 30s Modernists. The originality of these writers lies in the fact that apart from incorporating mass culture materials, they also make of them literary forms, transcoding their style into narrative prose. In this respect, Ellis's first novel, *Less than Zero* (1985), was classified by many critics as an "MTV novel" (Freese 1990: 68-85). The style of Music Television "with its incessant flow of video clips, its devotion to glittering surfaces, its limitation to the immediate present, and the reduction of its 'stories' to the short attention span of contemporary youth" (1990: 69) had found a verbal equivalent in the narrative style of the novel. *Less than Zero* is a 208 page novel, divided into 108 very short chapters, thus limiting the attention span demanded for each chapter. The narrated events are very superficial: they include partying, watching TV, eating out, shopping, taking drugs or having sex, and their time and space constantly change, mirroring the rapid sequence of video clips which are shown on MTV. Apart from the specific case of MTV, for Philip E. Simmons the common

procedures seen in blank and postmodern fiction are all also found within contemporary film and television: "ontological disruption, mixing of high and popular styles; pastiche and parody of genres and of methods of representing history, and a continual disruption of representational conventions" (1997: 8). He claims that certain features of our mass culture correspond to the formal features of some literary manifestations. In a way, and maybe due to our global, image-driven, electronic culture, we are witnessing a progressive approach of the languages of mass culture —cinema, television, radio, popular music and consumer culture— to the world of literature. Simmons might be right when he affirms that mass culture has become our "cultural dominant", the force field in which all forms of representation, including the novel, must operate (1997:2).

The influence of mass culture can be seen in blank fiction's interest and use of surfaces. For David Harvey this concern with surface is partly due to the shaping role of television. It seems that the average US citizen is reputed to watch television for more than seven hours a day and this has left its mark on postmodern and blank fiction. The era of mass television explains the attachment to surfaces, instead of roots, to collage rather than to in-depth work, to superimposed quoted images instead of worked surfaces, and to a collapsed sense of time and space (1989: 61). Thus, blank fiction's fixation on appearances and surfaces may be partly explained by this influence of mass culture and television. The fact that blank fiction's language resonates with references to commercial culture and surfaces has aroused the suspicion of some literary critics, who have dismissed it as lightweight and as a means of strengthening contemporary capitalist structures and of promoting further consumption.[2] Both Elizabeth Young (1992) and James Annesley (1998) have defended blank fiction writers from these accusations and have studied the ways in which their use of mass culture and consumerism provides a critique of contemporary social practices and lifestyle as it discloses a ruined society. Blank fiction writers have an exceptionally sophisticated apprehension of the excesses of our culture and show them from within. Since their way of proposing a social critique varies in form and degree with each writer, in this paper I will concentrate on one of them, Bret Easton Ellis, since he has been one of most controversial US writers to emerge in the last decades.

An important opening question that springs to mind is the way in which Ellis's fiction has been influenced by television. When asked about it Ellis said:

> Media has informed all of us, no matter what art form we pursue, whether painters or musicians. TV has unconsciously, whether we want to admit it or not, shaped all of our visions to an inordinate degree. How? I don't know. I couldn't give you specifics. Is it good or bad? I don't know. I think it just is (Ellis in Amerika and Laurence 1994: 1).

As we can see, Ellis is very conscious of the influence that TV has exerted on his generation but he does not judge this influence as something negative, he is simply aware of its significance. He uses the media and denies that this is detrimental to literature. When asked about the origins of the plain language he uses in his novels he answers:

> I would say from seeing a shitload of movies, reading a ton of books, watching enormous hours of television, and having it all soak in. If for some reason you want to be a writer, that's where the ear comes from. I don't know what other reference points there were when I was growing up. It was books, movies, TV and rock and roll (Ellis in Amerika and Laurence 1994: 2).

Ellis's main influence is then popular and mass culture. For James Annesley, the range of mass cultural references that blank fiction writers use positions this fiction very precisely in a particular time and place. The sense of context is not developed through detailed descriptions but through the texts' incorporation of the commercialised products of a particular epoch. Thus, blank fiction does not simply depict its own period but "it speaks in the commodified language *of* its own period" (1998: 7). In fact, the very language and style of these novels is influenced by mass culture. As Young has pointed out, blank generation writers do not have a memory of a clear demarcation between high and low typical of the pre-sixties world. Thus, they blur the boundary between both high and low culture because, through their own experience, they have never seen that difference (1992a: 14).

Bret Easton Ellis's most controversial and representative work is *American Psycho* (1991), a novel which clearly illustrates this influence of mass culture in blank fiction literature. *American Psycho*'s subject-matter is taken from popular literature. Its main character is a rich white heterosexual yuppie called Patrick Bateman. Although Bateman seems to be a successful man perfectly integrated in society, he is actually a sexist, racist, and xenophobic serial killer. Bateman himself narrates all the events portrayed in the novel, deploying the same flat tone to describe both his daily routine and his horrific killings. In a narration overcharged with details we learn of his favourite television talk shows, magazines, films, cosmetic products and preferred ways of torturing people. The book could be an example of popular horror, if it were not for the fact that it is filled with references to the theoretical constituents of postmodern culture. Thus, Elizabeth Young underlines the presence in the novel of "the commodity fixation, the focus on image, codes and style, the proliferation of surfaces and the deindividualization of neo-fogey characters who 'play' with the past —'I'm pro-family and anti-drug'— and in doing so embody irony and paradox" (1992b: 121).

The narrative rhythm in the novel is marked by two intertwined forms of seriality: the seriality of Bateman's never-ending killings, and Bateman's serial consumerism

of surrounding mass culture. Curiously enough, these two forms of seriality were in the mind of the FBI special agent Robert Ressler when he coined the term serial killer in the mid-1970s: on the one hand, we have the British designation of "crimes in series": a series of crimes committed in a fairly repetitive way: on the other hand we find the repetitive rhythm of many mass cultural representations. As Ressler explains:

> [...] also in my mind were the serial adventures we used to see on Saturday at the movies [...] Each week you'd be lured back to see another episode, because at the end of each one was a cliff-hanger. In dramatic terms, this wasn't a satisfactory ending, because it increased, not lessened the tension. The same dissatisfaction occurs in the mind of serial killers (in Seltzer 1998: 64).

Thus, Ressler was thinking of adventure serials when he coined the label serial-killing. Along this line, we might postulate that part of the pleasure that US audiences get out of consuming serial killer narratives derives from the way serialised homicidal crimes seem so well-adapted to mass cultural forms. For Richard Dyer it is only under capitalism that seriality became an important structure in cultural productions. It started with the serialisation of novels and cartoons, then it spread to news and movie programming (1997: 14). It is obvious that the serial novels popular in the 19th century have given way to the serial television shows of the late 20th century. In fact, seriality has become the main structure of television, constantly interweaving serial strands, whose orchestration is known as scheduling.

Cultural critic John Ellis reduces the system of television to segments, which are:

> [...] small sequential unities of images and sounds whose maximum duration seems to be about five minutes. These segments are organised into groups, which are either simply cumulative, like news broadcast items and advertisements, or have some kind of repetitive or sequential connection, like the groups of segments that make up the serial or series. Broadcast TV narration takes place across these segments, characteristically in series or serials which repeat a basic problematic or dilemma rather than resolving it finally (1992: 112).

Apart from advertisements, news, promotional material and title sequences, most programmes are themselves composed of a number of segments: that is the case of series and serials. The serial provides a narrative progression and conclusion, whereas the series (fictional or non-fictional) does not. The fictional series (everlasting soap operas, situation comedies...) revolve around a situation and a group of characters, while the non-fictional ones (documentaries, news programmes, chat shows, sports programmes...) have a recurring format and a set of routines which provide a framework of expectancy. Both series and serials are "a form of continuity-with-difference that TV has perfected" (Ellis 1992: 123).

Through scheduling the segments are arranged, thus producing a repetitive regular slot.

Seriality and climactic moments are marketing devices deployed by these television series so as to defer the moment when all plot lines reach an all-embracing ending. Once this happens the programme is given the label of "complete" and its cancellation takes place. The serial killer kills on and on and does not want to be given the label of "complete" either, which would imply that he is caught or dead.[3] His killing in series has a similar structure to the TV series and to the mass media structure. Thus, it is not surprising that the serialised media and the serialised killings converge in the pathological interest of many real serial killers to attain media fame. They kill precisely in order to see themselves mass produced and "serialised" in the newspapers and television reports about them.[4] The serial killer formula combines the structure of the serial and that of the series. The killer kills in series and apparently in a disconnected way. Each new killing creates a framework of repetition and expectancy for the audience, and ultimately the serial killer formula becomes a serial when the series of murders shows that there is a pattern behind them that explains the choice of victims and the nature of the killer. The narrative is completed with the arrest or death of the killer. In this way, the formula combines the attractive aspects of the series with the reassuring ones of the serial.

For readers and viewers the sources of pleasure in the serial killer formula are many and varied. Dyer argues that people have always been conscious of the pleasures provided by series so that throughout history, bards, jongleurs, griots and yarnspinners have all long known and used seriality to leave their listeners wanting more (1997: 14). The series provides an attractive mixture of repetition and anticipation, since the audience always craves for more and the structure makes them anticipate the continuation of the story. The serial structure also provides pleasure, since the knowledge that there is usually a pattern emerging from the choice of victims and from the moment and way they were killed makes the audience anxious to know who the next victim will be and why. This serial structure also guarantees the promise of closure that will infuse the whole narration with a final meaning. Accordingly, an important aspect, and notable pleasure, of the serial-killer fictional narrative is not only its structure in series but its serial structure.

The case of *American Psycho* is more complex since Patrick Bateman, the serial killer in the novel, kills in series, but the series of murders does not lead anywhere. Every new killing sheds no light on Bateman's motivations and, since he murders rich and poor people, children, homosexuals, men and women, it becomes difficult to find a pattern in the killings. The reader cannot guess who the next

victim will be or where the murder will take place. Even Bateman's confession seems futile. After reflecting on his reasons for slaying people and a possible explanatory confession he ends by saying:

> [...] and coming face-to-face with these truths, there is no catharsis. I gain no deeper knowledge about myself, no new understanding can be extracted from my telling. There has been no reason for me to tell you any of this. This confession has meant *nothing*... (1991: 377).

There is no ending to Bateman's killings, which go on and on, in a sequence replicating the way most television series are broadcast nowadays.

The thematic and structural significance of different forms of seriality within the novel seems to demand that close attention be paid to the devices used in order to highlight the notion and the practice of seriality. To further understand these forms of seriality I am going to use Mark Edmundson's *Nightmare on Main Street: Angels, Sadomasochism, and the Culture of Gothic* (1997). In this book Edmundson interprets our culture as a culture of the Gothic where serialised forms of the Gothic world have entered and are part of our social practices and mass culture. As corollary of the Gothic world, Edmundson also perceives a parallel social tendency towards its complete opposite, what he calls "easy transcendence", which constitutes "a vacation, a few hours away from more pressing Gothic fears" (1997: 76-77). On the one hand, Gothic is now present not only in Stephen King's novels or Quentin Tarantino's films, it is present in politics, in media renderings of the O. J. Simpson case, in TV news, in the environmental debates, etc. On the other hand, easy transcendence is seen through films like *Forrest Gump*. If we are made what we are by traumas, *Forrest Gump* provides a trauma-free past, the opportunity to experience the freedom of a life without traumas. It is not simple escapism, it also contains the Gothic pressures that surround us while denying their power, reassuring us. Other forms of pop transcendence are angels (whose image has been lately mass-produced and printed on all sorts of objects), TV, celebrities, advertisements, etc. The non-fictional Gothic and the world of pop-transcendence include forms of repetitive and serialised mass culture and these forms become key aspects of *American Psycho* where the examples of pop transcendence are mixed with the examples of pop Gothic and serial killings. Thus, the flow of the novel is based on a sophisticated structure infused with the rhythm established by mass culture and consumerism in contemporary society.

The world of pop Gothic in the novel is represented by *The Patty Winters Show*, a parody of *The Oprah Winfrey Show*, where different traumas are aired every day: raped women, men with cancer, abortions and the like. The sensationalist and morbid orientation of television talk shows has led Linda S. Kauffman to doubt

whether *American Psycho* is really more "psycho" than their average topics. To prove her point she quotes a 1991 *Time* article on television talk shows which charted the formula for a successful ratings sweep: "handicapped sex addicts married to organ donors" (in Kauffman 1998: 245). This is a formula not so different from the one used in *American Psycho*: "unwed sex addict serial killer, who murders prostitutes, in love with Whitney Houston" (246). A possible formula for a successful talk show becomes the subject-matter of the book. Furthermore, the afternoon talk show becomes a repetitive obsession for Bateman: nearly all the chapters in the novel start with a brief summary of the programme's topic of the day. He records the programme if he cannot watch it, and when summer comes and the shows are all repeats he reacts very strongly: "Life remained a blank canvas, a cliché, a soap opera. I felt lethal, on the verge of frenzy. My nightly bloodlust overflowed into my days and I had to leave the city. My mask of sanity was a victim of impending slippage" (279). *The Patty Winters Show* provides his life with a rhythm and when the rhythm is broken by the programmes' lack of unpredictability (the repeats are already known to Bateman), his own life is disrupted and he risks revealing his hidden nature. He goes on holiday to the Hamptons with Evelyn, his girlfriend, but he cannot stand the tempo imposed by the countryside and decides to go back home when he discovers himself "standing over our bed in the hours before dawn, with an ice pick gripped in my fist, waiting for Evelyn to open her eyes" (282). With his return to the city returns *The Patty Winters Show* with the topic "People Who Weigh Over Seven Hundred Pounds —What Can We Do about Them?" (283) and it is not casual that the return of the programme should coincide with the continuation of Bateman's murders: in the same chapter in which *The Patty Winters Show* reappears Bateman has sex with, tortures and kills two girls called Elizabeth and Christie.

The media also tell "Gothic tales" or horror stories. This is what Bateman reads in the *Post*:

> The *Post* this morning says the remains of three bodies that disappeared aboard a yacht last March have been recovered, frozen in ice, hacked up and bloated, in the East River; some maniac is going around the city poisoning one-liter bottles of Evian water, seventeen dead already; talk of zombies, the public mood, increasing randomness, vast chasms of misunderstanding (383).

The *Post* comes out everyday, so readers can read this horrific news day after day, following it, wondering whether the murderer of the three people who disappeared aboard a yacht last March will be found and whether the maniac that poisons Evian water will be caught. Television news also repeats terrifying events endlessly, something Bateman himself seems to be aware of:

> There were four major air disasters this summer, the majority of them captured on videotape, almost as if these events had been planned, and repeated on television endlessly. The planes kept crashing in slow motion, followed by countless roaming shots of the wreckage and the same random views of the burned, bloody carnage, weeping rescue workers retrieving body parts (278).

The gory event is turned into a series by its constant repetition on the news and in spite of its gory nature (or maybe because of it) people are eager to watch it, even in slow motion. They want to know more and they watch the news every day to find out what really happened. At the end of each programme they know there will be another day, same time, when their questions may finally find an answer.[5] Through the news, US Americans consume murder as a daily fare: quoting Edmundson, "Local TV news gives over more than 50 percent of its air-time, on average, to covering crime and disaster". It is not only the news that shows crime and disaster, we also have "true police-stories, true rescue-tales, documentaries about crime, tragedy, sorrow, disease, mistreatment, humiliation, and loss under the postmodern sun" (1997: 30). We have become used to these series of endless horrors, which may account for our fondness for the serial-killer narrative. This is a kind of narrative that satisfies our crave for an explanation of the daily horror, a craving that grows with every new programme we watch on TV, since serial killers, like chapters in periodicals, stand in need of interpretation, and the fictional form usually provides such interpretation through the figure of the detective, the police officer or the profiler. Although Ellis is aware of the seriality that surrounds a great deal of society's behaviour, he is not willing to provide an interpreter for all the horror. As a result the reader faces a narrative that lacks closure, comfort and reassurance, which intensifies the underlying horror.

Edmundson also discusses the side effect caused by this obsession with horror: pop transcendence, a kind of transcendence that also has a relevant place in *American Psycho*. Accordingly, Linda S. Kauffman considers that reading *American Psycho* is "like skimming *GQ*, *Rolling Stone*, *Interview*, *Playboy*, *Hustler*, *Spy*, and *New York Magazine*, complete with music and food reviews" (1998: 246). Even Bateman's friends acknowledge this openly when they state that Bateman is "total *GQ*" (1991: 90). Pop music is one of these forms of pop transcendence, a form that Ellis incorporates in the novel in a very curious way. As Elizabeth Young has pointed out, after the major killings there are whole chapters completely given over to strange, bland analyses of pop music (1992b: 112). The murder of Al, a black bum, is followed by a chapter on Genesis; that of Bethany, an ex-girlfriend, by a chapter on Whitney Houston; finally, the mass murders in "Chase Manhattan" by one on Huey Lewis and the News. The style of these chapters completely disrupts the narration: they are also narrated by Bateman, but they are completely cut off from what has happened before or will happen later.

Their style is typical of pop magazines where groups are reviewed and judged in very technical terms: "My favorite track is 'Man on the Corner', which is the only song credited solely to Collins, a moving ballad with a pretty synthesized melody plus a riveting drum machine in the background" (134). Unlike conventional pop transcendence, these episodes do not work as a means of obliterating the horror narrated in the preceding chapters. Their strategic position in the narration, each one occurring after a murder, changes their significance: they stress the horror narrated in the previous pages and the oblivion of the people who are capable of watching the horrors of the evening news and then of effortlessly listening to pop music. In *American Psycho* (2000), Mary Harron's film adaptation of the novel, this contrast is very well captured: Bateman murders Paul Owen while listening to "Hip to Be Square" and commenting on the virtues of Huey Lewis and the News. The critical intention of the novel is underlined by juxtaposing superficial comments about music with an appalling murder.

Another example of pop transcendence that is used and deconstructed in the book is the musical *Les misérables*, repeatedly publicised on buses and hoardings. The founding notion of musicals is that of entertainment, but in Ellis's novel *Les misérables* is used as a form of denunciation, not of escapism. It becomes a leitmotif that figures in the background of everything that happens in the story, as the musical is alluded to or named at least on twenty occasions. Victor Hugo's "misérables" are juxtaposed with the contemporary "miserable" people that populate the book and the city: beggars, the homeless or the insane, some of Patrick Bateman's potential victims. This is the telling way in which a beggar is introduced: "Once outside, ignoring the bum lounging below the *Les misérables* poster and holding a sign that reads: I'VE LOST MY JOB I AM HUNGRY I HAVE NO MONEY PLEASE HELP, whose eyes tear after I pull the tease-the-bum-with-a-dollar trick [...]" (113). Pop transcendence and the contemporary Gothic are juxtaposed in an ironic comment on our enjoyment of Victor Hugo's "misérables" and our disregard for New York "misérables".

Hollywood and its celebrities also work for Edmundson as a means of forgetting everyday horrors. Tom Cruise is Bateman's neighbour, while Donald Trump is Bateman's obsession. The self-help movement and the how-to books have a similar role in the novel; they aim at counterbalancing and protecting us from the power of the pervasive present Gothic world. Jean, Bateman's secretary, who is completely innocent and naïve, reads books with titles such as "*How to Make a Man Fall in Love with You. How to Keep a Man in Love with You Forever. How to Close a Deal: Get Married. How to Be Married One Year from Today. Supplicant*" (265). However, the form of transcendence most frequently mocked in *American Psycho* is consumerism. There are constant descriptions of clothes, furniture,

videos, restaurants, etc.; one of the chapters, dealing with Bateman's plans for Christmas, is significantly entitled "Shopping". The chapter has the form of a monologue in which Bateman talks about the colleagues he is going to give presents to, his priorities for Christmas and the places where he shops. The monologue is interrupted on three occasions by long lists of products he plans to buy:

> [...] pens and photo albums, pairs of bookends and light-weight luggage, electric shoe polishers and heated towel stands and silver-plated insulated carafes and portable palm-sized color TVs with earphones, birdhouses and candleholders, place mats, picnic hampers and ice buckets, lace-trimmed oversize linen napkins and umbrellas and sterling silver monogrammed golf tees and charcoal-filter smoke trappers and desk lamps and perfume bottles, jewelry boxes, office tote bags, desk accessories, scarves, file holders, address books, agendas for handbags [...] (177).

The long lists continually disrupt the narrative, denouncing the consumerist fever that takes place at Christmas time.

Related to Bateman's obsessive consumerism is his obsession with brand names and labels, which is not just a sign of his social status since in the course of the narrative it acquires other, more symbolic, meanings. He looks not at his watch but at his "Rolex", he drinks not whisky but "J&B", nor water but "Evian". On the subject of water he and his friends prove to be "experts":

> Courtney starts, counting each name off on one of her fingers. "Well, there's Sparcal, Perrier, San Pellegrino, Poland Springs, Calistoga..." She stops, stuck, and looks over at McDermott for help. He sighs, then lists, "Canadian Spring, Canadian Calm, Montclair, which is also from Canada, Vittel from France, Crodo, which is Italian..." [...] "It's your turn, Patrick" [...] I list the following. "You forgot Alpenwasser, Down Under, Schat, which is from Lebanon, Qubol and Cold Springs—" (247-248).

This wide use of labels is also deployed by other authors. Philip Stevick believes that this is something shared by much experimental fiction of the 70s. Authors such as Donald Barthelme, Kurt Vonnegut, Robert Coover or Thomas Pynchon incorporated mass-cultural objects, especially ephemeral ones, to their fiction for comic effects (1981: 123). Similarly, as we have seen, one of blank fiction's most recognisable characteristics is the use of a broad range of mass cultural references. Stevick and Annesley disagree on the meaning of this use of mass culture and brand names: for Stevick they are mainly used for comic purposes and he mentions twelve different situations in which an object is potentially funny when it is named (1981: 136-139). In the book the constant use of brand names produces comic effects on some occasions: when a taxi driver, who recognises Bateman as the killer of a fellow taxi driver, aims at him with a gun, Bateman remarks that "he's holding a gun, the make of which I don't recognize" (392). Even at a tense and dangerous

moment like this Bateman worries about makes and brands. Similarly, when he is being chased across Manhattan by the police he tries to steal some cars, cars that are described in full detail:

> [...] he dashes past a row of Porches, tries to open each one and sets a string of car alarm sirens off, the car he would like to steal is a black Range Rover with permanent four-wheel drive, an aircraft-grade aluminium body on a boxed steel chassis and a fuel-injected V-8 engine, but he can't find one, and though this disappoints him [...] (350).

Although Stevick is right in his reading of brand names as a device to achieve a comic effect, in the case of *American Psycho* it is Annesley's position that proves more interesting and illuminating. The way blank fiction writers use brands and designer labels is more related to critical purposes, as mass culture and consumerism come to contain a "double meaning": on the one hand they express the power and reach of commercial culture, on the other hand they reveal "the ways in which the commodity can be used in an expressive and communicative way" (1998: 92). When the book was published, the use of brand names was seen in the light of the first meaning, as a senseless and superficial empty reproduction of consumerism. One chapter called "Morning" is especially loaded with brand names and mass-culture products, and in it Bateman describes in detail his daily routine, the things he owns and the cosmetic products he uses, taking special pains to describe his favourite kinds of shampoo:

> [...] a Foltene European Supplement and Shampoo for thinning hair which contains complex carbohydrates that penetrate the hair shafts for improved strength and shine. Also the Vivagen Hair Enrichment Treatment, a new Redken product that prevents mineral deposits and prolongs the life cycle of hair. Luis Carruthers recommended the Aramis Nutriplexx system, a nutrient complex that helps increase circulation (27).

Passages like this led critic Roger Rosenblatt to affirm:

> I do not exaggerate when I say that in his way Mr. Ellis may be the most knowledgeable author in all of American literature. Whatever Melville knew about whaling, whatever Mark Twain knew about rivers are mere amateur stammerings compared with what Mr. Ellis knows about shampoo alone (1990: 16).

Rosenblatt's ironic comments ignore Ellis's point: through the chapter we see the excess in the number of available products and Bateman is depicted as a compulsive consumer, completely engulfed by mass culture. Ellis's prose straightforwardly reflects this commercial culture but it does not necessarily mean that the narration strengthens capitalist structures by promoting further consumerism. In fact, in the film version of the book, released in 2000, it turned out to be very difficult to obtain the consent of many of the designers to use their brand names and labels in the film. As film's director Mary Harron mentioned,

American designers like Calvin Klein and Ralph Lauren "didn't want to be associated with anything so horrible" (in Gopalan 2000: 2). When the book was published, American Express apparently considered suing Ellis and his publisher because the psychopath used an American Express credit card to cut his cocaine, pay for his dinner, and order prostitutes and room service (Kauffman 1998: 251). The very companies that obtained free advertising in *American Psycho* did not seem to believe the theory that *American Psycho* promoted further consumption.

However, if Ellis's intention when reproducing long lists of brand names and products was not to promote further consumption, one may wonder what his intentions were. We have said that consumer goods have a "double meaning": on the one hand they are agents of social control, on the other hand they have an expressive use. Ellis employs these goods to criticise them from within and to do so he exaggerates their visibility by naming and repeating them to excess; it is not surprising that Bateman's platinum American Express card snaps in half after so much use (1991: 278-9). Through exaggeration he makes us aware of the excesses of consumerism, the result not being pleasurable but boredom and asphyxia. Commercial names replace adjectives, qualifying phrases, and points of reference. What is being suggested is that they are used for description because they are charged with a series of additional meanings. In this respect, Mike Featherstone talks about the "new heroes of consumer culture" who accumulate goods to display their individuality and create their lifestyle. This kind of individual is conscious that "he speaks not only with his clothes, but with his home, furnishings, decoration, car and other activities which are to be read and classified in terms of the presence and absence of taste" (1991b: 86). Consumerism taken to an extreme invades everything and becomes our only means of relating to and judging others. In this practice commodities lose their use value, which is replaced by their exchange value (price). In fact, for Karl Marx (1976) this rupture between use value and exchange value was the most distinctive feature of capitalist societies. In the novel, Bateman openly acknowledges this rupture in statements like "[...] Stash's admittedly cheap, bad haircut. A haircut that's bad because it's cheap" (1991: 21). His obsession with the exchange value of things also explains his fixation on designer goods, whose use value alone cannot account for their elevated price; Bateman is eager to use them because of the message they provide, what they say about his lifestyle and about his identity.

For Baudrillard, this progressive erasure of use value by exchange value has resulted in commodities becoming signs in a Saussurean sense (1988d). When Baudrillard affirms that commodities have become signs, he means that goods do not have a use value and exchange value in a fixed system of human needs. Value now fluctuates in a changing system since it is determined by the rest of

commodities like the Saussurean sign, whose meaning is constituted by structural relations with other signs and by its position in a self-reflexive system of signifiers. Thus, Bateman's new business card is valuable only if those of his mates are less impressive. Just as commodities have lost their intrinsic value, so Bateman has lost any trace of a personality. As Martyn Lee suggests, Bateman's consciousness is assembled from fragments of the commodity-form and his experiences are channelled through an endless succession of commodity signs (1993: 176). This is literally seen in passages like: "Favourite group: Talking Heads. Drink: J&B or Absolut on the rocks. TV show: *Late Night with David Letterman*. Soda: Diet Pepsi. Water: Evian. Sport: Baseball" (395). Since his subjectivity is as unstable and fluid as the commodity signs and is free of social constraints, morality or conscience, he internalises everything offered by mass culture and consumerism. He leads a social life where everything is reduced to commodity consumption, a practice closely linked to his status as serial killer, another kind of consumption.

Seriality becomes a by-product of a society which stresses over-consumerism and offers a repetitive bombardment with messages that reinforce the "Just Do it" idea. The serial killer internalises the message of the ads: the archetypal advertising figure is now the isolated individual, a figure exuding power. As Mark Crispin Miller points out, "While the brand name may vary from ad to ad, all [...] are unified by their promotion of the same bad creed: that "power" is all, that it means nothing more than dominating others, and that you must therefore have that "power" or end up broken by it" (in Edmundson 1997: 90). These ads do not ask us to take it easy for a moment, but only to stand out, to come first, to take what you want, and take it now. For Christopher Lasch, "advertising institutionalizes envy and its attendant anxieties" (1991: 73), a philosophy internalised by Bateman, who even fantasises about his own appearance in a TV commercial:

> I'm imagining myself on television, in a commercial for a new product —wine cooler? tanning lotion? sugarless gum?— and I'm moving in jump-cut, walking along a beach, the film is black-and-white, purposefully scratched, eerie vague pop music from the mid-1960s accompanies the footage, it echoes, sounds as if it's coming from a calliope. Now I'm looking into the camera, now I'm holding up the product —a new mousse? tennis shoes?— now my hair is windblown then it's day then night then day again and then it's night (327).

Bateman has internalised the language of advertisements and applies it literally to his own way of speaking. Jean Baudrillard's theories on the simulacra in postmodern society are a help in understanding the way Bateman internalises the messages emitted by films, advertisements, television, and the mass media in general. For Baudrillard, our culture is a culture of the "simulacrum". Simulation

"is the generation by models of a real without origin or reality: a hyperreal" (1988b: 166), that is to say, the process by which the distinction between original and copy is destroyed (e.g. in film and record). "Simulacrum" would then be an identical copy without an original. One of the consequences of this process of simulation and the appearance of simulacra is that it threatens to dissolve the difference between "true" and "false", between "real" and "imaginary" (168). To reach this point the image goes through different phases: first, the image reflects a basic reality; then, the image marks and perverts that basic reality; later, the image marks the absence of a basic reality; and last, the image bears no relation to any reality whatever, it is its own pure simulacrum (170). In relation to Baudrillard's theories, John Fiske claims that the postmodern media no longer provide "secondary representations of reality: they affect and produce the reality that they mediate" (1994: xv). All events that matter are media events and, in this way, a clear distinction between the media event and its media representation is lost. The media do not simply report or circulate the news, they produce them. Representation does not stand removed from reality so as to conceal or distort it, it is reality. In *American Psycho*, Bateman's attitude reflects the power of the simulacrum as he internalises the messages of the media and turns them into reality. If the message says "Just Do it", he does it: after renting Brian De Palma's *Body Double* (1984), in which a woman is drilled to death, thirty-seven times, he also "does it" and kills in the same way. For Bateman, life is "played out as a sitcom, a blank canvas that reconfigures itself into a soap opera" (343) and the image in his head is not a representation anymore, it is reality: his life is the life of the nightmarish postmodern hyperreal.

The language of consumerism and advertising favours a series of themes, such as youth, beauty, energy, fitness, freedom, luxury, fun, etc., while it hides the dark side of consumer culture: the elderly, the unemployed, the poor, those whose consumption is limited to the consumption of images (Featherstone 1991a: 174-177). In postmodern consumer culture, reality may be partly produced by images but the system of consumption is still sustained by those who have the money to consume the products, not just the images. Patrick Bateman is a double consumer, of both objects and images that shape his behaviour. He is in a way the result of the logic of consumer culture: he represents all that is favoured by consumer culture, while he detests —on some occasions to the point of killing— everything consumer culture tries to hide. This logic of consumer culture is also the logic of the narcissist, who divides society into two groups: the rich, the great and famous on the one hand, the common herd on the other (Lasch 1991: 84). Bateman is a handsome, rich and seductive narcissist yuppie; he masters the rules of fashion and his friends repeatedly ask him what to wear or how to match their clothes, he makes reservations for the best restaurants and is admitted into the best night-

clubs, he is a member of a health club called "Xclusive" and lives in an expensive apartment, with Tom Cruise for a neighbour; he is even repeatedly mistaken for a model or a movie star (165, 206). Bateman represents a society's obsession with the cult of the body: dieting, body-building, jogging, a "look" based on surface and image. A society that dreams of "fashion, the latest styles, idols, the play of images, travel for its own sake, advertising [...] In short, the orgy" (Baudrillard 1988a: 96).

In the US, during the decade of the 1980s, this general trend was reflected in the figure of the yuppie. While Christopher Lasch considered the 70s the "me-decade" for the selfishness and narcissism that invaded US society, in a 1991 afterword to his famous *The Culture of Narcissism*, he concluded that the eighties did not see a revival of altruism or civic spirit, but rather the contrary, since yuppies were known for their selfish devotion to themselves (1991: 237). This culture of narcissism was inextricably linked to the mass media and the images and messages perpetuated by them. Mike Featherstone has noted that advertisements, the popular press, television and motion pictures provide a proliferation of stylised images of the body, supporting an extended hedonism and an obsession with body maintenance (1991a). Advertisements, feature articles and advice columns in magazines and newspapers advise their readers to take care of themselves at all costs. This attitude can also be found in the way personality handbooks and self-help books have changed since the beginning of the century: from an emphasis on discipline and self-denial they have passed to the will to win and, in this context, the key terms are personal magnetism and dominance over others, success or the look of success becoming an end in their own right (Lasch 1991: 56-59). Mike Featherstone points out that this new narcissistic type of individual has been described as:

> "Excessively self-conscious", "chronically uneasy about his health, afraid of ageing and death", "constantly searching for flaws and signs of decay", "eager to get along with others yet unable to make real friendships", "attempts to sell his self as if his personality was a commodity", "hungry for emotional experiences", "haunted by fantasies of omnipotence and eternal youth" (1991a: 187).

This happens to be a good summary of Patrick Bateman's personality, but Bateman is more than just a narcissistic character, he is also a killer, two aspects of his personality that are not separated but linked by the narrative. Passages like the following exemplify the connection:

> Shirtless, I scrutinize my image in the mirror above the sinks in the locker room at Xclusive. My arm muscles burn, my stomach is as taut as possible, my chest steel, pectorals granite hard, my eyes white as ice. In my locker in the locker room at Xclusive lie three vaginas I recently sliced out of various women I've attacked in the

> past week. Two are washed off, one isn't. There's a barrette clipped to one of them, a blue ribbon from Hermès tied around my favourite (1991: 370).

He has a fixation with the perfection of his body, while his toneless narrative voice informs the reader about his other possessions, which include three vaginas; he even has a favourite one, which is signalled out with a ribbon, though not any ribbon, "a blue ribbon from Hermès". As Kauffman notes, "Bateman is the conspicuous consumer run amok" (1998: 250).

In *American Psycho* the word "consume" is used in all of its possible meanings: purchasing, eating and destroying (Annesley 1998: 16). With his credit card Bateman consumes (purchases) design clothes and women for the night, on the same day he consumes (eats) at the best restaurant in town, while at night he eats the body of a tortured girl. At the stock market he consumes (destroys) companies to make them more profitable, whereas in his free time he kills and literally destroys a large number of people. Kauffman explains that, curiously enough, stockbrokers from companies like Merrill Lynch or Pierce (whose equivalent in the book is Pierce and Pierce) have long referred to their clientele with the motto of "Murder'em, lynch'em, pierce'em, fuck'em and forget'em" (1998: 250). Bateman only makes literal a language that is already in society, consuming to the ultimate consequences, "just doing it", as the advertisement says.

People become commodified in Bateman's mind, so he uses the same flat tone when describing the three types of "consumption" he performs: the things he owns and the people he kills are equated. Thus when describing his room after one of his killings he tonelessly says that "things are lying in the corner of my bedroom: a pair of girl's shoes from Edward Susan Bennis Allen, a hand with the thumb and fore-finger missing, the new issue of *Vanity Fair* splashed with someone's blood, a cummerbund drenched with gore [...] " (343-344). He does not seem to see the difference between some design shoes, an issue of *Vanity Fair*, a cummerbund and a mutilated human hand. Jean Baudrillard drawing from Karl Marx's definition of reification (1976) describes how men of wealth in a consumer culture:

> [...] are no longer surrounded by other human beings, as they have been in the past, but by objects. Their daily exchange is no longer with their fellows, but rather, statistically [...] with the acquisition and manipulation of goods and messages [...] (1988c: 29).

Bateman's attitude is thus that of a wealthy man immersed in a consumerist fever, who has internalised the consumerist logic to such an extent that he literally sees no difference between a person and an object.

American Psycho denounces consumerism by portraying the serial killer as the ultimate consumer. As a blank generation writer Ellis has used mass culture openly, to the extent of adopting the seriality characteristic of mass cultural productions in his own artistic language and style. The choice of a serial killer to channel and reflect contemporary consumer culture is effective and challenging: Bateman's never-ending serial killings mirror our own never-ending serial consumerism, the fact that we are engulfed by an ethic of disposal and repurchase in which consumption is present for the sake of consumption alone. The market continually provides "improved" versions of goods, artificially outdating products that are still useful. Envy is a powerful feeling that pushes people to comply with the ethic of disposal and repurchase: one has to have the best, which will make one stand out and dominate the rest. This is why the logic of consumerism is inextricably linked to the logic of narcissism and why the ultimate consumer narcissist is a man like Patrick Bateman. The fact that he is a serial killer comes as an extension of his immersion in the consumerist system and values. His killing in series is equated to his consuming in series, his equation of people and objects is linked to his "apparent" capacity to buy everything, to own anything he wants. Bateman's personality is constructed through the images and messages he receives through mass and consumer culture, which leads to his inability to distinguish self from surface. As Lasch has said, commodity production and consumerism "create a world of mirrors, insubstantial images, illusions increasingly indistinguishable from reality" (1984: 30), a world that Bateman thinks exists to gratify his desires. Bateman is thus the product of unrestrained consumerism in a society of the hyperreal, in which the difference between the real and the simulated, between our power and that of others is blurred and unclear. Bateman only does what the advertisements entice him to do, as a sports drink commercial claims: "It's your world, drink it up". Blank generation writers use this rhetoric of consumerism but not to promote further consumerism, nor as an example of literature fallen victim to the general commodification of society. In the case of Bret Easton Ellis's *American Psycho* it is a way of denouncing consumerism from within, from the mind of its most extreme representative, he who serially consumes objects and people: the serial killer.

Notes

1. This paper has been written with the financial help of the DGICYT, research project nº BFF2001-1775. I would also like to thank the anonymous reviewers of this article for their very useful comments.

2. David Lehman dismissed Jay McInerney and Bret Easton Ellis's fiction for having "the intellectual nourishment of a well-made beer commercial" (1987: 72). Roger Rosenblatt considered Ellis's *American Psycho* (1991) "the journal Dorian Gray would have written had he been a high school sophomore. But that is unfair to sophomores. So pointless, so themeless, so everythingless is this novel, except in stupefying details about expensive clothing, food and bath products, that were it not the most loathsome offering of the season, it certainly would be the funniest" (1990: 3). Both Lehman and Rosenblatt do not understand the use of commercial and mass culture and interpret it as a sign of the lack of artistic merit and capacity of these writers.

3. As Richard Dyer has noted, the number of female serial killers is statistically negligible (1997: 16).

4. Joel Black (1991: 135-187 and *passim*) deals with these possibilities in his fascinating book *The Aesthetics of Murder: A Study in Romantic Literature and Contemporary Culture*, where he analyses celebrity murders and murderers who have been inspired by mass media productions such as books, films or even television serials and series.

5. The events of September 11th, 2001, confirm Ellis's point here. The recorded images of the two planes crashing into the World Trade Center have been endlessly and insatiably repeated on TV. The story of subsequent events has similarly made the news for months. Questions such as where Bin Laden is, or how the war in Afghanistan is going have served as skeleton to the series of news on TV, combining the pleasurable aspects of repetition and anticipation.

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THE TWO SIDES OF A SINGLE COIN: *KARUN RASA* AND TRAGIC FEELING

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> The *tragic feeling* (stress mine) is evoked in us when we are in the presence of a character who is ready to lay down his life, if need be, to secure one thing — his sense of personal dignity
>
> Arthur Miller, "Tragedy and the Common Man",
> *New York Times,* 27 February 1949

In Sanskrit Poetics (SP) there is a discernible absence of tragedy perhaps on account of its idealistic character. Though conflict is present it is not the type of conflict as perceived between individuals. It is based, rather, on inclination and idealism in which idealism ultimately triumphs. In Indian thought Death is a fantasized happening; the body is prone to decay, while the soul is eternal. The issue then is how do we address Death, even when the manure of rotten leaves gives birth to new shrubs? Death possibly is not the denouement of life. On the contrary Life and Death are corollaries of each other. The second possible reason for SP being idealistic in nature is that here time does not follow a *chronological* sequence —it is *circular* in movement (*chakravat parivartante*). Therefore tragedy along western lines becomes impossible on account of philosophical compulsions. A man here after casting off his body assumes a new form and then takes another when the present body decomposes. This intermittent process goes on and on till he accomplishes total deliverance. And salvation can only be realized after having attained the first three goals of righteousness (*dharma*), prosperity (*artha*) and pleasure (*kama*). Here it seems that there is a more complete

picture of life in which both suffering and happiness are present. Take for instance the very popular example of a Lotus flower that bears pearls of moisture on itself. Although the very experience is ephemeral yet it is so beautiful. Perhaps to capture the eternal in the evanescent is a part of Indian and Western aesthetics. Sorrow is perpetually beautiful. And beauty is happiness. Keats's *Ode on Melancholy* is a fine record of this idea. To him true melancholy should mean the supraliminal delectation of a sorrowful feeling inevitably associated with everything that is beautiful and joyful. Authentic beauty invokes melancholy deliberations at her transience, but thrives on her very fleeting character as the instant captures for us the perpetuity of joy. Whenever sorrow alights on us like a cloud that brings a gladdening downpour for the drooping flowers and shuts out from the panorama the green hill with a cerecloth of April rain, one should drink deep at the spring of unaffected beauty of the rose that blooms in the morning, or of the kaleidoscopic colours of the rainbow shot by the sunlight on sand, made wet by the withdrawing wave or of the glove-shaped flowers. We should firmly clutch at these pleasures of beauty that will wither away and leave an anguish in the soul making her no less capable of an intense or deep enjoyment on that score. In other words, "tragic feeling" is not a problematic here. It is traditionally referred to as one of the many *rasas*, which in itself implies that it is to be experienced happily. However in Western literature the end of a tragedy is commonly one of total waste and loss. It is essentially melancholic in character. While in Indian literature sorrow and suffering might be presented in a very gruesome style but still the work would have a happy ending. In fact a blissful finale (*madhurain samapayet* or *sukha Paryanavasai*) was the motive. The *Mahabharata* for instance carries the central theme of the contest between two noble families, the Pandavas and their blood relatives, the Kauravas, for the possession of a kingdom in northern India. What follows is an elaborate offensive exercise in scheming and plotting primarily to eliminate the Pandavas. However with the intervention of Krishna events turn in favour of the Pandavas. The dialogue between Lord Krishna (Supreme Yogi) and Arjuna (pure self) is a focal point in the text, which categorically states that the good (Pandavas) is ultimately victorious, provided we dedicate ourselves with zeal to the fulfilment of the task at hand, without being influenced by its rewards or benefits and that the destruction of evil (Kauravas) is a preordained certainty and this should lead us to strive to stick to the path of goodness and godliness. There might be occasional periods of undeserved suffering and pain, but ultimately it is the truth, the absolute good that alone triumphs. Thus there are tragic elements to be observed but none that make a full-fledged tragedy.

In the Western canon, generally speaking, a tragedy should indispensably end in death. However, this tenet is juxtaposed with the understanding of one of the serious truths of life that Man with his seriousness of intent and confident deeds should only desire to search for the Truth. And that the understanding of the

world, which appears on occasions to be tolerant with surprises or full with the desire of reconciliation, is essentially a challenge, which in turn becomes the norm for attaining happiness. Thus an attempt is made in this article to examine in the first part the idea of those scholars who treat *Karun rasa* as an experience of happiness. And then in the second part all those critics are taken into account who look upon "tragic feeling" as an experience of sadness but also as a realization of one of the solemn truths of life. Finally an assessment is made of those opinions that hold together in the present context.

I

In Sanskrit poetics almost everybody has looked upon *Karun rasa* (tragic feeling) as an experience of joy or beatitude. Abhinavgupta (author of *Abhinavbharati*: eleventh century A.D.) looks upon *rasa* (the essence of anything) as a form of happiness. He believes that in essence all states of being (*rasas*) are happiness oriented. The *rasa* is a feeling dominated by an overwhelming and unadulterated sense of silence and vacuum. There is more unequivocally an experience of the expansion of the heart. It is the unalloyed realisation of equilibrium —the quintessence of joy (Kapoor, 1998: 114). Antithetically the Sankhya philosophers postulate that sorrow as such corresponds to the righteousness (*dharma*) of the *raajasik* (exemplified by the mind's unstable and roaming nature). But in the conscious experience of unalloyed joy there is a sense of entirety, of wholeness and more importantly a balance of the mind. Pleasure thus is commensurate with the essential (*saatvik*), Pain with the source of energy in creation (*raajasik*) and Inertia with darkness (*tamasik*). Dr. Nagendra on the other hand believes that Abhinavgupta's unalloyed realization of equilibrium is fundamentally an echo of Aristotle's "catharsis" (in Butcher, 1995: 242) or Richards' "Systematization of emotions" (in Wimsatt and Brooks, 1957: 610 and Seturaman, 1992: 328-29). However, Abhinavgupta's approach to life was that of an optimist and this assumed crucial importance in a sad world (where equanimity was all the more necessary). It is interesting that on the one hand Aristotle the biologist spoke about the difference between a man and an animal, and on the other Bharata (author of *Natyashastra*: second century B. C.) synthesized the human and the divine. Vishvanath (author of *Sahityadarpana*: fourteenth century A.D.) similarly thought of *rasa* as being out of the ordinary. He states:

> Hetutvam sokaharsaadergatebhyo loksamsrayat
> Sokaharsaadayo loke jaayantaam naama laukikaah
> Aalokikvibhaavatvam praaptebhyaha kaavyasanshruyaat
> Sukham sanjaayate tebhya sarvebhyospeeti kashatihi
>
> (*Sahityadarpana,* III, unnumbered pages)

> In the worldly life, well-known causes of pleasure and pain might lead to a painful experience, but in poetry they assume a supernatural character. And hence, what is the harm in believing that in Poetry they cause pleasure invariably?

However there are emotions that originate in the mind (in this world) and take the form of *rasa*. But mere emotion (*bhava*) is neither *rasa* nor poetry. Sorrow is a psychological state dependent on external causes. It is only the poet[1] who exercises his superior ability and translates and re-clothes this completely conditional corporeal emotion into an extraordinary and independent feeling, which kindles a *rasa* and gives way to *Karun rasa*. *Karun rasa* again is not an emotion of sadness alone. It is not a psychiatric disorder in which the predominant symptom is a disturbance in mood. Neither is it an irritable depression marked by sadness, guilt, and feelings of helplessness and hopelessness. Rather, it supplants untold and unbounded happiness inspite of tears. And only those who have had such an experience can appreciate this experience. If it ever had the object of evoking sadness then perhaps the *Ramayana* or the *Mahabharata* would never have been read. As Shelley says in his well-known poem *Ode to the West Wind*, our sweetest songs are those that tell of saddest thoughts. It should not be forgotten that sadness becomes more and more concentrated and becomes a substitute for reality, which is neither sweet nor meant to be sung. It is the saddest of thoughts that gives rise to the sweetest of songs. On the contrary, Bhattnayak (eight-ninth century A.D.) talks about the experiencing of *rasa* only by those who have risen above prejudiced measures of happiness and sorrow. And this precisely is the cause of its state of absolute happiness. To talk in Kantian terms the happiness originating out of beauty is considerably different from the happiness arising out of the customary assignments of the world. And since there is an absence of any utilitarian dimension to *rasa*, it is therefore pure, refined and extraordinary. There is here transcendence from the personal to the impersonal, from the subjective self to the objective self and from the particular to the general.

The necessity of experiencing the extraordinariness of *Karun rasa* despite its melancholy temper is the position taken by many Indian and Western scholars. On the native front Guncandra and Ramcandra (authors of *Natyadarpana*, twelfth century A.D.) profess that *rasa* is both a happy and a sad amalgam of experience. They state that the poet who is both accomplished in the manifestation of reality and imaginative experience arouses exceptional emotions in the reader. For instance, let us attend to the type of emotion which is aroused when a foe is dumbfounded at the sight of a more puissant adversary confronting him in battle or when an admirer is struck dumb by the graceful movements of a dancer. Both carry the elemental emotion of surprise but are evidently different in nature and context. So too the poet composes poetry that carries similar and diverging

emotions. The taste of a sweet dish following a bitter one makes the former doubly sweet. However Guncandra and Ramcandra caution that the experience of *Karun rasa* is dependent on both form and content (in Kulkarni, 1986: 52). On parallel lines Bhojaraja (author of *Sringaaraprakaasha*, eleventh century A.D.) declares the birth of bliss is on account of sorrow, *Dukhadamapi sukham janyati* (in Kulkarni, 1986: 50).

II

To return to the West, Hume speaks about the miraculous nature of eloquence that leads to the transformation of a tragedy into a comedy. He writes that the soul when roused by passion and charmed by eloquence feels on the whole a strong movement which is altogether delightful (in Seturaman, 1992: 269 and *Microsoft Encarta Encyclopedia* 2000). Passion not only brings the conflict of the hero to a close but also arouses the consciousness to an experience of happiness. Antithetically though in Hume's miraculous nature of eloquence emotion does not play a role even when in the artifice of poetic expression emotion does declare itself in a finer but sublime fashion. As is well known, F.R. Leavis stated in this connection that "by tragedy we mean something fundamentally true to life so the pleasure comes in seeing the life both serious and true" (in Chaudhuri, 1983: 24). Both blissful and saddening experiences of life are an actuality. Therefore if poetics is employed as a tool for giving utterance to certain truths of life then a tragedy could be in the making. And such a tragedy would give birth to "tragic feeling" i.e., happiness of a refined nature. Thus, Hume's miraculous nature of eloquence and Leavis' experiences of life (see Chaudhuri: 1983: 24) are two dimensions of looking at a tragedy. Further one should not forget that experience becomes a prerequisite along with expression for rousing romantic or pathetic emotions. Guncandra and Ramcandra too stress the necessity of both eloquence and experience in poetry. Both are miraculous in their own right. Leavis however thinks that "tragic feeling" is of greater importance in the making of either a comedy or tragedy for both are an articulation of life.

In the context of grief, Schopheneur in his criticism of tragedy has assigned a dignified status to sorrow ("tragic feeling"). He holds (in Seturaman, 1992: 268) that tragedy arouses in our consciousness a "spirit of asceticism" or "resignation" or "self-surrender". Happiness is consequently hallowed in this experience. "tragic feeling" also invigorates the mind to free itself of baser emotions (lust) in order to give room for happiness. Schopheneur states that when we are brought face to face with great suffering and the storm and stress of existence, and the outcome of it is to show the vanity of all human effort, then, deeply moved, we

are either directly prompted to disengage our will from the struggle of life, or else a chord is struck in us which echoes a similar feeling (in Seturaman, 1992: 268). This idea is not very different from the Buddhistic viewpoint of looking on *Karun Rasa* as the source of life's nourishment. In fact, as happiness is inherent in the attainment of truth, so too, the same happiness is an inseparable part of an individual's existence that gives birth to poetry. Hegel in a like manner believes that the enjoyment of tragedy is on account of a feeling of reconciliation and this feeling arises by reason of the sense of eternal justice. Justice as such is dependent on the fundamental desire of man to exist and thus reconciliation with sorrow ("tragic feeling") is possible at the end of a tragedy (in Chaudhuri, 1983: 25). Hegel refers to the happiness arising out of a tragedy as that which exists by virtue of the soul's ethical equipoise. Tragedy then acquires an extraordinary nature, for both the soul's reconciliation and its ethical equipoise are complementary to each other. Hegel continues his explanation by referring to the soul's reconciliation as the great absolute, for that is verily the Truth. Awareness and harmony are thus the crowning features of all-chaotic impressions and emotive conflicts. The happiness arising out of harmony is again uncommon in nature. Though conflict is essentially a part of both life and the world, the denouement lies in the realization of the Truth. A "tragic feeling" therefore incorporates in it conflict and resolution, the former arousing sorrow and the latter happiness (Abercrombie, 1967: 115).

As is well known, in the first chapter of his work *The Birth of Tragedy*, Friedrich Nietzsche similarly states that a tragedy assimilates both *dionysian* and *appolonian* powers. The former generate sorrow ("tragic feeling") and the latter rouse the emotion of expectation and triumphs over sorrow. It is the art of metaphysical comfort, a metaphysical supplement to the reality of nature. Further, Nietzsche also talks about the secret instinct for annihilation. The tendency to annihilate the individual self generalizes, which induces in the spectators a uniformity of experience and happiness. The death of an individual here is verily the death of mankind itself. Nietzsche states that in spite of fear and pity we are happy living beings, not as individuals, but as the one living being, with whose procreative joy we are blended. And this is the joy of tragedy. Schelegel (in Seturaman, 1992: 268) in this connection refers to a belief in *destiny* (whose contemplation is definitely pleasant) that destroys the ego and in turn builds fortitude in the individual. On very similar lines Emile Faguet (in Chaudhuri, 1983: 26) believes that there are omnipresent worms of violence present in man, and on seeing a fellow human being suffering, the individual immediately experiences happiness. This is the malevolence theory. Man as such carries in his subconscious a sense of unredressed injury, which awakens the feeling of hatred.

Aristotle however, in his *Poetics* finds in "catharsis" the enjoyment of a tragedy. He writes, "no less universal is the pleasure felt in things imitated" (in Seturaman, 1992: 268). And to learn or experience gives the loveliest pleasure. However, the pleasure will be due not to the imitation as such but to the execution, the colouring or some such other cause. Butcher (in Seturaman, 1992: 268) inversely speaks of three features with regard to the enjoyment of a tragedy, (a) Purgation, (b) Purification and (c) The Miraculous Nature of Art. Apart from imitation it is also the enjoyment of the miraculous nature of poetic creation (on account of the existence of both form and content) which is of great significance. Catharsis is attained only after the mind is calm and all passions are spent. The nobility of the hero and his tragic flaw are responsible for the arousal of fear and pity and this in turn fills the vacuum in the human heart. The individual then feels that he is not the other (non-participator) in the play. Susanne K. Langer (in Seturaman, 1992: 325) calls this the homeopathic treatment where pity with pity and fear with fear is erased and this in turn brings about a balance in emotions and mental equipoise.[2]

Accordingly, Dickson, Thorndike and Gilbert Murry (in Chaudhuri, 1983: 27-8) have also on occasions spoken about the necessity of "tragic feeling" in life. Dickson states that with tragedy there is an expansion of the soul, the mind and the intelligence. He writes, "It may very well be that beyond its broad and common ways, in the gloomier defiles of life, amid the grief worn faces and under the clouded skies of tragedy, we may seek knowledge, wisdom, an enlargement of the spirit, the meaning of things or some other ends". While according to Thorndike, tragedy begets (i) catharsis, (ii) the sanctimonious display of sympathy, (iii) aesthetic delight and (iv) the exaltation due to the vision of the eternal. And Murry believes that tragedy is enjoyable for it carries in it a profounder scheme of values. He states, "It must show beauty out-shining horror, it must show human character somehow triumphing over death and it can create and maintain only by high and continuous and severe beauty of form".

Conventionally speaking, Western, European or Shakespearean tragedy is the tragedy of fate where the hero fights against his destiny. Life to him is a challenge and death though pre-destined is a grand achievement. The conflict here is essentially one of Truth. Therefore when one, after witnessing the presentation of a tragedy, strolls out into the dark night and stares at the stars he blurts out in the words of Webster, "Look, look the stars are shining in the sky" (in Chaudhuri, 1983: 28). However contemporary tragedy (CT) is the tragedy of the average man who is a prey to confusion. Inhuman, unconcerned behaviour marks his absurd state. In fact CT does not find a semblance with Greek tragedy where man does not fail to fight a resolute battle against his destiny. It is thus a substitute for the arousal of tragic elements where chaos, depression, loneliness, and absurdity

dominate. But what is conspicuously absent is the suffering of a great soul. Of one who can suffer intensely and yet face the challenges with a sense of grandeur.

III

Consequently *Karun rasa* or "tragic feeling" is either an ecstatic state or is dependent on an extraordinary situation whose resultant effect is one of *happiness*. Abhinavgupta calls this bliss or happiness an experience of a state of consciousness –*rasaha cha baudhrupeva* (in Kulkarni, 1986: 28-42). In all the ideologies mentioned above one can note that the element of truth is omnipresent, though in certain philosophies a few errors might be observed. For instance, when Vishvanath refers to the enjoyment of poetry as of an extraordinary nature, what he exactly means by the term extraordinary is not explained in detail. However, Abhinavgupta thought that the problem does not arise for in this world there is no exactitude as regards the idea that sorrow should necessarily follow a painful experience. We might temporarily experience sadness on account of our friend's grief and happiness on account of our enemy's grief. In short, if the experience of poetry is not extraordinary, neither is it ordinary then. The effacement of the self does not lead us to an understanding of sadness, for human life is profound and the only truth again is not one of sorrow. Sorrow could be an aspect of life but not life itself. Schelegel's thesis of destiny (in Seturaman, 1992: 268) is an emotive doctrine for the helpless. In psychoanalytical criticism poetry is the resultant of the various tragic elements working in the human mind. However the cause of happiness arising out of *Karun rasa* or "tragic feeling" lies in the thought-content or the idea itself. And it is this thematic idea that can be paralleled with a sculptor carving a literary work, the very experience of which is extraordinary in nature. However self-effacement or self-annihilation then becomes a pre-requisite for its total enjoyment. This implies that violence in the human mind, pain and suffering has directly no connection with the enjoyment of *Karun rasa* or "tragic feeling". Furthermore those scholars who have propounded the reasons behind/for a tragedy and its ultimate enjoyment have made a grievous error in equating it with the Buddhistic state. The enjoyment of poetry is not only independent of specific causes, reasons or purposes but the very poetic experience leads to a state of bliss. And therefore *Karun rasa* or "tragic feeling" is important for its experience leads one to a divine state of supreme happiness. Dhananjaya (author of *Dasharupaka*: tenth century A.D.) has gone to the extent of pointing out that only men with limited intelligence (*Alpabuddhi sadhu log*) desire to employ the utilitarian ideal in poetry (in Chaudhuri, 1983: 27).

Truly, of the varieties of interpretations available on the idea of *Karun rasa* or "tragic feeling" only three appear to hold good, namely Bhattnayak's total objectivity, Abhinavgupta's unalloyed realization of equilibrium and Leavis'

doctrine of a detached attitude towards life. Of these the first idea of objectivity annihilates personal sorrow, lifts the curtain from the soul of the low grade (*tamasic*) and the pleasure-seeking (*rajasik*) and ultimately leads to the real (*saatvik*) state of peace or equipoise and then to happiness. This variety of happiness widens the individual vision and implants a belief in life. This detached state brings about the element of sincerity in the individual's exposition of the subject. The honest expression of the theme whether idealistic or realistic, whether happy or sad, provides us with happiness for it is an addition to the sum total of the experiences in life. Furthermore a happy life is also the expression of the all-pervasive nature of Truth. It is here that *Karun rasa* in Indian writings leads us to an essential (*saatvik*) state while in western thought the arousal of "tragic feeling" leads us to a recognition of a fact in life. The all-pervasive anguish of the Indian poet is a mean between his pain and his disillusionment. In it, there are streaks of peaceful feeling (*shanta rasa*), of divine bliss (*divyanumaad*), and of a real (*saatvik*) state of communion. Valmiki states:

> *Tishtha tishtha varorohe na testi karuna mayee*
> *Naatyartha haasyasheelasi kimarth manupaekhshe.*
>
> (in Chaudhuri, 1983: 29)

This is the nature of *Karun rasa*. Ethical instruction is not the objective here. It is rather a spontaneous expression of the soul's experience. The poet's soul here carries a typical aptitude and nature, which is very natural to him. And this nature is the divine nature, which leads one to the real (*saatvik*) state of everyday existence. It provides equanimity of the mind and constant happiness. And thus "Tragic Feeling" lies enshrined in our encounter with happiness. The image of Buddha is a supreme instance in point. Even the image of Nataraja (God Shiva) though bearing a look of calm on its face, is suggestive of an active process by the movements of the feet, a movement that includes both creation and destruction. The European poet perhaps lies embedded in the source of energy in the creative (*raajasik*) play of things. He does not long for a total merger. He is happy with his state of equilibrium. He does not long for *nirvana* or calm or peace of mind. He is satisfied in absenting himself from felicity for a while and therefore continues in this harsh world to draw his breath in pain.

Both Indian and European literature do emphasize an acceptance of the wide frontiers of knowledge and a belief in action that is impulsive and grave. However, the Indian poet is a sad poet who sees the world through the glasses of an ascetic (*yogi*). His philosophy of calm and its awareness in the midst of the world and harmony coalesce. The European poet on the other hand (in a world dominated by action) sees the world through the glasses of a doer. His philosophy of conflict and of destruction continues to be an ideal for him. However this does not imply that on account of the dominating essential quality (*saatvik guna*), Indian

Literature holds an edge over European literature which is known for its creative (*raajasik*) qualities. Irrespective of the dominating quality (*guna*) we are to be on the lookout for an experience that leads us to an understanding of truth. The truth of a *saatvik* life or the truth of pain or suffering both carry an element of impartiality and objectivity and both add to our experiences and ultimately leads us to happiness. This happiness is on account of the truth based on life's experiences. Thus the difference between *Karun rasa* and "Tragic Feeling", or in the variety of happiness derived from a tragedy or the difference in the sources/states of consciousness or conscious experiences is essentially a difference of the reader's response and thought or perception. There is no qualitative difference in terms of experience, which in itself is complete and whole. This experience in the words of Abhinavgupta (in Seturaman, 1992: 341) is like a remarkable flower that ever attracts us and makes *Karun rasa* or "tragic feeling" an extraordinary experience.

Notes

1. As is well known, in Coleridge's theory of poetry, *Biographia Literaria,* it is the poet who with his *essemplastic imagination* dissolves, diffuses, dissipates in order to re-create. The poet's secondary imagination is able to create rather than merely reassemble by dissolving the *fixities* and *definities* and unifying them into a new whole (see Wimsatt and Brooks, 1957: 385-86).

2. This essentially is a Platonic idea where *like cures like* (in Abercrombie, 1967: 107).

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Reviews

NOSTALGIC POSTMODERNISM: THE VICTORIAN TRADITION AND THE CONTEMPORARY BRITISH NOVEL

Christian Gutleben
Amsterdam/New York: Rodopi, 2001.
(by Mª Jesús Martínez Alfaro. University of Zaragoza)

Christian Gutleben's study delves into a more than noticeable phenomenon in the context of postmodernist fiction: the recasting of Victorian conventions in a wide range of postmodernist novels. These he calls "retro-Victorian", taking the term from Sally Shuttleworth (1998), or, alternatively, "neo-Victorian", thus emphasising the retrieval of past traditions and of the historical past, which, as the book's title announces, links postmodernist practices with nostalgia.

Illuminating as Linda Hutcheon's works on postmodernism and postmodernist literature seemed to me when I first read them, I must confess that I was not utterly convinced by her view that the postmodern has little to do with nostalgia and much to do with irony (see Hutcheon 1987, 1988, and 1998a). The double-voiced, playful and often critical nature of many postmodernist novels becomes one with their recourse to irony, which can thus be said to play a relevant role in the way they deal with the traditions of the past. Yet it is precisely this recurrent inclination to express the new through the old that inevitably puts nostalgia on the agenda. Therefore, how should one cope with the assertion that these ironic works have little to do with nostalgia? I opened Gutleben's *Nostalgic Postmodernism* expecting to find there something that could throw light upon the problematic relationship between nostalgia and irony. The book says much on the subject, though I would have welcomed a lengthier introduction in which the author paved the way for the practical cases (specific novels) analysed in the following pages. Nostalgia is an

interesting phenomenon and, as such, I think it deserved some "isolated attention", a more suggestive reflection on nostalgia in the age of postmodernity, prior to the illustration of the way in which it works in those late twentieth-century novels that recast the conventions of Victorian fiction.

Before going on, though, in all fairness to Linda Hutcheon, I should say that, precisely because she had not explored the ironic *and* nostalgic forces at work in postmodernist fiction, there came a point at which she had a "welcome (or unwelcome) sense of unfinished business for having simply believed that irony was more complicated and 'edgy' than nostalgia", when in fact what is most complicated of all is the tension between the two (1998b). As Gutleben explains, there is irony in postmodernist fiction and there is nostalgia as well. Both forces co-exist, then, but can we give the screw a further turn and argue, in the light of Hutcheon's "make-amends essay", that, among other things, it is nostalgia itself that is being ironised? I think Gutleben's study would have profited from a reflection on this and other questions in the same line, even if the author himself can be said to be somewhat ironic about nostalgia, arguing that this relish for the past in general, and for the Victorian past in particular, is not ingenuous, and that it should rather be approached as part and parcel of a profitable business.

The book is divided into three parts. Part One focuses on the relationship between the imitative activity at work in a wide range of novels and the fascination exerted by the Victorian model on late twentieth-century writers. Imitation is here approached as pastiche and several novels are discussed, which, to the author, duplicate the Victorian prototype without the challenge that is inherent in a parodic rewriting. The (Victorian) voices of authority are variously revived in ways that lend distinction to the words (in epigraphs, quotations, etc.) and style of famous Victorian writers. If pastiche requires a model to be imitated, the relationship between the imitation and the imitated work/tradition is one of dependence and derivation. What one finds here is the narcissistic pleasure of the postmodernist writer who is able to reproduce the voices of the past, as A. S. Byatt does in *Possession*, but also the view that these voices which are being imitated remain unsurpassed. In addition, the pastiche at work foregrounds (and privileges) a creativity and originality that is linked with the Victorian mode, while postmodernist practices seem to be much closer to repetition and recycling. Thus, what many retro-Victorian novels imitate is not only the style of certain Victorian writers, but also the global organisation of the typically Victorian narrative: plots culminate in the resolution of a mystery, events follow a chronological order, and, in a word, narratives are teleologically oriented. This is the case with John Fowles' *The French Lieutenant's Woman*, A. S. Byatt's *Possession*, Emma Tennant's *Tess*, Matthew Kneale's *Sweet Thames*, Patricia Duncker's *James Miranda Barry*, and

Sarah Waters' *Affinity*, to name a few of the works considered by the author. If the (conventional) structural organisation of these retro-Victorian novels is governed by the (equally conventional) purpose of surprising and seducing the reader, the Victorian art of description (of characters and worlds) also prevails in its contemporary counterparts. From the ideological point of view, then, such conservative aesthetic choices inevitably appear to be a mark of regression, given the fact that these choices have been made at a historical period characterised by the collapse of metanarratives.

Yet the fascination exerted by Victorian fiction, which accounts for the relish for pastiche, discussed in Part One, does not prevent contemporary writers from challenging and subverting the tradition. Here is where parody enters the scene, in Part Two of Gutleben's study. The author insists on the fact that parody and pastiche are not always easily distinguishable phenomena, which makes the division between Parts One and Two of the book somewhat problematic. Thus, some of the novels approached in Part One from the point of view of pastiche reappear in Part Two, where what is at stake is the parodic rewriting of Victorian conventions. What one should bear in mind, even if Gutleben does not state it explicitly, is that if parody is imitation with critical distance, pastiche (understood as sheer imitation) forms part of parody. A novel may be parodic when considered as a whole, and yet, because a parody should set up its target before subverting it, certain aspects of it may well be approached by regarding it as pastiche. This is a pastiche that ultimately proclaims its own artificiality, that is to say, its contribution to a broader project in which parody expands imitation beyond its limits till it ends up questioning whatever is being imitated. In fact, the co-presence of pastiche and parody seems to me less problematic than the practice of pastiche alone. One may wonder what the point is in writing a whole novel at the end of the twentieth century whose only aim is to imitate a model that, because it is a model, cannot be surpassed. Thus, Gutleben analyses Charles Palliser's *The Quincunx* (1989) as an illustration of retro-Victorian pastiche, which some have read as a parody of Victorian fiction in general and of Dickens' novels in particular, but which, to him, is utterly devoid of parodic intention. I agree that *The Quincunx* is more conservative than innovative, and that it powerfully recalls Victorian fiction in terms of both content and style. However, even though Palliser resorts to pastiche, there are enough destabilising elements (formal and thematic alike) in the text to justify its being interpreted, when the novel is considered as a whole, as a parody, and not as a pastiche. In short, if one wishes to argue that pastiche alone sustains a whole novel and not merely certain aspects of it, something more is needed than what Gutleben offers with regard to *The Quincunx*.

Part Two begins by preparing the reader to find ambiguity all everywhere. Parodic works are playful, ironic, critical, but they cannot be said to be so at the expense of leaving out respect and admiration. Rather, those retro-Victorian novels that resort to parody adopt an ambiguous stance towards the past that is both salutary and derisive at the same time. What is subverted may have to do with characterisation (the main character as social model and moral guide), with the notion of progress (be it historical, social or human), or with the functioning of narrative voice (the stable and univocous instance best represented by the Victorian omniscient narrator). All these possibilities are illustrated through the analysis of particular retro-Victorian novels, whose dynamics also serve to show how the new can be re-invigorated with the old. The reconsideration of gender issues, the importance paid to unheard narrative voices, the role played by the ugly/the unsavoury in fiction, the preference for openness, and other such features which perfectly fit postmodernist tenets, form part of the aesthetic and ideological rewritings of the tradition in works like Jean Rhys' *Wide Sargasso Sea*, Peter Ackroyd's *Dan Leno and the Limehouse Golem*, James Buxton's *Pity,* Alasdair Gray's *Poor Things*, Beryl Bainbridge's *Master Georgie*, etc.

As the author explains, if the first part of his study seems to disagree with the second part, this is only because there are contradictory forces and drives within the practices of retro-Victorian fiction. It is these tensions that Part Three of the book explores. Thus, Gutleben puts the subversive character of certain retro-Victorian narratives into perspective by commenting on the precedents of modernist and early postmodernist literature. As he concludes, "yesterday's scandals are today's conventions" (158), and so, these novels are closer to the more conservative, rather than the more experimental pole of postmodernism. Moreover, taking into account the fact that the main flowering of the retro-Victorian novel took place in the 1980s and 1990s —a period which corresponds to the advent of the politically correct— the author raises a series of questions intended to make the reader reflect on whether or not it is reasonable to harbour the suspicion of an opportunistic drive inherent in this kind of fiction. Favouring certain narrative choices and certain perspectives which were discarded in nineteenth-century literature amounts to giving the reading public what they expect: political correctness has become widespread and, far from being subversive or innovative, it has become "predictable, not to say redundant" (169). Thus, Gutleben concludes, political correctness in the novels he analyses is more a fashionable attitude than an ideological battle.

It is to his credit that the author of *Nostalgic Postmodernism* tends to shun clear-cut distinctions, and hence it is that, despite comments like those mentioned in the paragraph above, he manages to present a retro-Victorian novel as both

subversive and seductive (the work chosen is D. M. Thomas' *Charlotte: The Final Journey of Jane Eyre*). Subversion is possible, even if, as he insists, it must be qualified. And whatever the implications of these novels are, their aesthetic ambiguity and palimpsestuous nature ultimately enrich the narrative. This fact explains why so many of them have been written and also enjoyed by a wide spectrum of readers, invariably driven, despite their different backgrounds and the layers of meaning they may be able to find in the text in question, by the promised pleasures that a good yarn still affords.

Nostalgic Postmodernism is a rewarding read for anyone interested in postmodernist literature in general and, more specifically, in those novels that rewrite the Victorian tradition, which are considered here from several, and often complementary, points of view. A wide range of works are commented on, many of them published shortly before the book itself, and provoking questions are raised for the reader to ponder on. The work improves as it advances and, all in all, it is unlikely to disappoint the reader, being, as it is, a good point of departure for delving into the literature and the critical production connected with the subject it explores.

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JAMES CLARENCE MANGAN, EDWARD WALSH AND NINETEENTH-CENTURY IRISH LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

Anne MacCarthy
New York: The Edwin Mellen Press, 2000.
(by Teresa Sixto Rey. University of Santiago de Compostela)

In recent decades there has been a notable interest in a literature that emerged in nineteenth-century Ireland, written in the English language by native Catholic authors. Important contributors such as Patrick Rafroidi, Anthony Cronin, Michael Cronin or Norman Jeffares have paid attention to it in detail in their numerous studies on the subject. Nevertheless there still remain two important figures that have not been given the status they deserve: I refer to Edward Walsh and James Clarence Mangan. As a general rule, critical studies on Irish literature in English have passed them over rather lightly. Moreover, where other writers have gained general critical attention, they still continue to be marginal figures in the Irish literary cannon. Anne MacCarthy, an expert in Irish writing in English, claims a place for both writers in the tradition of this literature. In her book *James Clarence Mangan, Edward Walsh and Nineteenth-Century Irish Literature in English* she offers a rigorous appraisal of these writers from a new, fresh angle. By drawing on Itamar Even-Zohar's polysystem theory and on André Lefevere's ideas on the canon and translation she discusses Walsh's and Mangan's literary identities and their place in the tradition of Irish literature in English and offers a new valuation of their literary reputation. The book is a lucid and cogent study and it reveals the importance that both writers had for the development of an independent literary tradition and the creation of a new literary identity.

The opening chapter of the book is a useful introduction that helps to clarify aspects relevant to the subsequent analysis of both authors. In it MacCarthy presents the factors that in one way or another affect the formation of a canon and the literary reputations of writers. Thus, using Even-Zohar's polysystem theory she shows how literature is not an isolated discipline but is instead integrated in the rest of human activities. At this point she stresses the connection between literature and society, a particularly relevant connection in the case of Ireland. So, an examination of important concepts in the literary system, such as "institution", "repertoire", "product", "consumer", illustrates with clarity that not only purely aesthetic concerns are taken into account when establishing a literary canon.

Central to her arguments are also Lefevere's ideas on translation, since the authors she discusses wrote many translations form Irish and, in the case of Mangan, from many other languages. Like Lefevere, MacCarthy sees translation as being much more positive than the second-rate activity, equated with imitation and reproduction, that is how it has been regarded since Aristotle. Lefevere (1992: vii) stresses that translation "helps in the evolution of a literature and a society" and this is particularly the case in Ireland, where translation has played a vital role in establishing a tradition instrumental in maintaining the native culture and also in creating something new. This MacCarthy (2000: 86) acknowledges when she writes: "Translation in Irish writing in English not only meant the rediscovery of a native literature, it was also the creation of something new and identifiable Irish".

The chapters that follow set out the central and distinctive features of both writers, emphasising the part played by criticism in determining their literary reputation. Thus, the second and third chapters are devoted to Edward Walsh, while the next three focus on James Clarence Mangan. By providing innovative judgement on their work, these chapters contribute to a critical insight into these writers.

After defining what MacCarthy understands as Irish writing in English, she goes on to explore the consequences resulting from the loss of the Irish language (the disappearance of models to follow and the absence of a literary identity) and to show the significance of translation, and particularly Walsh's and Mangan's translations, for Irish writing in English. By translating from Irish into English these authors helped to prevent Irish culture from falling into oblivion, to recover and revitalise the heroes, legends and folklore of ancient Ireland for present and future generations. Moreover, they helped to establish a "repertoire" (according to Even-Zohar's meaning of that word) and thus to create models for future writers.

Although Walsh is generally studied as a scholarly translator, MacCarthy's perceptive analysis of the poet illustrates how he can be considered a creative artist as well. When translating he systematically takes certain liberties with the text that make him into a good example of a creative translator, "the translator who sees

himself as a creative artist" (2000: 37). And it is this aspect of his writing that MacCarthy underlines, raising the issue of creative composition in translation. Influenced by his ideology as a nationalist, Walsh decided to translate the native poems, recognising the cultural power of the past and the important effects that reviving the Gaelic spirit would bring to the nation. But his faithfulness to the original text did not prevent him from including patriotic sentiments in the text, absent in the original, that give the composition a new meaning. Thus, the two different features that Susan Bassnett spoke of with regard to nineteenth-century translation are identified in Walsh's works: faithfulness and creativity.

As a creative translator, Mangan is even more important than Walsh. His compositions are loose versions of the source texts, whether they be from German, Persian or Irish. Having a more imaginative attitude to translation than mere textual reproduction, his presence is significantly felt in the text, giving it a more personal air. But, most importantly, through these translations Mangan opened the frontiers of the Irish literature to others and he also imported models from literatures other than the British, thus making Irish writing in English more independent and universal.

Having defined Walsh and Mangan as Irish writers in English, MacCarthy moves on to analyse critical views of both authors to reveal how these have determined their literary reputation and their marginalisation within the canon. A challenging look at different opinions on Walsh in nineteenth and twentieth-century scholarship demonstrates how closely ideology and poetics are related to the literary fame of a writer. Thus, MacCarthy acknowledges three main reasons for Walsh's marginalisation: one of them is his dedication to translation, too frequently considered a secondary activity. Another is that his reputation has been predicated on nationalism. When nationalism was in vogue and became an important factor for the establishment of the canon, Walsh enjoyed a moment of fame. However, once nationalism was not so relevant, he fell into oblivion. Thirdly, he translated popular literature in a popular idiom and this has led to his being regarded as an inferior writer. Nevertheless, as MacCarthy's exposition clarifies, critics failed to notice an important fact: Walsh's contribution a new way of writing.

MacCarthy also submits critical work on Mangan to a close scrutiny to demonstrate how critical responses to his work have misjudged his art and how this has conditioned the reception of his writing. Critical evaluations of the poet have generally regarded him as a pathetic figure, enigmatic and elusive, difficult to understand. However, MacCarthy remarks that criticism has been narrow in its focus, applying rigid notions and fixed one-sided views, which ultimately demonstrates that the complexity of Mangan's work has not been understood. In any case, this study goes beyond those simplistic views and reads Mangan as an

important figure for Irish writing in English. Whereas many readings of the poet have regarded him as a minor figure, MacCarthy insists on his literary value, seeing him as a complex writer in his use of humour and his capacity to hide behind multiple masks. As a way of illustrating this, she takes a close look at the different manifestations of Mangan's identity and organises them into two main groups: Mangan the Romantic and Mangan the Augustan. Mangan the Romantic, the eccentric writer whose life is reflected in his work, fits nicely into the Romantic tradition. But problems arise when Mangan the Augustan, who proposes classical virtues such as clarity or self-restraint, subverts Romanticism. It seems that only when the writer adopts a Romantic identity is he considered of literary worth. However, as MacCarthy endeavours to highlight, not having a fixed literary identity does not necessarily lead to a mediocre literary output. On the contrary, it is a good example of an author's way of controlling his craft.

In this carefully-structured and well-argued book, MacCarthy offers a new and revealing study of the poets Edward Walsh and James Clarence Mangan. No single critic has so far examined their joint significance for Irish literature in English. Hence, the need for this full-length critical study. Written with elegance and great scholarship, the book is a painstaking account of two important figures who, in their own unique way of understanding translation, contributed to the creation of a new literary tradition. By rethinking the criteria for the establishment of a literary canon, an issue of major concern to critics today, MacCarthy hopes to open up the canon of Irish writing in Engish to new voices who have been rendered mute for so many years. And one of the book's greatest strengths is precisely this new treatment of the two writers. Certainly, the volume deserves to be read not only by students of Irish literature in English but also by those interested in translation. Irish literary studies will surely be enriched by such an impressive contribution.

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LONDON IN LITERATURE: VISIONARY MAPPINGS OF THE METROPOLIS.

Susana Onega and John A. Stotesbury (eds.)
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(by Christian Gutleben. University of Strasbourg, France)

Because London is an ever-potent muse and writers ceaselessly endeavour to capture her on paper, it appears regularly necessary to reassess the literary treatment of the metropolis. This volume takes stock of London writing up to the very end of the twentieth century; it comprises both diachronic approaches showing the evolution of London as a literary phenomenon and synchronic analyses highlighting the multi-layered nature of the transhistorical cosmopolis. The undeniable assets of this collection of academic papers are its unity and its diversity.

The city as a promise and a threat, a longed-for paradise and a potential inferno, a locus of human aspiration to perfection and a place of alienation, the epitome of civilisation and the embodiment of ruthlessness, the centre of cultural exchanges and the site of miscommunication: this tension between a utopian and dystopian representation of London lies at the heart of all the papers. Interestingly, certain literary movements (and hence certain papers studying these movements) privilege one polarity over the other; romanticism and modernism thus seem to present disenchanted visions of the metropolis, even if the nineteenth-century poems insist on a sense of loss and nostalgia, whereas the early twentieth-century novels dwell on the contemporary alienation of the individual. Just as interestingly, the studies of the postmodern depictions of the metropolis clearly demonstrate that the problematic tension between utopia and dystopia is not to be solved but is a fundamental aspect of the contradictory nature of the pluralistic urban tissue.

Another unifying device of the papers in this volume is the treatment of "space as a modality of time" (as Jean-Michel Ganteau puts it). The spatial dimension of the city inevitably reveals a temporal dimension whereby the traces of history are made visible. London then appears as a place of permanence, a place of intercourse between the past and the present, the living and the dead, tradition and modernity. To quote Patrick Parrinder's perspicacious oxymoron, London is a city of "living phantoms", in other words a city where temporalities are mixed and combined, where time is synchronic —and not successive. Naturally, the idea of a temporal synchronism —just like the tension between utopia and dystopia— is not specific to London but applies to the metropolis in general. This remark is not intended deprecatingly, on the contrary it wishes to draw attention on the wide scope of this volume: any scholar interested in the structuring metaphors of the city (the city as labyrinth, palimpsest, auditorium, living body, spiritual being, archaeological site, or geological field) will find rich food for thought in these papers. This does not mean that the specificity of London is not taken into account: John Stotesbury analyses London as a trope of the crisis of the British empire in Graham Greene's fiction and Susana Onega tackles the Englishness of the visionary mappings of London through the intertextual study of the dialogue between Peter Ackroyd and William Blake.

The diversity of the papers is not only historical (covering the literatures from the sixteenth to the late twentieth centuries), but is also generic since poetry, fiction, biography and autobiography are all carefully construed. It may perhaps be regretted that Peter Ackroyd and Ian Sinclair should so often be taken as key examples when so many other postmodern London writers could have provided fascinating objects of study, notably Salman Rushdie, Angela Carter, Martin Amis and Graham Swift. But a collection of eleven papers can hardly be expected to deal with all of one's favourite authors and rather than finishing on a note of regret I would like to conclude by praising the structure of the volume. The chronological disposition of the papers allows the reader to very well perceive the evolution in the characterisation of London in the various literary movements, and sometimes even within the same tradition –I am thinking here of the changing representations of London within modernism. This panorama through time and genre is aptly framed by an introduction which presents the contents, scope and purpose of the following contributions and by a penetrating final paper which proposes a critical synthesis of London literature and suggests that, if the myth of London has fostered much literature, it is equally valid to state that it is literature that has created the much profitable myth of London.

ADRESSING THE ASIAN DIASPORA: ENCOUNTERS: PEOPLE OF ASIAN DESCENT IN THE AMERICAS.
Roshni Rustomji-Kerns, Rajini Srikanth, and Leny Mendoza Strobel (eds.)
Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 1999.
IDENTIDAD ÉTNICA Y GÉNERO EN LA NARRATIVA DE ESCRITORAS CHINOAMERICANAS.
Begoña Simal González
La Coruña: Servicio de Publicaciones de la Universidad de La Coruña, 2000.
NEGOTIATING IDENTITIES: AN INTRODUCTION TO ASIAN AMERICAN WOMEN'S WRITING.
Helena Grice
Manchester: Manchester UP, 2002.
THE CHUTNEYFICATION OF HISTORY: SALMAN RUSHDIE, MICHAEL ONDAATJE, BHARATI MUKHERJEE AND THE POSTCOLONIAL DEBATE.
Mita Benerjee
Heidelberg: Universitätverlag C. Winter, 2002.
(by Rocío G. Davis. University of Navarra)

Some of the most creatively innovative and critically challenging writing of the past few decades is arguably the literature of the diasporas, the domain of transcultural and transnational identity politics and poetics. The fact of globalization has radically expanded the study of modern diasporas, creating the opportunity for plurality, and for a new kind of literature, that engages the story of diaspora on both a socio-cultural and aesthetic level. The texts I will analyze in this review, in different ways, prove how the transcultural subject's engagement with cultural production necessarily limns oftentimes problematic classifications such as *exilic*, *ethnic*, or *immigrant*, which do not do justice to the nuances of writing between histories, geographies, and cultural practices. Many of these texts explore the paradigms for understanding the relationship between displacement, languages, history, memory, and borders, as parameters of self-identification and self-representation. Diasporic literatures remind us that culture is, ultimately, a dialogue, and that the artifacts produced by subjects located in diasporic positions signify substantially on a discursive level. Specifically, the cultural production of the Asian diaspora has been obliging critics to revise some of the previously uncontested paradigms of postmodernism, ethnic studies, and postcolonialism, and re-negotiate the broader cultural history of Asian immigration. Intimately connected to cultural memory, it provides a translation of semiotic behavior of dislocation and resettlement, offering renewed versions of the phenomenological

reality of the Asian immigrant and subsequent generations. In a broad sense, diasporic narratives represent a conscious effort to transmit a linguistic and cultural heritage and difference through acts of personal and collective memory, filtered through the prism of fiction or negotiated though a variety of art forms. These texts demonstrate the increasing multilayeredness of the transcultural experience, deploying the issues facing deterritorialized cultures in their act of self-representation.

The paradigms of ethnic writing and criticism in the United States, whose critical attention has grown immensely since the 1960s, provide an interesting point of departure for approaches to diasporic writing in the Americas and in Europe. Importantly, the form of writing addresses the missing links in history and fills in the blanks in America's and Europe's writing about itself. Roshni Rustomji-Kerns, in her introduction to *Encounters*, argues that the anthology strives to reflect "the reality of our experiences in the Americas where we live our lives in the context of multiple societies and communities", rather than focus primarily on issues of interaction with economic and political groups. Clearly, the investigation of textual constructions and cultural affiliations that shape the notion of the diasporic subject calls for a nuanced reading of the interdisciplinary production of these people. This highly original and fascinating anthology thus foregrounds the multiple spaces and positions that the diasporic Asians occupy in the Americas, by incorporating the creative and critical writing that privileges the social and political spaces where cultures interact, and literature as an institution of cultural memory. *Encounters* provides a multifaceted comparative and theoretical framework that is not only highly innovative, but which is a valuable contribution to diaspora studies because of the organic perspective it offers of the processes of diaspora and adaptation, as well as of creative engagements with questions of authenticity and belonging. Moreover, the polyphony of texts in the anthology —by established writers and critics as well as emerging voices— stresses the dialogic nature of contemporary incursions into the meaning of the diaspora and the literature that arises from that experience.

The anthology features a combination of creative writing (poetry, drama, and fiction), personal essays, and critical articles that play against each other to create a multifaceted version of the diaspora story. The first part, "In Search of my Ombligo —Locating the Family" details diverse itineraries of personal identity and self-formation, often using bilingualism to creatively illustrate the role of languages in the struggle for selfhood. On some occasions, hybridity or cultural syncretism is the result of the process of reflection. Reproduction of visual art by Kay Reiko Torres and Tomoyo Hiroishi attest to this blend. Hiroishi's woodblock, entitled "La Búsquedad de la Identidad —In Search of My Identity", features a shelf with both

traditional Mexican and Japanese masks, and which suggests the choice she has to make, and the synthesis she arrives at. Leny Mendoza Strobel's personal account, "Dreaming All the Way Home," outlines her process of "de-colonization", and how dream images of ancestors and cultural past configured her inner landscape and led to her particular manner of forging a future. Three essays focus on Asian-Hispanic subjects: Monica Cinco Basurto, Lok C.D. Siu and Stephanie Li engage the cultural mix of Chinese immigrants in Mexican and Panamanian settings. Li's "In Search of My Ombligo", for example, tells of her Chinese American father's marriage to her Mexican mother —a wedding that included a mariachi band and the reception at a Chinese restaurant. Kathryne Jeun Cho's piece, "The Boy Under the Bridge", recounts her Korean family's odyssey to the United States, passing through Brazil, sustained by her father's idea of the American Dream. Aly Remtulla's poem, "We Sail Across Memories" subtly pinpoints the nature of the diasporic journey, and the heritage of its subjects.

The second section, "The Politics of Cool —Locating a Community" expands the arena of creative and critical concern, to negotiate the ethnic encounters of, among others, Japanese Peruvians, Chinese in Cuba, Okinawan immigrants in Bolivia, and Black Korea. Interestingly, two essays focus on the influence of African American youth culture and music on Asian groups: Sunaina Maira's essay, "The Politics of 'Cool': Indian American Youth Culture in New York City" is a fascinating explanation of the cultural permutations and hybridity of Indian Americans who increasingly identify with African American youth culture and the way this intersects with issues of class and gender politics; likewise, Janet Shirley's "The Story of Double R" also shows the influence of black culture through the story of a Filipino American youth's involvement with gangs and drugs. The final section, "Volcán de Izalco, amén —Locating the Body and the Land" opens with Dwight Okita's poem on being Asian American, how "As I child, I was a fussy eater / and I would separate the yolk from the egg white / as I now try to sort out what is Asian / in me from what is American—", realizing that "countries are not / like eggs —except in the fragileness / of their shells". The poems, essays and photographs in this section negotiate the development of a racialized consciousness within the landscape of the country they inhabit, and how preestablished categories of racial classification are not necessarily part of each subject's process of self-identification. On the contrary, the essays, stories, and poems repeatedly suggest the necessity of challenging stereotypical notions of the characteristics of Asian allegiances, and point to highly original itineraries of selfhood and cultural affiliation.

Rustomji-Kerns, quoting Walton Look Lai, privileges in the formulation of the central issues of the anthology, the idea of "an Hemispheric consciousness… as an

intellectual notion" to address how people from Asia in the Americas "define Asia for themselves and for the communities they live in, and how they describe their connections or lack of connections to Asia and recognize their own roles and the role of Asia in the American, especially in relation to the roles of others whose participation in the settling or the unsettling of the Americas has been barely acknowledged, denied, relegated to obscurity or denigrated." The three sections — focusing on family, community, and the land— highlight key issues in the development of both diasporic consciousness and transcultural affiliations: processes which are highly individual but which stress what Karen Tei Yamashita, in the preface, describes as "the extended fabric of our connecting lives across nations, cultures, and histories". By problematizing current premises about diasporic Asians, the volume as a whole challenges ideological preconceptions and suggests a revising of received theory, particularly with regard to the nature of the Asian presence in the Americas, and the mutual influences they exert in the places they inhabit.

The three other texts I will examine testify to the increasing significance of the literature of the Asian diaspora in the field of contemporary literature. Each of the books were published in different European countries —Spain, the U.K., and Germany— signaling a welcome growth of international critical interest. Begoña Simal's study contributes significantly to the development of two areas in recent Spanish literary criticism: it offers both an introduction to emblematic female Chinese American writers, and engages in a discussion of ethnicity and gender theory. Her theoretically grounded study is a useful introduction to issues of race, ethnicity and gender, and well as of narrative strategies and the metaphors ethnic writers have appropriated to describe their lives and forms of living. Centering only on Chinese American writers allows the author to delve in detail into aspects of immigration history and racial encounters, as well as the dynamics of Chinatown, which figures prominently in several texts.

Simal's choice of authors reflects her intention: to present a coherent outline of the most emblematic themes and narrative strategies used by writers to formulate the development of the consciousness of being Chinese American, as well as to explore the possibilities of defining that contested term. Maxine Hong Kingston, Amy Tan, Fae Myenne Ng, and Sigrid Nunez, in different ways, have marked the trajectory of Asian American narrative. Through a theoretically-informed reading of these writers' texts, Simal elucidates the reasons why these texts have become seminal in the canon of Asian American literature. Her focus on language, for example, considers one of the central concerns of women writers. Insofar as culture is memory, it can be retrieved though symbolic action, and Simal highlights the use of language as a powerful tool for both cultural memory and empowerment. Language constructs personal, social, and literary identity, and the choice of silence

as a central theme in many of these texts, as well as Simal's privileging of this metaphor, signifies on several levels. The question of language choice, as well as the possibility or necessity of moving beyond language, is a constant in Asian American literature. Silence becomes as powerful a form of discourse as words. In this regard, we see her debt to King-kok Cheung's 1993 study, *Articulate Silences*. Nonetheless, Simal takes Cheung's arguments a step further by engaging ethnicity and gender, making the texts dialogue with recent theory. Also, her incursion into the terrain of the in-between —the question of "either/or, both/and" can apply to discussions of other ethnic literatures as well. Notable are her detailed and intelligent readings of each of the texts —particularly that of Ng's *Bone*— and her negotiation of the nuances of ethnic and gendered discourse.

For professors of ethnic studies in Spain, Simal's study serves as a useful tool for graduate courses on Asian American literature, particularly when used in conjunction with Helena Grice's *Negotiating Identities*, which complements Simal's book in its approach to the issues and strategies enacted in Asian American women's writing. At a critical moment such as this one, where Asian American studies has gained a firm place in University curriculums in the United States and in many places in Europe, a concern with the links between the cultural production of Asian immigrants in the United States and Britain, for example, is being stressed, as well as the connecting strands between this writing and that in other countries who have increasingly large populations of Asians. Developed as a critical introduction to Asian American and British Asian writing for students in the U.K., Grice's book offers a theoretically-grounded, comprehensive view of the development of the writing in question. Its scope is wider than Simal's, as Grice engages the several Asian ethnicities (Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Filipino, and South Asian), and foregrounds issues such as mother/daughter writing —which practically dominated Asian American women's writing in the 1970s and 1980s— the intersection of gender and identity, narratives on Red China, writing biraciality, the question of citizenship and national identity, as well as definitions of home.

Grice chooses to approach the texts in question from a feminist perspective which "stresses the importance of not creating critical authority at the expense of the writing under consideration". This stance, which refreshingly contradicts current obsessions with theory, permits her to foreground issues of literary aesthetics and imagination. Her close readings of the narratives she considers, therefore, simultaneously privilege writing as both an act of agency and an art form. The formulation of the book, which begins with an overall introduction to the central themes and seminal works of the different Asian ethnicities, as well as the positioning of Asian diasporic women in history and in the context of feminist theory, is pedagogically useful. The development of ideas and discussion is clear

and concise, setting the groundwork for the rest of the study. In particular, the discussion of biraciality and the question of national and cultural affiliations are carefully nuanced and intelligent. Significantly, Grice engages texts that cover the entire 20th century, allowing the reader to appreciate the changing perspectives on race: the Eaton sisters, Diana Chang, Han Suyin, and Aimee Liu's definitions of and negotiations with biraciality provide a comprehensive view of a critical aspect of Asian diasporic identity politics. In the chapter on citizenship and national identity, the author tackles a variety of texts that crucially problematize America's and Canada's treatment of its own citizens, and the Asian American/Canadian subjects' personal and creative responses to the trauma of relocation, which led to their psychological and political dislocation.

Another of Grice's concerns in her book is the need to critically engage texts which may be popular, but which are more critically complex than may appear —Tan's *The Joy Luck Club* or Adeline Mah's *Falling Leaves* have become notable bestsellers, and may have contributed to promoting dangerous stereotypes about Chinese culture. Grice shows how these texts are actually much more complex than they may appear to the general public, and respond significantly to cultural moments. Interestingly, Grice tackles a question that plagues scholars of ethnic American literatures who are not (ethnic) Americans and work outside the United States —the insidious issue of cultural accessibility and authority, and the oftentimes ironically ghettoizing disposition of American scholars when faced with European colleagues. She points to what Houston Baker has called "earned participation" of white scholars in a "still evolving work" of ethnic criticism. For those of us who are not ethnic Americans and yet teach and write on ethnic or diasporic literatures, the question of insider/outsider position continues to be a contested terrain. Nonetheless, this notable text proves that Grice has rightfully earned her place among her colleagues —Asian American or not— who engage this literature.

From her position as an Indian German, Mita Banerjee uses her perception of the constituent of her transcultural position as a springboard for the interrogation of critical issues, as they are deployed in fiction and theory. Her recent *The Chutneyfication of History* focuses on three emblematic Asian diasporic writers: Salman Rushdie, Michael Ondaatje, and Bharati Mukherjee. Using the paradigms of both postcolonialism in its intersections with postmodernism, Banerjee constructs a critically challenging and remarkably coherent discussion of the manner in which these writers manipulate issues of history, spaces, language, authenticity, and representation. Where Rushdie employs chutney as a metaphor for his version of historiography, Banerjee enhances the metaphorical applicability of this image to negotiate the representations of cultural difference and interculturality. The author teases out fascinating implications of this central

metaphor: she points out how the chutney's "disruptive spatiality" allows the migrant "to juxtapose a variety of disparate features among which no hierarchy is established" as it simultaneously gestures towards "the constant push and pull between heterogeneity on the one hand and a spatial unity on the other, an incessant to and fro which I believe is central to the discourses of postcoloniality in general". The structure of Banerjee's discussion is based on what she calls "postmodernism's own preoccupations" —the question of spaces, originality, the concept of political agency, language, and nationhood— from the point of view of the acknowledged master narratives.

By reading these diasporic narratives firmly in the context of critical theories of postmodernism and postcolonialism, Banerjee critically challenges specific ideas regarding issues such as hybridity or reinscription. Her perceptive interrogation of her "concerns", as well as her exceptionally clear and well-founded arguments lead to a text that challenges the reader to re-think previously authoritative issues —she does not unquestioningly accept the tenets or the practice of postmodern criticism, pointing out their pitfalls and suggesting manners of fruitfully deploying them. Her criticism, for example, of what she calls "postmodernism's infatuation with marginality" allows her to explain how this concern may actually invalidate itself: "for postmodernism professes to love the Other precisely in his/her marginality, never sameness. In this light, postmodernism's dubbing the struggle for inclusion a cognitive failure is all the more precarious, since emancipation, through inclusion, will inevitably result in the loss of marginality, depriving postmodernism of what it feeds on". Her revising of some of the tenets of postmodernism are especially gratifying, as she elucidates, for instance, the crucial need for postmodernism to consider the spatial implications of some theories of postmodernity, lest it develop into another universalist narrative. Speaking of the "pocomo" blend, she stresses the need to consider that the fusion of postmodernism and postcolonialism occasions a deconstruction of history "*on another level*", the latter point being crucial because a failure of appropriate reinscription "epitomizes the postmodern practice of a defiance of concepts not through a thrust towards inclusion but a deconstruction of the very concepts themselves". Her detailed and perceptive readings of several texts by each of the writers in question illustrate her critical concerns on both a theoretical and narrative level. Her reading of the nature of hybridity, in particular, as well as her acknowledged ambivalence precisely because of its many possibilities, is useful as an approach to other texts. The questions she raises are intelligently deployed, and she outlines her process of arriving at answers (or more questions) with a logic and lucidity that is remarkable in such a young scholar. I have no hesitation in classifying this study as one of the boldest and most brilliant negotiations of the critical terms we often exploit unquestioningly in our studies of diasporic and postcolonial issues.

For the subjects of the Asian diaspora, as well as the critics who study them, questions of historical contingencies, cultural choices, the possibilities of self-invention and self-inscription mark the itineraries of transculturalism. These critical studies also gesture significantly towards a highly useful approach: the firm grounding in both critical theory and a close reading of texts —not allowing theory to create the texts, but rather to elucidate them. By struggling to contextualize the narratives in history (and historiography), diverse locations or the process of travel itself, specific cultural moments, these texts reiterate the idea of the palimpsestic/chameleonic character of the subjects of the Asian diaspora, as well as their capacity for change, adaptation, and creativity, as they are not only transformed by the cultures they live within, but in turn, transform society and artistic canons.

Abstracts

PALINODES, PALINDROMES AND PALIMPSESTS: STRATEGIES OF DELIBERATE SELF-CONTRADICTION IN POSTMODERN BRITISH FICTION

Christian Gutleben

This paper sets out to argue that contemporary British fiction, by using palinodes, palindromes and palimpsests both on the micro- and macro-structural levels, favours a logic of association of contraries *which* ipso facto deconstructs any monologic reflexion and conception of the world. To combine and superimpose contrary ideas means to eschew the monolithic. It also expresses the composite, heterogeneous, and yes eclectic, nature of postmodernism and its fundamental incredulity towards any singular ideology and aesthetic tradition. Ultimately, if contemporary fiction flaunts its contradictory syncretism, it is to claim the right to simultaneously and oxymoronically defend opposed tendencies, beliefs and influences.

Key words: Postmodernism, palinode, palindrome, palimpsest, G. Swift, J. Barnes, M. Amis, A. Carter, D.M. Thomas, A.S. Byatt.

GENRE, AUTEUR AND IDENTITY IN CONTEMPORARY HOLLYWOOD CINEMA: CLINT EASTWOOD'S *WHITE HUNTER, BLACK HEART*

Luis Miguel García Mainar

The essay is an attempt firstly to look into the persistence of forms of auteurism in contemporary Hollywood cinema and, secondly, to prove the relevance of a

joint genre-auteur analysis. Its starting point is the assumption that auteurs survive in, among other forms, the work of those directors who also act in their films, and whose film career has invested them with cultural connotations. Clint Eastwood is a case in point: his *White Hunter, Black Heart* (1990) illustrates how its generic configuration, as well as its representation of male identity, are inflected by the meanings associated with the auteur. The essay concludes that the complexity of meanings provided by the star-auteur lends the film an ambivalence that reveals its status as transition piece within the turmoil of gender and genre changes that affected the Hollywood cinema of the early 1990s.

Key words: Authorship, genre, identity, masculinity, reflexivity.

'SOME OF ALL OF US IN YOU': INTRA-RACIAL RELATIONS, PAN-AFRICANISM AND DIASPORA IN PAULE MARSHALL'S *THE FISHER KING*

Lourdes López Ropero

Although it is the rise and fall of jazz in the African-American and black expatriate French scenes that shapes *The Fisher King* (2000), what really draws the reader's attention in Caribbean-American Paule Marshall's latest novel is her revisiting of her old Brooklyn neighbourhood of Bedford-Stuyvesant, the setting of her first novel, *Brown Girl, Brownstones* (1959). After recreating an ambience her readers are familiar with, Marshall engages in a much closer study of the long-standing rifts still breaching Brooklyn's multi-ethnic black community —made up of 'native' blacks, Afro-Caribbean and Black Southern immigrants and their descendants— in the mid-1980s. Furthermore, for the first time in her writing career, Marshall touches upon black communities living in European, particularly French ghettoes. Thus, I argue that in focusing on diversity and conflict within black communities in US ghettoes and dwelling on their European counterparts, *The Fisher King* completes Marshall's trajectory of widening and problematising the notion of the black subject and its community. I relate Marshall's positioning to the recent debates over Pan-Africanism and diaspora led by cultural critics such as Paul Gilroy or Stuart Hall. Bringing into my discussion other novels by the author, I claim *The Fisher King* as an excellent companion to *Brown Girl, Brownstones*, through which Paule Marshall's writing career comes full circle.

Key words: Pan-Africanism, diaspora, ethnicity, migration, Caribbean.

MY BEAUTIFUL LAUNDRETTE: HYBRID "IDENTITY", OR THE PARADOX OF CONFLICTING IDENTIFICATIONS IN "THIRD SPACE" ASIAN-BRITISH CINEMA OF THE 1980S

Mónica Calvo Pascual

This essay will attempt to define Kureishi and Frears' 1985 film as a mid-1980s British-Asian film that escapes the "burden of representation" that characterised earlier Black British cinema in two main ways. Firstly, through the representation of the British-Asian protagonist as a homosexual with a "Thatcherite" entrepreneurial drive, the film subverts the notion of the Black community as the homogeneous entity which the "cinema of duty" set out to portray. And then, the film's generic and technical hybridity breaks with the "realism" of those earlier films and, through its representation of "reality" as fragmentary, relative and contradictory, creates a space for the questioning of received notions of "identity". Thus, the British-Asian protagonist is represented in his individualistic struggle as reconstructing his sense of "identity" out of the traces he finds most convenient from each of the different cultures that inform his ethnic hybridity, a process that is revealed as being essentially paradoxical.

Key words: Ethnic hybridity, third space, in-betweenness, "new realism".

SERIAL MURDER, SERIAL CONSUMERISM: BRET EASTON ELLIS'S *AMERICAN PSYCHO* (1991)

Sonia Baelo Allué

Bret Easton Ellis is a representative blank fiction writer whose novels deal with violence, indulgence, sexual excess, decadence, consumerism and commerce. In *American Psycho* (1991) he focuses on the phenomenon of the serial killer. The aim of this paper is to look into the ways in which the seriality of the serial killer's murders is linked to the seriality provided by different forms of mass culture: talk shows, daily news, advertisements, pop music, magazines and consumerism in general. Our society's never-ending serial consumerism is mirrored by the serial killer's never-ending killings. Taken to its ultimate consequences, consumerism includes everything, which dehumanises people and blurs the difference between consuming objects and consuming human beings. The concept of seriality is deeply embedded in our culture, and is shared by serial killer fiction, mass cultural productions, and by consumerism, which may account for the current popularity of the serial killer.

Key words: Bret Easton Ellis, *American Psycho*, blank fiction, consumerism, serial killers.

THE TWO SIDES OF A SINGLE COIN: *KARUN RASA* AND TRAGIC FEELING

Anupam Nagar

The paper begins by discussing the Indian idea of *Karun Rasa* as interpreted by Abhinavgupta, Nagendra, Visvanath, Bhattnayak, Gunchandra, Ramchandra and Raja Bhoja, and then compares it with the Western concept of *Tragic Feeling* as explained by Aristotle, Hume, Leavis, Schopheneur, Hegel, Nietzsche, Faguet, Butcher, Langer, Dickson, Thorndike, and Murry. Finally it is concluded that the extraordinary opinions of Abhinavgupta, Bhattnayak and Leavis are of outstanding importance in the present context.

Key words: *Karun Rasa*, tragic feeling, death, metaphysics, Eastern thought vs. Western thought.

Notes for contributors

NOTES FOR CONTRIBUTORS

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   …perform a distinctive function in discourse (Blakemore 1987).
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NEALE, STEVE. 1992. "The Big Romance or Something Wild?: Romantic Comedy Today". *Screen* 33 (3) (Autumn 1992): 284-299.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The publication of volumen 26 has also been somewhat delayed. This issue (the second of the two volumes for the year 2002) has appeared in December 2003. This delay has been mainly due to the substantial changes of format that have been recently introduced in our Journal, which have necessarily postponed the edition of some issues.

We would also like to thank all the colleagues who, without belonging to our Editorial Board, were willing to revise and assess some of the contributions.