ANNALS OF THE UNIVERSITY

OF CRAIOVA

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TOWARDS AN INTROSPECTIVE REALITY: POE AND HAWTHORNE RECALLED

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Abstract: *Edgar Allan Poe and Nathaniel Hawthorne are the two genius writers of the nineteenth century America. They are considered the forefathers of the American Romanticism as they take romanticism beyond its borders, into a realistic dimension. What both of them practice is dark romanticism, because what permeates through their works is the negative side of people. Besides, they innovate to short story and detective fiction in which they depict a different reality of life. Although Poe and Hawthorne might look different at first sight, they have a lot in common in terms of their distinct realistic attitudes. This article will focus on these representative features of the two author's fiction in the short stories "The Black Cat" and "Young Goodman Brown", both investigating themes such as the human temptation and the evil side of humankind.*

Keywords: *American Romanticism, realism, human condition, short story.*

Introduction

Highly appreciated in the modern age, Edgar Allan Poe and Nathaniel Hawthorne are known for their distinct ways of expression and the use of effective styles, which is why it is hardly astonishing to draw similarities between the two with regard to their short stories "The Black Cat" and "Young Goodman Brown" (Jones 1994: 429). Applying to similar symbols and motives in their writings, they exhibit common points to be taken into consideration as they reflect the other side of reality. In this paper, I shall analyse the points in the short stories that the two writers make use of to present their personal understanding of reality.

Reality through Poe and Hawthorne's Eyes

Principally, Edgar Allan Poe is an early nineteenth century writer who is quite challenging and innovative in his techniques and style. He exposes the human psychology from a darker angle and brings forth the

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undiscovered sides of real life, thus creates a dark, romantic, yet ironically realistic atmosphere. He has a difficult familial life because of which he is mostly said to create such grotesque and sordidly realistic stories. He is famous for his stories full of horror and mystery such as "The Fall of the House of Usher" and "The Tell-Tale Heart." On the other side, Nathaniel Hawthorne, who is known for his masterpiece *The Scarlet Letter*, is also a great nineteenth century writer, exemplifies Transcendentalism in his works which is a philosophical movement in the 1830s and 40s claiming that the state, church and other governmental institutes corrupt the innate innocence of the individuals and that the humanbeings should be all free and consciously united with the divine, in other words, nature. This way, the society shall consist of self-reliant and confident members, the transcendentalists argue. Compared to Poe, Hawthorne seems to embody a more conforming personality and self-fashioned style, yet he still has the courage to criticise the state, the church and even his own Puritan ancestors for crimes they all committed (Marshall 2009: 21-32). Hence, one can point out that these two writers significantly go their own distinct paths. Yet, with a detailed study, it is immediately comprehended that Poe and Hawthorne desire to give humanity similar messages in similar techniques in their "The Black Cat" and "Young Goodman Brown" stories.

To begin with, both writers belong to the American Romantic tradition in that they focus on the feelings as well as psychology of the individuals and reflect the inner side of humanbeings in contrast to the harsh rationality and dogma of the Age of Reason (Pakdiwatan 2004: 3). Still, they practice dark romanticism because what is transmitted through their works is the negative and dark side of humanbeings and life in general. So, it is fair to claim that they depict reality through the dark actions of the characters. In this respect, two stories are parallel in their main themes implemented within narration.

"The Black Cat" by Poe is a short story about a cold hearted man who confesses the reader how pitilessly he killed his beloved cat first and then his wife for no certain reason but the inherent evil growing inside him. He is a normal, compassionate man in the beginning of the story. He has been brought up as an animal lover by his parents and he continues to pet many animals like birds and rabbits in his house even after he is married (Poe 1843: 4). He and his sensitive wife pursue a quite normal and happy life until the narrator starts consuming alcohol. After then, he gets wilder, less conscious and more vicious each passing day by drinking. He loses his temper easily, ignores, in fact tortures all his pets but the black cat named Pluto and even humiliates his wife. Later on, he possesses a much more arrogant and cruel attitude towards everyone and everything around him.

Meanwhile, his wife is rather understanding towards him even though other household members (i.e. animals) avoid him to protect themselves. Nevertheless, the black cat Pluto gets on his nerves for following him everywhere and the narrator turns into a monster after he blinds Pluto with a penknife one night and kills him the other night. He explains these actions as sins, yet he does not feel any guilt as he has no conscience left (1843: 6, 7, 8).

What is more, the darkness, hate and rage hidden inside his nature are all trigerred because of a symbolic outside element, which is alcohol in the story. Through the end of the story, he takes another black cat from the streets, but this one has some white around its neck, as being different from Pluto. Even though he wants to be a normal person again and love this cat, he attempts to kill it just as he did before. Yet, he kills his wife instead by accident. But even this loss does not affect him. In fact, he is happy that there is noone around anymore to bother him. So, cruelly he buries the body into the cellar wall and feels like he has just got rid of a burden. The cat is also amiss which gives him great relief. He is happy just for a few days because neither the neighbours nor the police visit his house to ask about his wife who is now long dead. Then, the police catches him unaware and searches every part of the house including the cellar.

Meanwhile, the narrator is extremely calm as he has walled his wife in and there is no way to discover it unless he confesses to the police himself. He acts normal, smiles and takes the police officers towards the exit of the cellar. But, just as they are leaving the place, a terrible noise, in fact, moaning is heard from inside the wall and the officers open the wall to see a corpse and a giant black cat resting on the head of the body. This scene is the most subtle evidence to the narrator's crime, which sends him to the gallows at the end of the story. This end can also be interpreted as the divine justice of the "Most Merciful and Most Terrible" God, in Poe's own words, to an extremely sinful humanbeing (1843: 8). Hence, Poe suggests that men can become the devil itself quite easily because the darkness is already a part of humanbeings just like goodness and that they can commit sin only because it is forbidden to them. The theme is quite realistic and common to all humanity as almost all evil in the world is related to the acts of people. This depicts the human temptation into sin and the innate evil inside mankind which are also studied by Hawthorne from a dark Romantic perspective likewise. (Dinçer 2010: 220-23)

In "Young Goodman Brown", Nathaniel Hawthorne wields similar themes to Poe's about the human nature and the tendency to sin. The story is about an ordinary man Young Goodman Brown, as the name suggests, who departs his house saying goodbye to his young and pious wife, Faith at night to arrange some business matters. His wife is worried that he is going into

the forest at night, yet Goodman Brown assures her that he will be alright, in fact thinking she might be right anyway because he is into an evil path. He walks through the forest which is considered to be a frightening and evil place at night and regrets that he has left home. He then meets his friend in the woods who is elder and more cunning than him and who has a mysterious, snake-like stuff on his back. They continue their way talking about a range of topics including the governor and the religious fathers of the town of whom Goodman Brown dreads very much. (Hawthorne 1835: 1, 2)

Shortly after, they come across an elderly pious woman Goodman Brown has known since his childhood. Brown's friend decides to meet the woman alone while Brown hides because he does not want to be labelled as a man wandering in the woods at night. Brown watches his friend and the woman from a distance, but they seem to indulge in a strange conversation and he gets shocked when his friend's stuff turns into a man. Goodman Brown cannot believe his eyes, as what has just happened is beyond reason and his comprehension. Then, the man and old woman keep talking about the meeting of a secret group in the woods and soon they join them. The meeting brings the bishops, aristocrats, young, old, good and bad, pious as well as criminal people of the town side by side. This causes a great trauma in Young Goodman Brown as all people he fears and respects are chanting mysterious and magical words at night and in this forest. He is even more surprised while his wife Faith is dragged into the group as a victim who is to be offered to a black shadow for her faith and innocence.

The group circles around a black shadow in the shape of a man and keep chanting. At the same time, the shadow calls his people, this group, as his children. He indicates these people are from the witches' generation who were executed and burned long ago during witch trials. Hence, this incident changes Brown's notion of good and evil because he loses his faith and trust in religion and in these people most of whom he adored minutes ago. So confused and rageful, he decides to save his wife and prepares to interrupt the ritual ignoring the fact that this group might hurt him. For he has just killed all his faith, he has no fear of anything anymore. Therefore, he challenges these people to give him his wife back, yet the group surround them and listen to the dark figure. Then, the figure baptises the group with a kind of liquid like blood. At this instant, Goodman Brown realises that his ancestors are also magical people, the witches (1835: 4-7). He and his wife are the only ones hesitating to join the darkness and he tells Faith to be strong and resist against the evil.

At the end, he is left alone in the woods leaning on a damp rock. In this confused state, Goodman Brown wakes up from his dream. Faith is by his side and everything seems normal. Still, under the influence of the ritual

incident, he starts acting skeptical towards his wife, the bishops, aristocrats and the other townspeople he sees in everyday life. At the end of the story, the narrator conveys that Young Goodman Brown lives for long years with his wife, children and grandchildren. However, he has lost his soul at that night in the forest. After then, he has pursued his life as a man without faith. Consequently, it is again and again assured that this story is about humanbeings' easy tendency to lose faith and embrace the evil.

Young Goodman Brown loses his strict Puritan faith only because of a small happening which gives no clue if it was real or imaginary. This proves his irrational fondedness to religion and also secret doubts about religion which come to surface by an event either happened or dreamed. These doubts are indeed the reflections of Hawthorne's own cynicism about his Puritan past (Dinçer 2010: 224). So, Hawthorne clearly indicates that mankind, who is represented by Goodman Brown in the story, are so quickly seduced to leave faith and step into the realm of darkness (Kallay 2003: 36). As seen in both stories, two authors emphasise the very same quality of mankind, also the blurry distinction between good and evil.

Apart from the themewise resemblances, Poe and Hawthorne make use of similar symbols, motives and styles in their stories. They employ elements to create a persuasive, realistic but at the same time supernatural atmosphere as a context to their narration (Dinçer 2010: 224-25). In terms of supernatural, Poe brings back the dead cat Pluto in the second cat's body in "The Black Cat." Besides, the second cat has some white around its neck which symbolises the rope Pluto is hanged with. Hence, it symbolises resurrection. The mysterious fire in the narrator's house which starts at the very night he murders Pluto, also the terrible sound coming out of the cellar wall and the last scene with the corpse and the cat's head are other examples of the supernatural in Poe's story.

As for Hawthorne's supernatural in "Young Goodman Brown", the forest is narrated as an evil place and Young Goodman Brown's friend turns his burden into a man. Then a ritual takes place and people chant, after that a shadow emerges and commands to people, Faith is brought to the place for sacrifice and at the end of the story, it is not proved if this has all been a dream or not. So, the story develops in a supernatural and horrorful atmosphere in which all bad events happen at night and it ends mysteriously just like Poe's story "The Black Cat." Moreover, both Poe and Hawthorne choose their characters' names intentionally to serve their purpose in the stories. For instance, Poe's black cat is named Pluto, which means "the lord of the dead." Accordingly, the cat dies and resurrects to take revenge from its master in the end which really justifies its name. Similarly, the narrator who is the representative of the tempted mankind and his wife as the

representative of goodness do not have any names because the only significant thing in the story is the cat, its revival and revenge from a sinful humanbeing.

In Hawthorne's story, the names are quite allegorical as well. Young Goodman Brown is a random name which reflects the once (in youth) faithful and good mankind while his wife Faith represents the name itself, faith to God. However, these names are corrupted through the end of the story when the characters lose their goodness and faith. Additionally, there is colour symbolism harnessed in both works. In Poe's "The Black Cat", the colour black and white are described as the symbols of darkness, death and resurrection. The "blackness" of Pluto is associated with witches and the white around the second cat's neck symbolises resurrection. On the other hand, Hawthorne similarly interprets the colour black as the evil itself as in the appearance of the black shadow and walking in the forest at night. As a final remark, in both stories the narrator is not known, it is anonymous. Poe's narrator is the nameless protagonist calmly confessing his cruel acts and Hawthorne's narrator is in third person telling the faithless life of an ordinary man named Young Goodman Brown. The particular reason behind these choices is the authors' desire to make their stories seem less strange and more as a part of daily life so that people can embrace the stories and get their lessons from them.

Finally, in terms of transgressing the values and boundaries of the 19th century American society and reflecting the other side of reality to the readers, Nathaniel Hawthorne's "Young Goodman Brown" bears the reminiscence of his masterpiece, *The Scarlet Letter*. Hester Prynne defies the norms of the small society of her town when she has an affair out of wedlock and has a baby. After that she becomes the scapegoat of the people and is forced to bear the scarlet letter "A" for adultery and affair. Likewise, Goodman Brown discovers his connection to the "othered" witches and becomes a different man afterwards. Then again, the forest is associated with evil in darkness in both works and all evil or non-traditional incidents take place in the forest. Hester meets her lover in the forest and Goodman Brown encounters the town folk enchanting in the forest as well. In that sense, Hawthorne exemplifies the desire of a change and also the defience of religion, tradition and morality through his works.

Conclusion

Once and for all, although Edgar Allan Poe and Nathaniel Hawthorne are usually mentioned as being rather different in talent, creativity, themes and styles, in "The Black Cat" and "Young Goodman

Brown" they built a striking analogical relationship between their works. They are not only the members of the same literary movement, that is American Romanticism, but they also embody the same tendency to create mysterious, supernatural, terrifying, symbolical and negatively, strikingly realistic works in attempt to expose psychology of people and picture the everyday human condition in their realistic way. Hence, Poe and Hawthorne are rediscovered for having similarity in contrast with distinction as many have and would put forth.

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Rezumat: *Edgar Allan Poe şi Nathaniel Hawthorne sunt recunoscuţi drept genii ale creaţiei literare americane a secolului al XIX-lea. Ei sunt consideraţi fondatorii romantismului american, translatând acest curent literar peste frontierele sale, într-o dimensiune realistă. Ceea ce îi uneşte pe cei doi scriitori este romantismul întunecat, latura negativă a fiinţei umane fiind cea care domină operele lor. Pe lângă aceasta, ei aduc inovaţii importante nuvelei şi prozei poliţiste, prin care descriu o altă realitate a vieţii.*

Deşi, Poe şi Hawthorne pot părea diferiţi la prima vedere, aceştia au multe lucruri în comun în ceea ce priveşte abordarea de factură realistă, întâlnită mai ales în nuvele. Articolul de faţă se concentrează pe elementele definitorii ale stilului celor doi autori, analizând nuvelele"Pisica Neagră", a lui Edgar Allan Poe, şi "Tânărul Goodman Brown", a lui Nathaniel Hawthorne, ambele abordând teme precum tentaţia şi partea întunecată a omului.

HENRY JAMES' FICTIONAL WINDOW

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> The house of fiction has in short not one window, but a million –
> a number of possible windows not to be reckoned, rather; every
> one of which has been pierced, or is still pierceable, in its
> vast front, by the need of the individual vision and by the
> pressure of the individual will.
> (Henry James, Preface to *The Portrait of A Lady*)

Abstract: *Henry James had noticed that fiction in the Victorian novel no longer applied to the ever more complex reality and thus it failed satisfying the readers' expectations in matters of plot or writing techniques. He introduced the metaphor of the novel, a stately house endowed with millions of windows, through which life was peered by the artist, producing a new realism (The Art of Fiction).*

In 1881 "The Portrait of A Lady" was published as Henry James' ample project of a bildungsroman on the international theme. Picturing his woman character convincingly, the writer consolidated a Self and commented on his hermeneutics triad art-life-novel.

Keywords: *fiction, portrait, Self, art, novel*.

The Art of Fiction – **James' fictional window**

In the beginning of the 20th century, Henry James started exploring the origins of the novel as a form of art. Earlier still, in the anthological essay *The Art of Fiction* (1884) and in the Preface to *The Portrait of A Lady* (1886), he had defined the novel "a square and spacious house" through the million windows of which "one may peer at the spreading field, the human scene." (James, 1986: 45)

In the critique of the time, Henry James was often labelled *snobbish* and his works were considered meaningless to the average American citizen. It must have appeared with less patient reviewers, for the imposing figure of the author announcing Modernity by the turn of the century, was to be rounded up in the talented literary productions with solid background, thick with psychology, philosophy, original style and new writing

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techniques: "A novel is in its broadest sense a personal, a direct impression of life: that, to begin with, constitutes its value, which is greater or less according to the intensity of the impression," (James, 1885) declared Henry James while designing a broad frame of reality for *The Portrait of A Lady*, his first ample novelistic project. In fact the writer suggested a *new realism* in the fictional discourse, not because life had been suddenly different to his critical eye, but because he was aware life complexity changed and the expectations of the readers were much higher about the artistic fiction than decades before, with Dickens' passionate stories.

Wolfgang Iser's theory concerning the act of reading as reader-oriented discovery begins, as already pointed out with building characters-protagonists in Jamesian great masterpieces: Isabel Archer's vigil with Streather's post-countryside experience vigil in *The Ambassadors*, and Maggie Verver's pagoda-like metaphor of consciousness in *The Golden Bowl*, via the intricate interpretation foregrounded in *The Figure in the Carpet*. This represents Henry James' modernism *avant la lettre*, by involving the reader in *dealing with the text*, in making him de-construct and then re-construct images and impressions, in the confrontation with the text, with no omniscient help on the part of the author. There is a kaleidoscopic succession of angles of vision and perspectives meant to hook the reader into his own hermeneutic approach that Henry James intended, his ultimate purpose for fiction. The author succeeded in "making" the reader reach that virtual dimension of the text, in which text and imagination help create a new *figure in the carpet*. (Iser, 1978: 279)

For this reason it is hardly surprising that much of Henry James' literary work has frequently been met with skepticism on the part of critics and reading public, even on the part of his brother, William James – a Swedenborgian philosopher – to whom the author used to complain at that time of a general lack of taste, originating in consumerism of the omniscient, ready-digested text. As a consequence, in 1879, James designed the *large* architecture of *The Portrait of A Lady*, his restless search in doing something on a larger scale than he had done before.

The New World Meets The Old One

The rendering of youthful, American *innocence* as inexperience which leads to overrating one's possibilities to a pre-stage of disaster represents the foundation stone of Jamesian experience highlighted in *The Portrait of A Lady*. This further and discreetly develops into the question of queerness in relation to the representation of sex, enabling the writer to point to sex as power of representation to corrupt or influence the young.

At the same time James embarked upon a sort of revolution in modern novel writing techniques, with experience as "the power to guess the unseen from the seen, to trace the implications of things, to judge the whole piece by the pattern, the condition of feeling life in general" (James, 1885: 65). In *The Portrait of A Lady* James talked on what he coined as cautious silence on certain topics, a proof of morality held in high esteem. An anonymous reviewer wrote in the New York Sun that the sophistication of James' social world required a sophistication of *style* that betrayed no mark of graving tool or burnisher.

Isabel Archer, the protagonist in *The Portrait of A Lady* is a penniless orphan. She inherits money and ventures herself to meet the Old world of the Continent, by visiting England to see relatives, accompanied by elderly Mrs Touchett and Madame Merle. She turns down proposals of marriage and finally decides to marry Gilbert Osmond, a middle aged snobbish widower with a young daughter, Pansy: „He had a light, lean, rather languid-looking figure, and was apparently neither tall nor short. He was dressed as a man dresses who takes little other trouble about it than to have no vulgar things." (James, 1986: 202)

Along her touring Europe, Isabel discovers that Pansy is Madame Merle's daughter, but she avoids the plot of falling a prey to love affairs for the latter to enjoy her wealth. Isabel's sense of duty inherited from the American background, attached to morals and to pragmatism made her leave the sophisticated Old world in Europe and return to Osmond and Pansy, her family in America.

Isabel Archer was inspired to Henry James by his cousin Minnie Temple in whose company he grew up as a small boy in his grandmother's house in Albany. The heroine that is to become a lady by experiencing life and meeting two worlds besides the Atlantic, gets by far more convincing in the psychological construction of a woman character, making room to query theories on the writer's homosexual life and celibacy (Stevens, 1998: 172). She becomes Henry James' double in the ardent wish of conquering the Old world through a trip of initiation. That accounts for the author's biographical participation in a detailed re-enacted visit to Europe and also the disappointments he met. Isabel takes different meanings from travels for Henry James because he used to be an expert tourist from early childhood, while with Isabel, the reader meets the less fortunate side of sightseeing, which implies more like drifting away from her former life.

Then Isabel steps into the second phase of her meeting the Continent. She realizes she accumulates nothing only she is taking different views at the world instead. At that point Isabel Archer is unravelling the favourite international theme of the author representing him at the best of

modern fiction writing techniques: drilling into consciousness to the detriment of the gist-offering plot.

Travelling now gains more profound, psychological dimensions, meant to foreground the dialectic between impression and subjective understanding and the inter-subjectivity, the extrapolation of real meaning out of the personal and impersonal. The reader thus follows Henry James' new hermeneutic quest by which the protagonist will draw the line between reality and appearance, up to a certain point.

Isabel Archer on the road and close to art

A young and strong American woman, Isabel further travels to more distant places, but only touches the surface of knowledge and art in what may seem a refusal to focus, only because that would mean placing an inexplicable social burden on her financially-spread wings. The permeable line between essence and appearance is made explicit by Henry James once the heroine arrives in Florence for the first time and meets Gilbert Osmond whom she starts observing. He had been pictured in the most negative colours by Madame Merle hoping marriage would not be in view: "an avatar of a medieval knight, living in a medieval place, with the dignity rare to be met with, a man of no career, no name, no position, no fortune, no past, no future, no nothing" (James, 2004: 511). The episode of making acquaintance with this *no name*, having faint American origins is intended by Henry James to foreground half measures of experience with his young character whose portrait he minutely builds in psychological reaction both to reality and to art. Along living her experiences in Rome Isabel Archer is given the opportunity to develop discernment, always depending on some degree of prior knowledge. She grows mature and develops a Self, ready to embrace what Rome is offering both for a personal life and for consolidating her taste, her knowledge on art.

Her first contact with Italy has already taken place on the shore of the Mediterranean, where she has paused: "on the edge of this larger adventure; there was such a thrill even in the preliminary hovering. It affected her moreover as a peaceful interlude, as a hush of the drum and fife in a career which she had little warrant as yet for regarding as agitated, but which nevertheless she was constantly picturing to herself by the light of her hopes, her fears, her fancies, her ambitions, her predilections [...] She lost herself in a maze of visions; the fine things to be done by a rich, independent, generous girl who took a large human view of occasions and obligations were sublime in the mass." (James, 1986: 275)

The Mediterranean waves take her back into her pauper past, this time from the position of a person who believes the unexpected fortune has become "a part of her better self," which gave her importance, gave her even to her own imagination, a certain ideal beauty" and then forth to the two men who have marked her life while "losing faith in the reality of absent things" (James, 1986: 275-276). In growing mature out of life experience Isabel remains one of another feminine presence the writer wanted to immortalize close to Venice: Constance Fenimore Woolson whom he had met as a boy. She fell to her death possibly by her own volition from a sea room window. In depicting the protagonist's complex portrait, James mirrors his personality in a genuine reflection of Self and authorial views on fiction versus art. "Rome has served for the west as its greatest sign of his historical necessity. Look, touch, believe; this truth seems engraved in the very stones of Rome." (Poole, 1997)

Italy with Rome, Florence and Venice appears quite often in the writer's works, a topos re-enacting history and art with each and every special person that aspires to the peaks of artistic excellence and getting inspiration therein: "I had rooms on Riva Schiavoni, at the top of a house near the passage leading off to San Zaccaria; the waterside life, the wondrous lagoon spread before me, and the ceaseless human chatter of Venice came in at my windows, to which I seem to myself to have been constantly driven, in the fruitless fidget of composition, as if to see whether, out in the blue channel, the ship of some right suggestion, of some better phrase, of the next happy twist of my subject, the next true touch for my canvas, might n't come into sight." (James, 1986: 66)

The Portrait of A Lady, one *picture in the carpet*

There are three voyages that Isabel Archer makes back and forth to Rome, a challenge posed to the reader as to envisage the unwritten, a picture which remains invincible at the level of the text, a post-modern feature James the artist anticipates. "It is of course no mere accident of narrative that it is Rome Isabel returns to. The city cannot help standing for the weight of past empire and the constraints of tradition, for 'law' against 'sympathy'; although James is too complex a writer to labour this value one–sidedly, and the novel is rich with the consolations as well as the constraints for Isabel of Rome's and Europe's pastness." (Hadly, 2002: 26)

Coming back to modern fiction the author started with Jamsian particular talent to design architectural monuments, not only because of the lucid objectivity in his discourse, but also because fiction was entirely set on

the writer's sophisticated interpretation of triads like art-life-novel. Readers of all times could grasp their *picture in the carpet*.

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Rezumat: *Henry James a intuit cum proza victoriană nu mai corespundea realității din ce în ce mai complexe, trădând astfel așteptările cititorilor în materie de intrigă și tehnici narative. El a introdus metafora romanului, o cladire impunătoare dotată cu milioane de ferestre, prin care artistul urmărește viața, producând o nouă versiune de realism (The Art of Fiction).*

În 1881, "Portretul unei Doamne" a fost publicat ca amplu proiect de buildungsroman, urmărind tema internațională. Portretizându-și personajul feminin cu multă convingere, scriitorul consolidează un "eu" inedit și comentează asupra triadei sale hermeneutice artă-viață-roman.

TRANSGRESSING CULTURAL BOUNDARIES IN J. CONRAD'S *HEART OF DARKNESS* AND C. ACHEBE'S *THINGS FALL APART*

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Abstract: *Both Joseph Conrad's Heart of Darkness and Chinua Achebe's Things Fall Apart focus on the idea of European colonialism exerted in the 19ᵗʰ century over the African continent. What makes the two novels different is the perspective their writers have on the process and the interpretation of its effects on both colonizer and colonized. By identifying the coordinates of their intersection, this paper attempts to analyze the way in which the two parts alter each other. To assist our approach are Martin Heidegger's bridge concept and Homi Bhabha's Third Space theory, the conclusion being that both elements in conflict transgress their self-aknowledged borders and reach a state of constructive neutrality.*

Keywords: *colonialism, bridge, imperialism, cultural difference, Third Space.*

In the essay *Building, Dwelling, Thinking*, Martin Heidegger develops on the idea of boundary, which he defines as a space where different elements interact. In his view, space is in itself defined by its boundary as "something that has been made room for" and for which it does not have a limiting or destructive effect. A boundary is thus seen not that at which something stops but, that from which something begins its presencing. Heidegger's idea of boundaries is also connected with that of the bridges, which "lead in many ways" and which allow crossings between different spaces. Thus, boundaries can work as bridges, and bridges can function as boundaries:

> Always and ever differently the bridge escorts the lingering and hastening ways of men to and fro, so that they may get to other banks and in the end, as mortals, to the other side. Now in a high arch, now in a low, the bridge vaults over glen and stream – whether mortals keep in mind this vaulting of the bridge's course or forget that they, always themselves on their way to the last bridge, are striving to surmount all that is common and unsound in them in order to bring themselves the haleness of the divinities. The

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bridge *gathers* as a passage that crosses, before divinities – whether we explicitly think of, and visibly give thanks for, their presence, as in the figure of the saint of the bridge, or whether that divine presence is obstructed or even pushed wholly aside. (Heidegger, 152-3)

For Heidegger, the main role of bridges is that of gathering the two shores and creating a common space where the two elements coexist. This space is defined by one element as much as it is defined by the other. It is, in fact, a constructive neutrality which has the effect of dissolving all boundaries, limitations or singularities.

The same idea of dissolving boundaries is adopted by Homi Bhabha when he analyzes modern existence. In his view, "the borderlines of the present" modify life continuously in the way in which the prefix 'post' permanently shifts concepts such as postmodernism, postfeminism or postcolonialism. The space of boundary becomes, thus, the starting point of negotiation between domains of difference and the social distinctiveness develops into a complex discussion of hybridity:

> It is in the emergence of the interstices – the overlap and displacement of domains of difference – that the intersubjective and collective experiences of nationnness, community interest, or cultural value are negotiated. How are subjects formed 'in-between', or in excess of, the sum of the 'parts' of difference (usually intoned as race/class/gender, etc)?
> The representation of difference must not be hastily read as the reflection of pre-given ethnic or cultural traits set in the fixed tablet of tradition. The social articulation of difference, from the minority perspective, is a complex, on-going negotiation that seeks to authorize cultural hybridities that emerge in moments of historical transformation. The 'right' to signify from the periphery of authorized power and privilege does not depend on the persistence of tradition; it is resourced by the power of tradition to be reinscribed through the conditions of contingency and contradictoriness that attend upon the lives of those who are 'in the minority'. (Bhabha 2)

What Homi Bhabha insists on is the omission of categories such as race, class or gender. In the same manner as Heidegger, Bhabha continues by saying that the 'beyond' may be interpreted, "neither as a new horizon, nor a leaving behind of the middle years."

He maintains that any initial subjectivities must be left behind and attention should be given to the instances or happenings located within 'the articulation of cultural differences.' In fact Bhabha considers this move as one of extreme political and theoretical importance because, as he continues, "These 'in-between spaces' provide the terrain for elaborating strategies of

selfhood – singular or communal – that initiate new signs of identity, and innovative sites of collaboration, and contestation, in the act of defining the idea of society itself. " (Bhabha, 1-2)

In Bhabha's line of judgment, the sites of collaboration and contestation produce the proper environment for what he considers the enactment of "ambivalencies and ambiguities" within the "house of fiction" (Bhabha, 19) with the result of affirming the desire for social solidarity.

In regard to space and location, the ideas of postcolonial cultural theorist Homi K. Bhabha play a significant part in helping to define and analyze the environment in which African people in this study begin the process of self-definition. Self-definition for them happens in the now – the present – in the intervening space of social or "cultural difference." Cultural difference, according to Bhabha, occurs when cultures understand that difference is articulated:

> [I]n relation to that otherness internal to their own symbol-forming activity which makes them decentered structures-through that displacement or liminality opens up the possibility of articulating different, even incommensurable cultural practices and priorities. ("Interview" 210-11)

Bhabha maintained that a culture or group realizes its disparity when it juxtaposes itself with another group or culture, and then opens up the possibility of articulating difference. The location in which cultural difference is best conveyed, according to Bhabha, is in the notion of Third Space.

The Third Space offers possibilities for a location and time from which both Africans and Europeans can define their own terms by which they wish to be viewed. Third Space, as conceptualized by Bhabha, is an intervening space in which "the overlap and displacement of domains of difference – the intersubjective and collective experiences of nationness, community interest, or cultural value are negotiated" (*Location* 2). Conceptually, Third Space, is the paradigm of two partly covered circles, is the overlapping of two differences, social or cultural difference is represented by the simultaneous ideology of hegemony and the representation of the marginalized. The overlapping of the two in Third Space, allows for the emergence of the newness in the form of what has already been identified by Bhabha as "nationnness, community interest, or cultural value." Thus, Third Space, according to Bhabha, is a place for intervention or renegotiation of differences – a site for change.

The best example of how this works is a model similar to Bhabha's explanation of Third Space as a link to understanding cultural differences.

To show the 'in-between moment' in his model, he uses African American artist Renee Green's work, which shows the "binary logic through which identities of difference are often constructed – Black/White, Self/Other" (Bhabha, *Location* 3). Bhabha uses her metaphor of the museum building, where her work is displayed, to show Third Space as a link to understanding cultural difference in the "in-between moment." Bhabha quotes Green who says:

> I used architecture literally as a reference, using the attic, the boiler room, and the stairwell to make associations between the certain binary divisions such as higher and lower and heaven and hell. The stairwell became a luminal space, a pathway between the upper and lower areas, each of which was annotated with plaques referring to blackness and whiteness. (Green 4)

The stairwell becomes significantly important because it is the link to moving to other places within the large dominating space of the museum. As a link to the lower or higher places, the stairwell provides the mechanism to change or move from one's position within the larger setting. Without the stairwell, the chances of moving to other locations are increasingly difficult without incurring some harm. The other key point about chances of injury in trying to move out from one space to another is that there is the real possibility of never getting there. Literally speaking, without the right equipment to move from one space to another, the move could be fatal. Bhabha explains the stairwell idea in this way, stating:

> The stairwell as liminal space, in-between, the designations of identity, becomes the process of symbolic interaction, the connective tissue that constructs the difference between the upper and lower, black and white. The hither and thither of the stairwell, the temporal movement and passage that allows, prevents identities at either end of it from settling into primordial polarities. This interstitial passage between fixed identifications opens up the possibility of a cultural hybridity that entertains difference without an assumed or imposed hierarchy. (Location 4)

As a linkage to new selfhood, Third Space acts as a "stairwell" in giving rise to something new and different – a new area of self-representation.

Another scholar who investigates the Third Space is bell hooks, who considers it a locus where black women have greater possibilities for change. Transformation, as hooks maintains, takes place in setting where blacks can resist and move against oppressive boundaries set by race, sex,

and class domination (Yearning 145). However, in moving "out of one's place," hooks makes the point that the oppressed need to consider and understand "the realities of choice and location" as marginalized people (Hooks 145). As she understands, the choice or decision to move out of places of oppression is a critical one. For African American women, the choice to move or remain in subjugated places determines black women's response to existing cultural practices of female oppression and their willingness to envision new alternative and racial ways of living (145). A change of black women's condition indicates moving from a place of complacency – on margin – to a site outside hegemonic domains of power, or within the center of its discourse. For hooks, this location for radical change is a place found on the margin where, as hooks indicates, one can speak from a voice of resistance.

In his essay, "Two Visions in *Heart of Darkness*", Edward W. Said commences by establishing that domination and inequitis of power, which characterize human society stem from self prejudice, on one hand, and here he quotes V. S. Naipaul in saying that "they/the others are to blame for what they are, while on the other hand from independent/external pressures – namely imperialist intentions. Said maintains that accepting only one of these two arguments would be incomplete and, in fact, we should consider a matrix of interdependent histories in order to understand how two cultures change each other, or continually negotiate their cultural borders.

Said mentions how the imperial attitude is captured in Conrad's Heart of Darkness. "It is impossible to convey the life-sensation of any given epoch of one's existence – that which makes its truth, its meaning – its subtle and penetrating essence.... We live, as we dream – alone" (Said 23). Said enlarges upon Marlow's view of his journey as a demonstration of the Europeans imperialism in Africa (ibid. 23). He further claims that Conrad, the same as Marlow, is limited to his position. Conrad's perspective of the time was the only valid view he could experience: "Independence was for whites and Europeans; the lesser or subject peoples were to be ruled; science, learning, history emanated from the West." (Said 24)

In regard to space and time, Bhabha's and Said's ideas play a significant part in helping to define and analyze the environment in which the two novels under scrutiny here negotiate their posterity. *Heart of Darkness* by Josef Conrad and *Things Fall Apart* by Chinua Achebe are two novels that are typical of the interwining space of different cultures. They produce a huge impact on readers, which varies from discontent to acceptance and self-enlightenment. Not to mention that they place the narrative in the same space – wild Africa – and depict the relationship between the same categories of people. The interaction zone is thus

presented from two different points of view: on one hand there is the perspective of the white colonist, while on the other side there is the local African perspective. Therefore, in the light of the theoretical concepts of Heidegger and Bhabha (the bridge and the stairwell), we may say that the cultural interaction happens on two main axes: the horizontal axis and the vertical axis. On the horizontal level, the locals react to the foreign influence on their customs, religion and way of life, whereas on the vertical level, the colonists perform their influence but also suffer consequences of their contact with the African element.

Chinua Achebe's rethoric against *Heart of Darkness*, whose author he calls "a thoroughgoing racist" (301) becomes a symbol of the horizontal reaction against the white element. Achebe maintains that Joseph Conrad's way of depicting two main symbols on the different worlds in collision, i.e. the Thames River and the Congo River, is biased. The Thames is presented as the conquerer of darkness (299), while the Congo is an impenetrable void, dark and brooding. Achebe goes even further and claims that, for Conrad, it is not this capacity to maintain or dissipate darkness that defines his attitude but the commonality of the two rivers, as the Thames once resembled the Congo. Achebe chooses *Things Fall Apart* as a means to express his disapproval of Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* with a view to debunk the myths about time, language, and the indigenous peoples of Africa. He even insists that these "truths" were the figment of western imagination, without at least trying to adjust their observations.

As a result, the African society that Chinua Achebe describes in *Things Fall Apart* is nothing near as simplistic and "blind" as Conrad sees it, but complex, based on clear sets of social rules, with traditions and aspirations. The Ibo people have indeed a different way of life, a different religious system, but share the same human ideals, of community, of love and respect: "Feast of the New Yam was held every year before the harvest began, to honor the earth Goddess and the ancestral spirits of the clan." (Achebe 36)

In contradiction to this, Achebe depicts the violent effect of colonialism, both on the foundation of the African way of life and on their mentality. The main character of the novel, Okonkwo, is a respected leader in his community, "well known throughout the nine villages…by throwing Amalinze the Cat…one of the fiercest since the founder of their town" (Achebe 3). Okonkwo is presented as a strong person, "He was afraid of being thought weak" (Achebe 61), but he is entirely destroyed when he realizes that his world would be taken to ruin by the colonists. Thus, from a man of strong character, with a powerful sense of community, he isolates himself from the others and fails to find his place in the new world,

eventually commiting suicide. Achebe aims here at the disrupting effect that the colonizers have on the psyche of an individual, but also on the mindset of a nation, whose fragile balance can be easily destroyed by intruders.

Achebe metaphorically admonishes Conrad again in the end of the novel, when depicting the westerner "in charge", who boasts about his literary endeavours, deciding to write a book about Okonkwo. The westerner promises to describe in detail the tragic episodes he witnessed in which "every day brought him new material…" Betrayed by his ignorance, he opinates that "the story of this man who killed a messenger and hanged himself would make interesting reading" (Achebe 208). The westerner shows his conviction that Okonkwo's troubled life and tragic death could epitomize the destiny of the African people: "One could almost write a whole chapter on him. Perhaps not a whole chapter but a reasonable paragraph, at any rate…He had already chosen the title of the book after much thought: The Pacification of the Primitive Tribes of the Lower Niger" (Achebe 209). In the effort to contradict Conrad once again, Achebe wrote an entire book on the "man who killed a messenger and hanged himself."

However, Conrad's Belgian traders in *Heart of Darkness* are different from Achebe's colonizers from *Things Fall Apart*. In Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, though Leopold II allegedly believes that "seizing" the Congo region for Belgium would also be beneficial for the natives, the outcome is totally unidirectional, and the natives are the ones who lose their lands, traditions and in the end find their own identity threatened. The main interest of the Belgian traders is to harvest Congo's natural resources, especially the ivory.

The repression imposed on the natives is evident to Marlow, the narrator in the *Heart of Darkness*; the men carrying the earth being chained to each other, as slaves. They are starving and desperate, which makes Marlow reconsider his position:

> Six black men advanced in a file, toiling up the path. They walked erect and slow...I could see every rib, the joints of their limbs were like knots in a rope; each had an iron collar on his neck, and all were connected together with a chain...but these men could by no stretch of imagination be called enemies. They were called criminals, and the outraged law, like the bursting shells, had come to them, an insoluble mystery from the sea...the eyes stared stonily uphill. They passed me within six inches, without a glance, with that complete, deathlike indifference of unhappy savages. (*Heart of Darkness* 38)

If in *Heart of Darkness*, Marlow observes the natives with awe and superiority, in *Things Fall Apart*, the natives observe the European colonists with anguish and fear. Either way, both cultures experience sentiments which change them definitively. In Achebe's novel, imperialism presents itself in the name of Christianity and colonization – the "civilized and advanced" race claims to assist and help the lives of tribal natives, by negating local tradition. Their mission is not successful until the locals betray their own kin and convert to Christianity:

> The white man is very clever. He came quietly and peaceably with his religion. We were amused at his foolishness and allowed him to stay. Now he has won our brothers, and our clan can no longer act like one. He has put a knife on the things that held us together and we have fallen apart. (Chinua Achebe, *Things Fall Apart*, Ch. 20)

Instead of a conclusion, both novels depict European imperialism in the African Congo in the 1800s. The distinction between the two is that Joseph Conrad presents the readers with a European point of view while Chinua Achebe with an African point of view.

Both authors use extremely well developed characters to manifest and exhibit controversies and bring to light critical aspects of human nature. They use conflict of various types to ascertain an overall theme. In this process, as Heidegger and Bhabha demonstrated, both elements in conflict transgress their self-aknowledged borders, findin themselves in a space which fosters change and evolution.

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Rezumat: *Atât "Inima Întunericului" a lui Joseph Conrad, cât şi "Lumea se Destramă" a lui Chinua Achebe se concentrează pe ideea colonialismului european, aşa cum acesta a fost exercitat pe continentul african, în secolul al XIX-lea. Ceea ce diferenţiază cele două romane este perspectiva autorilor asupra procesului de colonizare şi interpretarea efectelor sale în relaţia colonist – populaţie colonizată, şi vice-versa. Prin identificarea coordonatelor acestei interacţiuni, lucrarea de faţă încearcă să analizeze felului în care cele două elemente se transformă, permanent, unul pe celălalt. În susţinerea demersului nostru, s-a dovedit util conceptul de pod al lui Martin Heidegger şi teoria celui de-al treilea spaţiu, a lui Homi Bhabha, concluzia fiind aceea că ambele elemente aflate în coliziune îşi depăşesc graniţele auto-recunoscute şi se plasează într-o stare de neutralitate constructivă.*

READING THROUGH CULTURAL APPEARANCES IN ITA DALY'S *THE LADY WITH THE RED SHOES*

Mihai COŞOVEANU[1]

Abstract: Ita Daly, a contemporary Irish writer, makes various cultural aspects intermingle in her short story, "The Lady with the Red Shoes". The storyteller, a fine observer of people and their behavior, contemplates the way in which old and new, Irish, British and American cultural aspects find shelter in an Irish hotel meant to preserve Irishness. My paper aims at identifying and presenting these elements and the way in which a community can change due to cultural influences.

Keywords: cultural, Irish, hotel, American, waiter, tranquility

Ita Daly is a contemporary Irish writer, born in 1945, known both for her short stories and novels. The collection of short stories "The Lady with the Red Shoes and Other Stories," published in 1980, represents her literary debut and the short story which gives the title to the collection won a Hennessy Literary Award. Characterized by most reviewers as "bizarre," Ita Daly's short stories do have moments of brilliance. Possessing a "lively writing style" (Han 2006: 82) that highly engages the reader, she comes up with subjects that allow a better understanding of the Irish society. She is known as a promoter of feminist and socialist theories, preferring Dostoyevsky and Tolstoy to James Joyce. In an article published in the Irish University Review, Ita Daly admitted that "J.J. was the unread hero of my youth." (Daly 1982)

Broadly, the short story "The Lady with the Red Shoes" is nothing but a parallel between the old world represented by the hotel called McAndrews and the new, intrusive world, represented by the new generation and the lady with the red shoes. We have a strong cultural background regarding the history of the building and its environment: "Nobody knows whether it was there before Kilgory and the village grew up around it or whether Kilgory was there first." (Daly 1996: 130) The story is placed somewhere in the North of Mayo, which can be primarily defined by a boring landscape. Moreover, only few people know about the place and

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this oasis of silence is recommended only to individuals who love preserving old customs and traditions.

The beginning of the story is a mixture of feelings: on the one hand, it tells the reader how beautiful the West of Ireland is ("heartbreakingly beautiful") and points out the pros of the old-fashioned McAndrews Hotel but, on the other hand, we notice that there is a certain amount of sadness in the author's voice when recalling the history of the place, including here a representative figure in the history of Great Britain, the one of Cromwell: "today, it is as impoverished and barren as ever it was, bleak and lonesome and cowering from the savagery of the Atlantic." (Daly 1996128)

The description of the place leads to one conclusion, the author is very proud of: here "you can get a whiff of Paradise." Despite the fact that the place is "peopleless as far as the eye can see," April mornings represent quite a blessing for visitors. The writer also mentions the presence of the clover, pointing out from the very beginning that speaking about Ireland and Irishness is very important. The other plant the author takes into consideration when describing the marvelous landscape is the gorse, which has a definite role in people's lives, being related to a saying: "when gorse is out of bloom, kissing is out of fashion." It means that one can see carpets of golden flowers of gorse bushes, with their specific coconut and vanilla aroma, almost all year round, except winter time. Spending some time in the West of Ireland could be a reward for everybody, no matter the nationality. The tradition is so rooted that it is a sacrilege not to spend the Easter holidays in McAndrews Hotel in North Mayo. The narrator admits that his ancestors were English but he is happy that they settled in Ireland.

He considers it normal to declare his reasons for his staying at the McAndrews: it is a matter of family tradition and this is enough to explain his emotional involvement. It is somehow a magic attraction between those who do want to spend some time there and the tranquility offered by this special setting. The narrator is delighted to call the hotel "one of the puzzles of the world" and he is pleased to see that nobody solved the puzzle, which makes the place more interesting. He also expresses his bewilderment to the location of the building, which is rather strange as it has nothing to do with touristic common routes. That is why he also points out the fact that people who come there are as strange as the person who decided to build a hotel in such a deserted place. Nevertheless, the hotel fits very well into this area since the building is out of the common and quite unusual, being rather scary for the normal visitor: "its monstrous outline, lonely on the hill." The landscape is dangerous and represents a real threat to innocent visitors: the sea is "treacherous" and the cliffs are "so steep." The reader gets the feeling that the narrator is, somehow, a representative of some environmental

associations or organizations, fighting against pollution. He is very happy when he talks about that, saying that "the grounds and the environs are delightfully free of petrol fumes." McAndrews Hotel is the perfect retreat for the old-fashioned people who want to stay away from the miseries the modern world is full of. The reader can easily notice the storyteller's reluctance to whatever civilization has produced for people like him. He enumerates all the bad things that surround him in the civilized world, blaming on the egalitarianism, which became the excuse for bad manners and insolence. He loves Murphy because he knows how, when, and what to say to his clients. For everybody in the hotel, Murphy represents the moral values of a society they care about. He confers the place a highly-praised equilibrium, a certain safety with "his air of calm and dignity." Murphy is more than the head waiter of the restaurant, he is the key to the good time the guests have there. He is the one who guarantees the perfect holiday and that is why the episode when the lady with the red shoes disregards Murphy's position in the hotel is somehow regarded as an attack at everybody's integrity. The modern world makes Mr. Montgomery tired and nervous because he cannot stand "that bright and fatuous chatter." The hotel is still there as there will always be guests who prefer peace and intimacy, never disturbing the others, apart from "a civil word of greeting." He clearly states the main characteristics of a great dialogue between two individuals: "formal, impersonal, remote, and totally predictable." It is obvious that he hates surprises and intruders, while "routine" is one of his favorite words. He loves to dive into it, the comparison he uses being very suggestive: "putting on again an old and much-worn jacket." The days spent at the hotel are a bliss because this is the only place where the guests can breathe freely, with no pressure or stress. The afternoons are characterized by non-activities, which represent the essence of healing in their battle with the merciless civilization: "dozing, dreaming, idling." McAndrews experience has a very important role in his life: finding his soul again represents a major target, after being traumatized by improper attitudes and behavior of a society he no longer understands. Even though there is a cultural gap between Mr. Montgomery and many other people, either conservative or modern, and here we should mention a continuous argument between him and his son, who considers him "an old snob," he is aware of all the changes and he has the force to laugh about everything that happens, protected by a glass of good wine and a fine walk near the coastline, admiring the Atlantic Ocean. One should conclude that he belongs to the upper class since he has no intention to apologize for being a snob (Akkas 2009: 6). He displays an aristocratic air, being able to spend hours on end watching the ocean, which is not the case of his son.

When our storyteller talks about the departures from McAndrews, he needs to emphasize how painful they are because he has to get back into the "world". Here, all guests are "of a kind" and they gather here, far from disturbing factors, in a place where time seems to have stopped and the new cultural tendencies cannot penetrate. McAndrews Hotel is the best place for those who long for the peaceful way of living, without being exposed to the noise produced by people and cars and to the shortcomings of the city. McAndrews is synonymous to tradition and old ways of living – they are perfectly preserved and are keywords for its guests who know each other but they care a lot about their privacy. The place is renowned for preserving rules and traditions, commonly associated with a moral and decent existence. The temple-like atmosphere is something that was built in many years, something that is worth keeping. The narrator also introduces here some notes of playful description, the whole thing resembling to a fairy-tale where the characters are tiny creatures which enjoy themselves within this magic environs: the means of transport to the hotel used to be a "toy train" and the passengers arrived at a "toy station," just a "stone's throw" from the hotel's "grand front door."

The narrator feels that it is his duty to explain his presence at the hotel, at that moment of the year, without his wife, Judith. His first intention is to declare his wife ill, which proves to be "an exaggeration." He corrects his mistake at once, declaring that he would not leave his wife if she were indeed ill. Because he really cares about his image, he does not want his reader to have a false impression upon him. Then, he is fully aware of the fact that he is not the type of man a woman looks for when she longs for some entertainment. He mentions some important features of his wife, "gay and outgoing," which seem to be in total contradiction with his personality, namely "a dry stick." Our storyteller admits that he is a solitary person, who hates people interfering in his life and his worldviews. The moments he spends at McAndrews are unique, so leaving the place causes him a "mounting nervousness and depression." He succeeds to overcome this state of anxiety by consoling himself with a bottle of vintage claret and admiring the Irish twilight, which seems to be the most beautiful twilight in the world. Mr. Montgomery praises the hotel personnel for preserving this unique moment of the day, which can be interpreted as something representative for Ireland, something to be proud of: "the curtains are never drawn nor the lights switched on until darkness finally descends." (Daly 1996: 137)

This citadel, this fortress of relaxation, the calm structure of the place is suddenly earthquaked by the unexpected presence of a lady with a pink dress and red shoes. Everyone is startled by her appearance and, apparently, rude behavior and everybody is intrigued by her choosing such a

place. Our narrator starts watching her, analyzing, like a detective, every single word or gesture, closely following her facial expressions.

The name of the head waiter, Murphy, represents a solid piece of the traditional Irish style, known all over the world. Accustomed to well behaved guests, who hardly start conversations, except the civil and normal greetings, Murphy is astonished to see someone in his restaurant who addresses him in a highly impolite way, unusual and most disturbing for everything McAndrews means. Because of her inadequate behavior, Murphy has to pull himself together to be still polite. When she orders the steak, we have the strong feeling that she has something against the Irish people, which makes us think that at a certain time, long before, she spent some time in Ireland. Her sentences are strictly connected to her memories, which definitely affected her. Therefore, she stresses upon the importance of a well-prepared steak, accusing everybody of overcooking the meat: "All you Irish overcook meat." It is obvious that she is there to display an air of discontentment and to bring a bag of reproaches. Moreover, she orders something which was not in the menu taking advantage of the highly polite Murphy.

The lady with the red shoes transforms from an unexpected and undesired presence into someone worth being investigated, taking into account that the storyteller is interested in the American phenomenon: television thrillers, the tough New York and the favorite villains. When she orders a double Scotch on the rocks and the menu card with an American accent, everybody present sees her as an "intruder," as someone who dared to break into an intimate inner circle. The narrator is puzzled, in the beginning, but later on he is delighted to guess the real reasons of her being there. Even if she desperately wants to impress the others with her American appearance and accent, the storyteller eventually notices that she has an accent which exists only in North Mayo. Consequently, he draws a subjective conclusion: the woman with the red shoes must have been very poor and she went to America to find her fortune. Now she came back to show her change, in a place she loved and hated, at the same time.

The narrator takes advantage of the presence of this exotic figure in order to stress upon the imminent threat: "soon McAndrews itself will be gone." Nevertheless, he is happy that the unexpected presence, the lady with the red shoes, made it clear how important McAndrews was for this corner of the world and how cultural elements can influence the evolution of such establishments.

The speculative information the narrator gives about the lady may be considered highly subjective and therefore insignificant since everything is

filtered through a strong Irish conscience, which is rather nationalistic. She is to be judged according to some prejudices which are inherited.

The author presents an appealing, comforting quiet atmosphere of the hotel before the appearance of the disturbing factor, thus trying to create a suggestive contrast between the initial situation and the one that has to come: "I was struck again by the solemnity of the room. Years and years of ritual have given it a churchlike quiet." (Daly 1996: 138) There are distinct elements that provoke a state of anxiety among all the people present in the hotel. First of all, this new guest, a woman, is a very unusual character who talks much too loud and this is the first sign that causes disturbance: "a raised and discordant voice." Then, there are some rules in society one must observe and must not break: "she was alone, unescorted, a sight which was not only odd, but simply not done" (Daly 1996: 139). A single woman in a restaurant was an outrageous thing. Moreover, her appearance is "the most striking thing of all." One can easily notice that she longs for attention: the teeth are shining, a characteristic of the American women and the spectacles define her as a total foreigner. She looks down to everybody, as if she had something to demonstrate.

She permanently displays an ostentatiously air of superiority. The foreign lady is guilty of outrageously breaking the routine of those who come there and this is an unpardonable mistake. On the other hand, she commits several faults, when trying to impress the present people with her American style. Even if we are talking about a hotel, there is a familial atmosphere among the tourists, on the one hand, and the people who work there, on the other hand.

Nevertheless, it is obvious that the lady with the red shoes is not there by chance. Her presence in that very place is something well-planned. Actually, every detail of her appearance and attitude comes to prove something. She is there with one purpose: to destroy what the guests and hosts have built.

The "intruder" tries to make herself noticed by all the guests of the hotel and its employees, which is not such a difficult thing, taking into account that any detail that can disturb the tranquility of the place is easily perceived. She succeeds in surpassing all the limits, starting from the visual point of view and ending with provocative language structures that are meant to cause a state of restlessness among everybody present. The narrator, the guests and the hotel personnel are confronted with an uncommon situation that breaks the harmony of the place. When everybody strongly believed that nothing could happen in this old forgotten place, the unexpected occurred in a rather violent way. All the bad things that happen in their society are embodied by a single person: the lady with the red shoes.

The narrator is eventually aware of the fact that the reader could be rather susceptible and even critical about this disturbing episode, at least for him. Nevertheless, no matter the opinion of the reader, the storyteller disregards the subjectivity issue and states sharply, in a very convincing way: "Of course, you on reading this, are going to see me as a sentimental old codger, making up romantic stories about strangers, because I am lonely and have nothing better to do. But I know what I know" (Daly 1996: 149). The last part of this speech is used by people when they have to defend their beliefs, even if they can be accused of making up things.

The writer focuses, in her short stories, on the importance of preserving one's identity, fact which was demonstrated by her intermarriage. The fact that she is a Catholic and David Marcus, her husband, a Jewish, has not been an impediment for a very good relationship. Various cultural perspectives cannot limit, as Florentina Anghel notices, the "understanding of the Irish cultural, historical and social context." (Anghel 2011: 10)

Ita Daly remains a representative writer of the contemporary Irish literature, pleading for tolerance and understanding, for finding a way to overcome the cultural gap.

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Rezumat: Ita Daly, scriitoare irlandeză contemporană, reuşeşte, în nuvela sa, „Doamna cu pantofii roşii," să întrepătrundă diverse aspecte culturale. Povestitoarea, o fină cunoscătoare a oamenilor şi a comportamentului acestora, contemplă modul în care vechiul şi noul, aspectele culturale irlandeze, britanice şi americane se regăsesc într-un hotel irlandez, menit să păstreze spiritul regiunii. Lucrarea mea are ca scop identificarea şi prezentarea acestor elemente şi a modului în care o comunitate se poate schimba datorită influenţelor culturale la care este supusă.

REALITY VERSUS THE AMERICAN DREAM IN ARTHUR MILLER'S PLAYS

Georgiana-Elena DILĂ[1]

Abstract: *Arthur Miller's desire for a believable plot extended to the idea that stories about men and their ordinary problems should be exposed for the public to analyse from different spectres and so he found great inspiration in everyday reality, which helped him shape characters willing to embrace contemporary values and principles that moulded their developing personalities.*

The American Dream stands out as one of Miller's most popular topics as it transforms his protagonists into creators of worlds paralleling reality, feeding their imagination and helping them escape real life, as times change and people become more self-absorbed, focusing on ideals and feeding on the desire of achievement.

Keywords: *dream, reality, values, idea, stories.*

Arthur Miller's biography and his desire to grasp the meaning of everyday experiences offered him the possibility to present in his work the exact amount of realism readers and theatregoers needed in order to take a good look at their lives and understand what might have gone wrong because of misbehaviour and lack of confidence in themselves as doubt was part of their approaches to both their actions and others' attitudes.

When Miller started to receive attention from both the public and the critics Tennessee Williams was also embraced as a remarkable figure of the theatre world, both showing that the American theatre could focus on the faulty existence of the time where new social problems were created people being traumatized by different types of situations. Williams and Miller were trying to give birth to a type of theatre where new elements were being brought on stage apart from the traditional ones that people could easily identify and feel no freshness of the representation. Their skills were put to work also when the time came for them to be staged or transformed into films for the big screen. However, Williams was more musical, more poetic than Miller in his portrayal of realism, working more with the radical theatre

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in his belief that a new type of plays could develop. As Christopher Bigsby underlined in his description of modern American drama,

> The sense of promises turned to dust, of the individual suddenly severed from a world that had seemed secure, underlies much of their work. The shock which both writers express seems to derive from their sense of the fragility of the social world, the thinness of the membrane that separates us from chaos. That conviction was shaped by the events of a decade that began with economic debacle and ended with war in Europe. (Bigsby, 2004: 69)

The first elements Miller introduced in his plays were related to his own biography as he had had a "riches to rags" childhood and understood some social matters better than others did as he had experienced the consequences on his own watching his family fall apart and degrade. There are some *scars* from the past that the author did not escape and this haunting sensation that he experienced followed his memory for years to come. He found inspiration in all the stories he heard from relatives and friends and introduced some of them as central images of his plays, maintaining his connections to realism and reality very close. It is also important to mention that the personal tragedies Miller had faced, helped him produce powerful plays, which stood the test of time, stating his value as a dramatist and making others look up to him. This singular figure of his era was appreciated for the insights he offered people and for continuous struggle to make them think over what he was presenting to in his work.

His desire for a believable plot extended to the idea that stories about men and their everyday problems should be exposed for the public to analyse from different spectres making them not only relate to the characters, but also try to understand them to the point that they not only reflected the reality of an era; they were symbols for generations and mentalities, out of which many needed to be changed for society to more forward and prosper. For example, the events from *All My Sons* were drawn from a story he had heard from his mother-in-law, *The Crucible* portrays a parallel to what he was facing during the HUAC trials, while *After the Fall* and *The American Clock* are highly personal and autobiographical. Miller preferred drawing details from the reality he was in contact with in order to make sure that the traits he exposed are believable.

The characters presented in Miller's plays were built upon people he had once encountered or even close relatives; he mixed their traits together and the blending resulted in the creation of human beings similar to his audience, individuals anyone could relate to. He always believed that an

example could be set and followed only if the average people were able to connect with his characters and so follow their examples or regard them as social and individual models.

Arthur Miller was called a realist playwright for almost his entire career, and this was not something he considered entirely appropriate as the author believed that he did not attempt at re-creating reality, but at interpreting it. His realistic style does not hint at a copy of the real world, it merely projects a vision of reality as it engulfs people, their beliefs and hopes and transforms them into individuals they do not recognise anymore. Miller is best known for his strong moral sense, which can be felt through the structure of every play he wrote, promoting the social reform he considered to be utterly needed during his lifetime.

Critics mention a variety of themes that the playwright approaches such as: responsibility, morality, importance of the past, law and the damage capitalism has brought upon people. For Miller the past moulds what people can become in the present, he believes it is important to embrace the past and accept the details of one's life or history and try to make good use of what can be considered as a lesson for the future.

The author also considers it very important to acknowledge responsibility for the past and present actions. In Miller's belief, it was necessary for individuals to understand that they could not develop further more as human beings if they refused to accept both the consequences of what they have done, along with their actions. It could be believed that his desire of making people accept reality and its values can be generated by Miller's Jewishness, which implies that doing the right things is something natural and sensible.

The playwright tried to create a small rank society through his depictions of families. He presented the changes the traditional family had undergone as there were members reacting one against the other, not maintaining the unity, forgetting about loyalty and respect. One other reason that provides gaps between families is the father-son relationship which for Miller is not only tensioned but is burdened with the role the father should have according to the sons' desires and his inability to perform to such a level, bringing forward guilt and frustration for both sons and fathers.

The gaps that are created between society members are also born out of the materialist view that one can be successful only if he/she can afford all the *superior* goods, which are advertised on the market. Consumerism is one of the core negative elements he criticised in his work. The ones who fail to achieve such a task are the ones whom the community overlooks in its search for success. This might also be a reason why Miller insisted on basing his plays on the idea of a moral law above the institutional law. For

him the laws created by people were faulty and as a result, he judged his characters from a higher moral standard.

The author highlighted in his plays the idea that we are all responsible for what happens to each other. His writing style is best known for its honesty and true nature of man. The themes he approached connect to issues of the Left, but most definitely go beyond Marxist capitalist views, focusing mainly on the relationship existing between the individual and society as a whole. Important matters, which the author brought forward, are guilt, responsibility, fraternity, and psychology. He was very interested in getting people to understand the awareness that society should build upon.

The restlessness of the American society that is fore grounded in his plays and the spiritual problems its citizens are dealing with show Miller's concern with changing the world, taking attitude and bringing into discussion the moral elements people seem to have forgotten. He not only understood what "psychological realism" represents, but also the need for some reformation at the level of society as a whole. His insight gave him recognition and even though the critics may not have always been supportive, they never ignored his work or projects.

The author's style involves a metaphoric language, which discloses the nature of his characters. Critics have noticed that the choice of names or of lines that the playwright had made was not at all random as they reveal the character's inner thoughts and patterns of behaviour. In Miller's plays, the dilemmas, which extend to universal level, lead the public to personal insight and desire for solution finding. By bringing the audience into the play, he hoped that people could meditate on what should be done in order to solve problems and take a stand. "For Miller, beyond the fantasies, the self-deceptions, the distortions of private and public myths are certain obligations which cannot be denied. The present cannot be severed from the past or the individual from his social context; that, after all, is the basis of his dramatic method and of his moral faith." (Bigsby, 2004: 124)

The American identity cannot be separated from Arthur Miller's work and personality, as he was dedicated to improving the national ideals, mainly to what morality and responsibility are concerned. Considering the results of the playwright's work, Steven Centola believes that "Arthur Miller stands tall in the procession of great American writers who have wrestled with the shifting and oftentimes contradictory meaning and reality of the American experience." (Centola, 2008: 40)

One of the most prominent themes Miller approached in his work is the failed American Dream. He did believe in equality and possibility of people to adapt and even completely change their lives, but he was against the naïve pursuit of such an ideal. The American Dream represents an

emblem of the U.S.A., it is part of its history and its tradition. If in the beginning it had represented hope and prosperity, being part of the American constitution, militating for people being equal in front of God and the others, in time it developed in a negative way. At the end of the millennium, there were even four new types of dreams related to customers and consumerism. Therefore, the initial American Dream of fighting for a better place in society transformed itself into something, which proved harder and harder to achieve as time went by. Generations after generations stated that the American Dream was more about personal happiness than about earning money.

When the author decided to write about people's hopes and dreams, he had in mind an analysis of the society from the family point of view, placing the ideals ordinary individuals could develop as farfetched and destructive. He believed that individuals should stand up for the unjust actions taken against them. Readers usually view Miller's plays as pointed critiques of contemporary values, because he was very interested in evaluating the way society was acting out and he used his plays as a tool to attract attention to some negative aspects, which in everyday life would be completely ignored. The author considered that some issues had to stop being covered by the authorities and had to be revealed to people in order to familiarize them with the impact of development. He even mentioned that the power of expressing himself is given to him by the structures of his plays and that if it were not for their existence he would not have managed to speak his mind so clearly.

All My Sons stands out as Miller's first impact upon the audience, a play that not only describes the American society involved in the post-war activities, but it traces the idea which stood at the core of American capitalism. If in the beginning we perceive the presence of a self-made man who has worked his way up the social ladder by using his ability to receive orders and, when the time came to give some himself, by the end of the play there is no image any member of the audience can look up to, degradation has replaced all the positive traces the main character ever had. Joe Keller, the protagonist of *All My Sons*, has made all the necessary sacrifices to achieve the status he enjoys at the beginning of the play, being proud of his company and his family. He believes in the post-Civil War version of the dream, the one that Clurman names the dream of business success focusing mainly on financial growth.

Joe Keller can be regarded as the hero who follows the Horatio Alger ideal because he considers that if people work hard and have courage there is no bad thing that can happen in the land of all possibilities, however he does look the other way when this suits his interests. There is an

interesting blend of attitudinal behaviour which shows that the protagonist does not place his family as the most important thing in his life, but his achievement of the dream. As long as he has all the things he set his mind for he is happy and he can feel proud. He concentrates on earning money and providing for the family, in any way he can. He is not interested in equal chances; he only wants to focus on his goal and disregard any collateral victims. Keller prides himself in having been able to build his own company, earning his, more than decent, living, and providing for a home, which seems admirable. His hopes for his son's future are that some day he would take his place as the head of the company, taking care of what Joe has built all his life. As he is a product of the contemporary American society, Joe represents the type of man who has been working all his life for the well being of his close relatives, having no other ambitions besides a comfortable home for his family and a successful business to pass on to his sons. The need for a legacy is more than obvious in his case reaching out for that desire of immortality which can also be noticed in *Death of a Salesman*. The only problem Keller has is that he does not understand when it is the best time to stop working in a business, which connects his products with the lives of men fighting in a war. Ethics seems to lack from his character and this is why so many problems appear, the past intruding with the present and changing its course.

Keller's partner has been sentenced for the shipment of some defective cylinders, as Joe's excuse was that of having been ill the day it happened. As he had been exonerated by the Court of Law, no one dared to question him in an overt manner. So, his life went on, while his partner's was reduced to nothingness. Steve Deever, Joe's partner, confided in the American Dream as much as Joe, but, unfortunately for him, the desire for prestige and wealth that the latter had resulted in a tragedy. His son and daughter rejected him, his friends turned their backs on him and, even though he was not forgotten, they never mentioned him.

Joe Keller wanted to hide his guilt and responsibility, so he chose to set an example by telling his family and Ann that he would accept Steve back to the firm, in a lower position, after his release. What bewildered others seemed only natural to Joe. His conscience did not allow him to speak up in a confession, but still, obliged him to take virtual measures.

Miller's play reveals a constant struggle between generations and also between the principles that people of different ages may have. Due to the fact that his protagonist is a man of stubborn ambitions who places onto his sons the American Dream of success, there is a clash which destroys him and the personal image of idealism. So, Keller ends his life for the greater good, which has been shut away from him because of the blindness he lived

in throughout his life. Being the product of a society based on image, on what one can show others, the protagonist has certain limitations in thought that refrain him from developing further as a human being. Chris, his surviving sons is his antagonist, but also his wake up caller who brings to light the flaws of his father and the consequences of his actions, even though his uttermost desire was that of doing the right thing, of following the laws of the country and those of common sense and decency. The end of the play shows a leaving of the past behind and a fresh start bearing in mind the mistakes the father made and keeping a clear head for the future. Kate Keller's last line: "Don't take it on yourself. Forget now. Live." (Miller, 2000: 84) indicates her desire of letting go of the past and creating new rules and ambitions. Time has come to make some drastic changes in their lives, the first one being to face the truth and intake the consequences.

One other symbol of the American Dream in the play is the setting, the Kellers' backyard, which symbolises the result of American affluence having perfectly cut green lawn bordered by poplars, a large house with a porch and interesting outdoor furniture. Everything Joe has earned is visible in his lifestyle and in the comfort he enjoys. There is no minute which goes by that he does not focus on what life can offer that he can be happy for, especially at the material level.

Another play that Miller used to point to the American Dream is his work *A View from the Bridge*, about an immigrant community, hoping to earn a better living on the New York docks than in Italy. The American Dream has always suggested that through hard work, courage and determination one can achieve his/her hopes for a bright future. This ideal was the one, which attracted many immigrants to the U.S.A. Even though Miller knew first hand that immigrants had miserable lives and that the area they were living in was not much more than a modern slum, so he understood the need for comfort and hope they had, and the despair they were feeling, make-believing that everything was exactly what they had expected and sometimes even more. The author creates his plot in such a manner that Eddie Carbone, the protagonist, still envisages his home as being much better than any Italian one. When his wife mentions the arrival of two of her cousins from Europe and complains about the mess in the house he points out that "They'll think this is a millionaire's house compared to the way they live" (Miller, 1965: 382). In his opinion, they are clearly superior to their Italian relatives considering that everything on the continent is outdated and poor. He cannot understand why his wife attempts to impress her cousins, believing that their coming to Brooklyn is more than sufficient to make them feel overwhelmed.

In the case of Marco and Rodolpho, the *bridge* between their past life and the new one is the Carbone family living in the immigrant's neighbourhood near the Brooklyn Bridge in New York. The leap from the poor life they had to endure in their native village, where no money could be produced into a world where hope and possibilities do exist represents a huge step in their evolution. Even though there are tough challenges and an incredible amount of work that has to be done there is a possibility for them to make money and improve their living standard and in Marco's case he can secure the future of his children and prevent them from starvation and further poverty. America is once again the land of hope and dreams. Italy is left behind only physically, because it is remembered in all the important actions of the community members, who keep in mind the ground rules applied in a society that, although it is not as free minded as the American one, it relies on the respect of its people for one another.

The play's title alludes to this bridge between continents and between communities and it even includes a symbol of the American society, namely the Brooklyn Bridge in New York. It is a span between disparate civilizations leaving the action somewhere in the middle, looking for some sort of balance. New York is filled with all sorts of labourers, immigrants with strange accents, the American children of the immigrants, but also with bankers, lawyers and all types of cosmopolite generations, who represent the *trademark* of the city and make the connections to other worlds. This mixture of identities makes the issue of immigration and integration a very important one. There is an overwhelming sense of behaving according to some laws, which sometimes have separate directions and people get hurt and confused. When writing about Miller's *A View from the Bridge* Albert Wertheim mentioned that

> The bridge between cultures is not merely there in the symbol of the Brooklyn Bridge but there as well anthropomorphized in the on-stage figure of Alfieri, the immigrant-son lawyer who practises in Red Hook and tries to explain American legal statutes to men like Eddie Carbone, reared in the traditions of Sicilian family and tribal loyalties, imperatives, and taboos. (Wertheim, 2006: 109)

Beatrice's cousins are quite different from one another, although they are brothers. Marco is a well built individual, with dark skin and tender voice, who keeps to himself and respects both Beatrice and Eddie, being grateful for their generosity. His sole aim is to gain enough money in order to send his wife so that she can take care of their children. Marco's American Dream is related to his family back home, which is in a position

that requires a constant amount of money to prevent them from starving. Rodolpho, on the other hand, is blonde and light skinned, fascinated with the American Dream, wanting to become an American as soon as possible. He focuses on getting rich and buying a motorcycle.

Eddie is not very fond of Rodolpho as he believes that he should also work for his brother's family as he has none of his own. In his view, it is selfish and inappropriate to buy new things for yourself and not think about your closest family members:

> A snappy new jacket he buys, records, a pointy pair new shoes and hisbrother's kids are starvin' over there with tuberculosis? (Miller, 1965: 403)

The bright lights of New York make Rodopho feel he can be someone important some day. He is inspired by the things around him as he does his best to fit into the community he is now part of. He wants to imitate the American lifestyle as much as possible. When, for example, in the second act Catherine suggests that the two of them could go away and live in Italy he feels rather offended and replies that Italy has nothing more than one can find in America. His dreams are to buy a house for himself and Catherine in the States. His intentions are not those of ever moving back to Europe. Still, Eddie is of a different opinion and he acts accordingly. As he is jealous of Rodolpho he gets to a point when his feelings cloud his judgement and his desperate act of calling the Immigration Bureau not only jeopardizes one brother's chance of earning money, but also the other's. So, when the police come, Marco's future is compromised as he has absolutely no alternative but to be sent back to Italy. His anger against Eddie is incontrollable as he understands that his American Dream has to end abruptly, the only solution he might still have is that of accusing Eddie in from of the whole neighbourhood by yelling "He killed my children! That one stole the food from my children!" (Miller, 1965: 433). Marco makes a comparison between what would have happened if they had been in Italy, pointing to the respect people have for tradition and the internal laws of the community.

Eddie feels very offended by all the accusations Marco brings to him and he wants the former to admit his mistake in calling him a traitor. His reaction, however, is not a calm one as he has a knife pointed at Marco. His sense of guilt and fear of Marco transform Eddie into an irrational man, who is unable to control himself. Still, his reactions have tragic consequences, as in the human clench he has with Marco, the knife is twisted and he becomes

the victim, being killed instantly. Eddie is dead and so is Marco's chance at ever achieving the American Dream.

Rodolpho, on the other side, having his relationship with Catherine and a planned wedding, could continue to live in the U.S.A. Catherine's citizenship could provide for his future. His ambitions could be fulfilled as she is his ticket to becoming an American. When Miller first presented the play there was a deep controversy surrounding the American Dream, which many believe that still exists. Many foreigners considered America as the new nation which brought hope to all the people inhabiting it. It represented the light at the end of the tunnel, where people found opportunities and jobs. Nevertheless, the true story behind the dream brought shattering results as in the case of Miller's characters.

The happy end that the American Dream is supposed to bring people is just a fake belief in Miller's vision, not only because it can sometimes resemble more a utopia-like element than the reality of life, but also because the most prominent examples of wealth and happiness are the ones deluding people. Miller did not maintain the position that wealth and happiness could not be achieved, but he intended to make people aware that times change and the psychology of the human being is so complex that even though there is a greed for money, the terms initially defining the American Dream have actually changed. He was perfectly aware that war profiteering was part of what made America prosper during the war and it made him take a stand and ask some questions, which were probably in the mind of many of his contemporaries, but who ignored them for the sake of making money and prospering. These were not the only elements that preoccupied Miller, who, with his rabbinical righteousness analysed social issues, which troubled Americans and immigrants alike. The despair that he presented in *A View from the Bridge* was real, people dying of hunger and having no way out of a situation that was expanding in European countries. He introduced the opinions of outsiders of the system, who placed their hopes above anything else. Miller's tight relation with America in general could not let him overlook elements that were crucial in social development and this lead to some of the criticism he brought on the stage.

Marilyn Berger wrote in the *New York Times*, shortly after Miller's death that his "work exposed the flaws in the fabric of the American dream" (Berger, 2005), suggesting that his minute perception revealed issues some ignored and others just chose to ignore. Miller engaged in a serious investigation of the plight the working class was involved in, and this gave him the possibility of using his ability of creating stories mixed with the psychology of desperation and the realism of American vernacular. His projections were not just the work of a writer who considered himself the

voice of the nation, but it was that of an American who analysed the problems society had and was brave enough to not turn the head the other way. He believed that some urban myths were damaging the development of future young people, who were raised in a culture which valued hope and opportunity and sometimes was misled into forgetting the real life parameters, which portrayed an illusory expectation from others and less from oneself. This renouncement to the self identity, which should have a primary role in the psychological and sociological development, makes the readers and audience alike face the post-modern changes, which develop more and more urban *schizophrenia* induced by the constant changing parameters of representation of authority.

Times do change and people become more self-absorbed, focusing on ideals and feeding on the desire of achievement. The playwright's intents are those of ringing an alarm of despair and proposing a rethinking of attitude and principles, bringing forward the concepts of respect, ethics and morality. There is a need for a serious basis to provide human beings with courage and determination, and at the same time with insight and exhilarating awareness, having a personal commentary of the world in general.

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Rezumat: *Dorinţa lui Arthur Miller de a produce o intrigă plauzibilă conduce la ideea că povestirile despre oameni şi problemele lor obişnuite ar trebui să fie expuse publicului spre analiză. Astfel, autorul se inspiră direct din realitatea cotidiană, ceea ce îl ajută să modeleze personaje care vor să îmbrăţişeze valorile contemporane şi principiile pe care îşi clădesc personalitatea.*

Visul american se distinge între temele favorite ale lui Miller, pe măsură protagoniştii dezvoltă lumi paralele cu realitatea, hrănindu-le astfel imaginaţia şi permite evadarea într-un alt spaţiu dorit.

WORDS, MEANING, AND MIND: MAKING SENSE OF THE THE

Dennis LEAVENS[1]

Abstract: *Some advances in neuroscience endorse views of language and concerns with interpretation voiced by modernist writers. Among recent developments, neuroscientists have traced the timing of word recognition, have located parts of the brain that construct explanatory narratives, and have indicated the role of the unconscious in processing information. In particular, Wallace Stevens' concern with the manipulation of sense data by the mind, and the reinterpretation of poetic data by a reader adumbrate these advances in neuroscience. Other modernists, through the "difficulty" of their texts, underscore the interpretive act. Neuroscience has identified some of the interpretive processes that concerned modernists..*

Keywords: *poetics, neuroscience, unconscious, RAS, Wallace Stevens.*

The ending line of Wallace Stevens' poem "The Man on the Dump" raises questions about truth, meaning, and mind: "Where was it one first heard of the truth? The the" (203). In this formulation, the truth is denominated by reiteration of the definite article, which itself becomes a nominative. By this formula, truth in our apprehension has something to do with naming a definite – a definite thing, object, idea, aspiration, etc. But the doubling of the article causes a momentary linguistic disjunction. We cannot read the second "the" as we have read the first. The syntax and context require semantic reconfiguration.

Another well-known modernist American poem duplicates a whole phrase, with again a difference in meaning. The ending two lines of Robert Frost's "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening" contain exactly the same words in exactly the same order, and somehow result in different meanings: "And miles to go before I sleep / And miles to go before I sleep." Readers frequently understand the first version as a part of the literal journey described in the poem, and the second as a metaphor for life's journey to death, or some similar interpretation. How and why does this happen? How to the same words in the same order result in different meanings? Some

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advances in neuroscience have approached these issues and offer tentative explanations for how these poems produce these effects, while simultaneously offering insights into the construction of meaning and truth.

These advances in neuroscience have identified or verified parts of the brain associated with specific linguistic activities, for example, syntax with Broca's area and semantics with Wernicke's area. But the use of recent technological advances, including functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI), electro encephalograms (EEG), and magnetic encephalograms (MEG), have contributed significantly to the understanding of how the brain processes language. Because MEGs record events in real time, the sequence of language processing has become more accessible. But in addition to language processing, the brain plays an active interpretive role, making sense of data even when the data is not ordered, constructing narratives and explanatory accounts from partial, incomplete, or contradictory information. Partly for this reason, duplications are never the same, the second iteration frequently reinterpreted in the brain.

At the same time, it is important to point out that neuroscience is just beginning to understand brain functioning. While important discoveries are being made and some extrapolations are fairly safe, it is also clear, as V.S. Ramachandran says, "What do we mean by 'knowledge' or 'understanding'? And how do billions of neurons achieve them? These are complete mysteries" (*Tell-Tale* Loc. 3313). Furthermore, as Antonio Damasio asserts, "Neither the ideas discussed in this book nor the ideas presented by several colleagues working in this area can be said to solve the mysteries surrounding brain and consciousness" (*Self* Loc. 3723). While these caveats are required, there are developments that address the question of how do the same words in the same order result in different interpretations.

Some historical explanations of these differences have held currency among critics. Ever since Heraclitus, thinkers have asserted the impossibility of duplication. In Fragment 41, Heraclitus offers this famous comment: "Into the same river you could not step twice, for other (and still other) waters are flowing."[2] The point is sufficiently clear: life is change, our environment is different from moment to moment; we are different from moment to moment, and so duplication is impossible. Reader Response theory rests in part on fundamental differences of readings because of internal and external contexts, as we come to a text from different places at different times, for the first or second or third time. Duplication is not

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[2] (http://www.classicpersuasion.org/pw/heraclitus/herpate.htm)

possible if only because of the conditioning of encountering a text a first or second or repeated time.

So it is to be expected that a second "the" needs rhetorical re-processing, especially when it appears in an unexpected grammatical context. Similarly, the second iteration of Frost's closing line vaults a reader into a different interpretative space, the first literal interpretation being, as it were, already semantically occupied.

At the same time, repetition does not always lead to re-interpretation.
A famous example, quickly glossed by T.S. Eliot, is King Lear's "Never, never, never, never, never" which Eliot calls "one of the most thrilling lines" in the play, "but apart from a knowledge of the context, how can you say that it is poetry, or even competent verse?"[3] Of course, the inversion of the iambic to a trochaic pentameter marks a complete reversal of the play's dominant rhythm, underscoring the permanence of Cordelia's death. But the dramatic moment is what carries the emotional meaning. And while the momentum gathers to a kind of finality from this repetition, the individual "never's" do not necessarily or automatically accrue different meanings, as they do with Frost's and Stevens' passages. Lear's line reads more like an apostrophe, repeated by a nearly deranged mind, holding on to the repetition as grounding in an inexplicable world.

So while not all repetitions differ in meaning, some recent studies in neurolinguistics have dealt with polysemous meanings, like those we find in the lines from Frost and Stevens. The brain seems to be processing language preconsciously first, with meaning emerging milliseconds later into consciousness. The process is not linear, and initial responses in the brain condition subsequent responses. In short, Lear's line may be exceptional. We are more likely to locate a different meaning with a second iteration of the same word or words. To add to the perplexity, the interpretations we provide are normally plausible, but we do not necessarily need evidence or "truth" to support them.

How might polysemous generation of meanings work? Some neuroscientific studies with polysemy, but the interpretive process would appear analogous when poets are deliberately invoking polysemy through repetition. It would make sense that when "people process a polysemous word in one sense, this interferes with their later processing of the word in a different sense (Klein & Murphy, 2001)" (cited in Pylkkänen et al, 98). But this kind of interference leads to a reinterpretation, occurring before meaning arises to consciousness: "Surprisingly, however, the polysemous

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[3] (http://www.ancientworlds.net/aw/Post/327817)

stimuli showed exactly the opposite effect: related targets peaked reliably *later* (*M* = 381) than unrelated targets (*M* = 351; *F*(1,8) = 10.12, *p* < .05)" (Pylkkänen et al, 103). Since it normally takes about 500 milliseconds for meaning to emerge in consciousness, this polysemy is automatic and preconscious: "The proposal that remains most compatible with all the evidence is the hypothesis that awareness is the emergent result of appropriate neuronal activities when these persist for a minimum duration of up to 0.5 sec." (Libet Loc 732)

When this time delay is combined with the recognition that there is a vast amount of information entering the brain at any one moment, we realize that very little actually enters consciousness: "the human sensory system sends the brain about eleven million bits of information each second. . . .The actual amount of information we can handle has been estimated to be somewhere between sixteen and fifty bits per second" (Mlodinow 33). In this maelstrom of sensory data, the brain, sometimes preconsciously, sometimes consciously, selects out material to be aware of.

But that selection is never neutral. On the contrary, it is biased and partial, in both senses of the word: "modern neuroscience teaches that, in a way, all our perceptions must be considered illusions. That's because we perceive the world only indirectly, by processing and interpreting the raw data of our senses. That's what our unconscious processing does for us – it creates a model of the world" (Mlodinow 45). These models are more or less reflective of the external world and "the the," but they are designed primarily for survival, not for accuracy of description, explanation, or truth. If those result, so much the better, but keeping the organism alive is the primary function of the model.

Worse yet, our explanations are often enough confabulations designed to make sense to us, not necessarily to reflect the external world, nor even capture the sense data coming into the brain: "When we set out to explain our actions, they are all post hoc explanations using post hoc observations with no access to non-conscious processing. Not only that, our left brain fudges things a bit to fit into a makes-sense story" (*Who's in Charge* 77-78). Because so much unfiltered material is presented to the unconscious brain, we get access to only a tiny percentage:

The brain's first sensory intake filter, the reticular activating system (RAS), is a primitive network of cells in the lower brain stem through which all sensory input must pass if it is to be received by the higher brain. Out of the millions of bits of sensory information available to the brain every second, only several thousand are selected to pass through the RAS – and that selection is an involuntary, automatic response rather than a conscious decision. (Willis Loc 873)

While several thousand pass through the RAS, not all of those make it to consciousness, so we end with the sixteen to fifty bits of information per second that seem to be the normal range humans can manage.

And even with those sixteen to fifty, we don't really tell the truth or construct reality. Michael Gazzinga, working with split-brain patients, asserts "It is the left hemisphere that engages in the human tendency to find order in chaos, that tries to fit everything into a story and put it into a context. It seems that it is driven to hypothesize about the structure of the world even in the face of evidence that no pattern exists" (*Who's in Charge*, 85). Part of the normal activity of a normal brain is constructing explanatory narratives that create patterns whether or not those exist in the data. Whatever sense information is presented will be arranged into some pattern and some story that we then believe: "When asked to explain ourselves, we engage in a search for truth that may feel like a kind of introspection. But though we think we know what we are feeling, we often know neither the content nor the unconscious origins of that content. And so we come up with plausible explanations that are untrue or only partly accurate, and we believe them." (Mlodinow 191)

Thus Gertrude Stein's declaration – "I made innumerable efforts to make words write without sense and found it impossible" – turns out to be literally true for every reader or listener (*Primer* 18). In the process of the brain confabulating causalities, connections, linkages, categories, and orders, these narratives acquire a unity, coherence, credibility, and weight that mask their partiality, bias, and subjectivity.

So it is with language processing in the brain. An expression like "the the" follows primarily a parallel psycholinguistic process, with "near-simultaneous access to different types of psycholinguistic information, which may be followed by second order computations and reprocessing of already accessed information." The phonological, lexico-syntactic, and semantic information jumbles together in the first 250 milliseconds or so, with semantic and syntactic reinterpretation, along with other cognitive processes, following in the next 200 milliseconds or so (Pulvermüller and Shtyrov 56). This all occurs before consciousness and without volition ro free will. Pulvermüller et al conclude "that the brain processes of word meaning access are to a large degree automatic." ("Brain Signatures" 888)

Since most or all of this access to meaning is occurring before consciousness, which is normally around 500 milliseconds, meaning is determined preconsciously, then reinterpreted and reanalyzed, preconsciously, then shaped into a confabulation that makes sense, often before meaning emerges in consciousness. This is especially the case when the words do not appear to make normal sense, when syntactic or semantic

abnormalities occur. Yet a central part of a poet's or creative writer's work is to "make it new," in Ezra Pound's phrase, by giving us configurations of language that we have not seen before, thereby jolting our sensibilities and pitching us out of cliché-ridden everyday expressions. If language is, as Emerson called it "fossil poetry," if it is "made up of images, or tropes, which now, in their secondary use, have long ceased to remind us of their poetic origin," poetry should make demands on an audience, or more particularly, on those parts of the brain that interpret language. The brain then will order the new experience, create a narrative that makes sense.

Gazzaniga and colleagues assert that there is a particular part of the left hemisphere of the brain that is concerned with making order out of disorder, or out of new experiences: "The left brain interpreter creates order out of the chaos presented to it by all the other processes spewing out information" (*Charge* 88). So the brain is equipped to address the demands of a new configuration of language, though it may confabulate those demands into a more or less accurate construction. The ending of Stevens' "The Idea of Order at Key West" suggests something like Gazzaniga's Interpreter, and our will to order:

> Oh! Blessed rage for order, pale Ramon,
> The maker's rage to order words of the sea,
> Words of the fragrant portals, dimly-starred,
> And of ourselves and of our origins,
> In ghostlier demarcations, keener sounds. (129-30)

In this context, the "maker" must point in at least two directions: (1) etymologically, the poet is a maker, who orders words "of ourselves and our origins"; and (2) the reader or listener is a maker, making meaning, order, sense, story "of ourselves and our origins" from those words. The two needn't agree, because while the sounds are "keen," the demarcations are ghostly – ghosts of the Interpreter, ghosts of preconscious automatic processes, ghosts unknowable and inaccessible.

Because the brain is always changing, from without and from within, the emergent interpretation is always different, always ordering. Because the brain is multi-layered, operational, and interactive, narration and interpretation occur in many places in the brain and are always fractional, different, and new. "Sense" is indeed ghostly – tentative, biased, partial, and subjective, but made orderly and believable. Even more perplexing, the "'causal arrow' in human thought processes consistently tends to point from belief to evidence" (Mlodinow 200-201). Interpretation, while automatic and necessary, contains a pre-cognitive unconscious element; a conscious

element of intentionality; a belief – some social or personal construct; and evidence, normally factored in later.

An answer to Stevens' question can now be approached: "Where was it one first heard of the truth?" One first heard of the truth somewhere in the pre-conscious or non-conscious brain. One shaped that truth, ordered it into some conscious plausible narrative or story or interpretation, which is necessary, and illusory, tentative and recursive, creative, believable, and in varying degrees, false. "The the" makes a noun or nominative of an article requiring new interpretive strategies**,** as the definite article becomes an indefinite nominative referencing anything and everything. Similarly, the second "And miles to go before I sleep" initiates a new interpretive moment, generates a new narrative or explanation**,** references a different context, all supplied internally, though the external evidence remains the same.

Other modernist writers also rely on semantic and syntactic disjunctions to "make it new." The famous opening of *Finnegans Wake* is one such example, in which the polysemy resides in the syntax and neologisms, forcing an interpretive strategy that is neither stable nor fully believable: "riverrun, past Eve and Adam's, from swerve of shore to bend of bay, brings us by a commodius vicus of recirculation back to Howth Castle and Environs"[4]. While one can certainly gloss this and "make sense" of it, interpretation slides around, polysemy dominates, and interpretation itself is called into question. Samuel Beckett, as close as any reader to the *Wake*, said: "You cannot complain that this stuff is not written in English. It is not written at all. It is not to be read. It is to be looked at and listened to. His writing is not about something. *It is that something itself*."[5] The intentional shift from language as "about something," language as meaning, as window pane through which the world is seen, to language as thing-in-itself, as object with its own demands on the interpreter, identifies interpretation as the central act. And the brain interprets preconsciously, through unknowable decisions by the RAS and inaccessible pre-sorting of data.

Gertrude Stein was similarly concerned with words as things. Her assertion that she never repeats herself agrees with some of the neuroscientific evidence, and her intentional placing of words next to each other to see what patterns emerge highlight the interpretive act:

Nearly all of it to be as a wife has a cow, a love story. All of it to be as a wife has a cow, all of it to be as a wife has a cow, a love story.

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[4] (http://ebooks.adelaide.edu.au/j/joyce/james/j8f/)
[5] (http://www.sheilaomalley.com/?p=1181).

As to be all of it as to be a wife as a wife has a cow, a love story, all of it as to be all of it as a wife all of it as to be as a wife has a cow a love story, all of it as a wife has a cow as a wife has a cow a love story.[6]

Once again this is a text that, with a certain amount of effort, one can and does "make sense" of, but to do so is to fix meaning in a dubious way, and to call up other interpretations simultaneously, including the tonal quality and music of the prose. The piece is intentionally "difficult" syntactically, and intentionally repetitious, but various meanings emerge as pattern and rhythm work with sound and denotation.

For Stevens, the recognition of the mind's displacement of sense data and accompanying meaning lies at the center of some of his most well-known works. *The Man with the Blue Guitar* deals specifically with the call to order, and the mind's inability to access reality directly. The mind necessarily changes "things as they are," yet we hear continual pleas to give us life, give us reality. The tensions between sensory information from the external world and their alterations in the brain are noted:

> They said, "You have a blue guitar,
> You do not play things as they are."
>
> The man replied, "Things as they are
> Are changed upon the blue guitar."
>
> And they said then, "But play, you must,
> A tune beyond us, yet ourselves,
>
> A tune upon the blue guitar
> Of things exactly as they are." (165)

At least two kinds of alterations are going on here, one in the artist and the other in the audience. Change is required by the artist's reconstruction of things as they are. And the audience requests an impossible, yet completely appropriate, result: play a "tune beyond us, yet ourselves" and play things "exactly as they are." The passage is a call to some intricate internal self to which we do not quite have access. And even the artist's effort cannot reach the audience's aspiration:

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[6](http://www.archive.org/stream/selectedwritings030280mbp/selectedwritings030280mbp_djvu.txt)

> I cannot bring a world quite round,
> Although I patch it as I can.
>
> I sing a hero's head, large eye
> And bearded bronze, but not a man,
>
> Although I patch him as I can
> And reach through him almost to man.
>
> If to serenade almost to man
> Is to miss, by that, things as they are,
>
> Say that it is the serenade
> Of a man that plays a blue guitar. (165-6)

Whatever the construct is, it misses a round world, a man, and things as they are. The language marks the necessary alterations of the artist and the audience. Neuroscience helps us identify why: sense data is always already modified, interpreted, and filtered, before it ever emerges into consciousness.

Obviously the artist is a person, and with that comes the recognition and acceptance of this unalterable situation. We cannot be other than we are: "I am a native in this world / And think in it as a native thinks," and to think in that way means all the preconscious processing and all the make-sense confabulation: "Here I inhale profounder strength / And as I am, I speak and move / And things are as I think they are / And say they are on the blue guitar" (Stevens 179-80). We are finally left with our interpretations and confabulations. We simply cannot get access to the external world, nor even our own raw sense data. Things are as we say they are as we tumble through our explanatory narratives.

"Where was it one first heard of the truth?" A.R. Ammons, picking up Stevens' theme with perhaps a more skeptical view, addresses consciousness directly, with his typical humor and ironic eye:

> consciousness is a kind of planet, inscribed
> on the outside with whatever's seen or done,
>
> trekked or swum, climbed or scrambled down,
> while inside the molten moves (drives, slow
>
> shifts) redispose how the surface lies: we're
> wardens, gardeners, waterworkers of the self

keeping the circulations clear and the light
bright; except, of course, we clog everything

up and dumb everything down dim. . . .(225)

What we become conscious of emerges from the "molten" unconscious, leaving us tending the externalities but without access to the unconscious states that create consciousness. Meanwhile our narratives and confabulations "clog" understanding and "dumb" down the complexities. Not only is the unconscious driving consciousness in inexplicable ways, but our conscious decisions are also selective, partial, and distorting:

for when you select

from reality widely surveyed the appropriate
stuff from which to form an assertion, axiom,

affirmation or other muscled manifestation
you have left behind so much unformed stuff

that your truth is drowned in inopportuneness:
in other words, the road you is on is too

slender to measure the landscape: truths, though,
can be passing views, as of strange bushes . . . . (249-50)

Truths are not only partial and selective, but temporary glimpses of things we do not quite know. Neuroscientists tell us that selection is preconscious, automatic, and directed toward certain specific ends: keeping the person alive. Selection is also, at a later stage, conscious and deliberate and partial. Ammons' passage focuses perhaps more on conscious construction of axioms and affirmations, but even before consciousness, the brain has disallowed some sense data. What does pass into consciousness is then further distilled and distorted into "the the," some truth or postulate. And that truth is intimately connected with falsehoods and belief:

truth persists, if at all, hardly distinguishable
from a pack of lies: the truth has about as

much chance as a slender of wheat in weeds:
but, of course, weeds are the truth, too, just

not the truth we want to keep . . .

we should always believe the opposite of what
is believed because what is believed hides

by contradicting what we don't want to believe:
the truth covers the merely true and the truly

believed . . . . (*Glare* 210-11)

While Ammons' position is ultimately skeptical, his union of opposites is sufficiently familiar. And since beliefs precede evidence, locating what we don't want to believe is especially difficult, requiring an unusual effort. We can do nothing about the preconscious selection, but Ammons urges us to question and reconsider whatever we accept as "the the." Wherever we encounter a truth or the truth, such a statement masks a number of other truths, somehow not accepted or acceptable at the moment.

Like the man on the dump,
One sits and beats an old tin can, lard pail.
One beats and beats for that which one believes.
That's what one wants to get near. (Stevens, 202)

Wonderfully, the brain and its processes seem to work for many situations and circumstances. We gain clarity about many causal relationships, we are very clever at manipulating our environments, and we do locate some mutually verifiable truths. Though partial, distorted, and inopportune, some of our confabulations offer a functional and successful measure of truth.

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Rezumat: *Pogresele în domeniul neuroştiinţei au rolul de a confirma anumite viziuni şi interpretări asupra limbii, formulate de unii autori. Printre cele mai recente tendinţe, neuroştiinţa vizează recunoaşterea cuvintelor, localizând părţi ale creierului care construiesc ficţiuni explicative, ceea ce subliniază rolul subconştientului în procesarea informaţiei. Preocupările lui Wallace Stevens pentru manipularea datelor senzoriale de către mintea umană, precum şi interpretarea poeziei de către cititor, prefigurează aceste progrese în domeniul neuroştiinţei. Alţi modernişti, prin dificultatea textelor, subminează actul interpretativ. Neuroştiinţa a identificat unele procese interpretative pentru care moderniştii îşi arată interesul.*

GEORGE ELIOT AND DARWINISM

Victor OLARU[1]

  Abstract: *However much were 19ᵗʰ century British intellectuals interested in science based on methodological research, Darwin's The Origin of Species (1859) took them by surprise and produced great changes in the period's mentality. His work shaped the course of Victorian scientific, theological and artistic thought, determining various direct or indirect reactions with most major poets and fiction writers of the late Victorian period, George Eliot included. This article attempts to emphasize Eliot's engagement with Darwin's theory, demonstrating the importance of science in such a novel as Middlemarch. Reference is also made to other Eliot writings: Silas Marner, Adam Bede, Daniel Daronda, and The Mill on the Floss.*

  Keywords: *Darwinism, mentality change, Victorian fiction, George Eliot, Middlemarch.*

  George Eliot was fascinated by the scientific world and, although she wrote novels, her interest in science is equally important, for her, as art. Not only did she read the scientific works and their reviews and criticism, but she also kept an exact evidence of her readings, scientific or not, as Gillian Beer informs us (2004: 16). However singular, George Eliot was not the only writer that was interested in science; her contemporary intellectuals were too, irrespective of their occupation. Science, as research, offers different methods of precise study. Victorians were interested in science and scientific research based on methodological study, which involved more than a chat between friends and family. The Victorian society as a whole was keen on discovering what had not been discovered yet. Nevertheless, they were not prepared for Charles Darwin's studies which caused great perturbation in Victorian conservatism. There had been some studies on different subjects – psychology, physiology, physics and mathematics – their initiators such as G.H. Lewes, Claude Bernard, John Tyndall, W.K. Clifford and Clerk Maxwell using a literary non-mathematic discourse that came in handy to the Victorian reader interested in science. However,

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Darwin's *Origin of Species* published in 1859 had the greatest impact. (Beer: 4, Postlethwaite: 99)

Victorians, including Eliot, were interested in discovering what man is like, as an individual. A new science began its existence in the 1840s, phrenology, which represents "the detailed study of the shape and size of the cranium as a supposed indication of character and mental abilities" (*Oxford English Dictionary*). George Eliot herself had her head cast by phrenologist James Deville in London in 1844. She wrote to Maria Lewis, her former teacher: "having had my propensities sentiments and intellect gauged a second time, I am pronounced to possess a large organ of 'adhesiveness,' a still larger one of 'firmness,' and [one] as large of conscientiousness." (quoted in Postlethwaite: 104)

George Eliot accompanied her soul mate, the philosopher and literary critic George Henry Lewes in all his scientific and research travels. During one of these travels she wrote this journal entry where she gives a description of her observations which display her ability to handle a remarkable scientific vocabulary: "Indeed, every day I gleaned some little bit of naturalistic experience, either through G's calling on me to look through the microscope or from hunting on the rocks… There are tide-pools to be seen almost at every other step on the littoral zone at Ilfracombe… the Corallina officinalis was then in its greatest perfection, and with its purple pink fronds threw into relief the dark olive fronds of the Laminariae on one side and the vivid green of the Ulva and Enteromorpha on the other. After we had been there a few weeks the Corallina was faded and I noticed the Mesogloia vermicularis and M. virescens, which look very lovely in the water from the white cilia which make the most delicate fringe to their yellow-brown whip like fronds." (qtd. in Postlethwaite: 106-107)

Biological science was an interest that both Marian Evans and Lewes shared from their earliest acquaintance in 1852. Science offered George Eliot the prospect of faithful and accurate observation as the foundation for the realism of her fiction. In science Eliot could find the objectivity that she yearned for. In one of Lewes's writings, *Physiology of Common Life*, he offers the definition: "[s]cience is the endeavour to make the order of our ideas correspond with the order of the things themselves; not to make out a scheme for Nature, which shall correspond with our ideas" (Chapter ix, "The hind and the Bbain," Section I – "The Cebebbuh": 85). Following Lewes's article, Eliot's 1865 essay "The Influence of Rationalism" reads: "the great conception of universal regular sequence … could only grow out of the patient watching of external fact, and that silencing of preconceived notions, which are urged upon the mind by the problems of physical science" (quoted in Postlethwaite: 108). Eliot's

characters become objective to the outer world and to their own actions and thoughts only after the process of self-knowledge and self-sacrifice. In order to interpret life correctly they ought to know themselves first. Eliot pays much attention to the language she uses both in her novels and essays as well as in her personal writings. The term "microscope" is recurrent in *Middlemarch*, her most scientific novel, and it is Lydgate who uses it in order to find "the primitive tissue." (2: 15: 95)

Eliot's interest in science was not only related to her novel-writing; the scientific-based journeys that we have mentioned demonstrate this. A fact that is less known about Eliot and Lewes's private life is that on the occasion of his sixty-first birthday Eliot had a telephone "installed at the Priory," their famous London residence (*The Letters of George Henry Lewes*, 2: 210, quoted in Picker 2003: 104). Also, Picker quotes Eliot's last manuscript's beginning that was meant to be part of a novel she never published, probably begun in 1880, the year she died: "The story will take you if you please into Central England and into what have often been called the Good old times. It is a telescope you may look through a telephone you may put your ear to: but there is no compulsion" (William Baker, "A New George Eliot Manuscript." (qtd. in Picker 2003: 109)

Darwin chose to inform his contemporaries of his discoveries in a narrative discourse that should help the reader to penetrate the thick walls of science. In his works Darwin expressed a world of "gladness and destruction: life, making and destroying itself" (Beer: xix): "Nothing is easier than to admit in words the truth of the struggle for life, or more difficult – at least I have found it so – than constantly to bear this conclusion in mind. …We behold the face of nature bright with gladness, we often see superabundance of food; we do not see, or we forget that the birds which are idly singing round us mostly live on insects or seeds, and are thus constantly destroying life." (Darwin: 40, quoted in Beer: 15)

Given the tension in natural life, the tension in the life of human beings seems natural in its turn too. The relationship between man-woman is one between conqueror and conquered. Therefore, the tension can culminate with some of female characters' actions that emphasise their rebellious nature, in other words, they desire to achieve nonconformist actions through which they hope to show that they can use their free will and thus be nonconformist. Should we take the relationship between Gwendolen Harleth and Henleigh Mallinger Grandcourt in *Daniel Daronda,* we will be in accord with Darwin's statement. Gwendolen is in permanent quest of dominating Grandcourt and Grandcourt, in his turn, dominates Gwendolen who becomes the prisoner of "enforced passivity" (Beer: 36). Gwendolen tries to overcome social and cultural barriers as she invites

Mirah Lapidoth to sing at the Grandcourts' party that does not take place after Grandcourt has come not only to fear Daniel Deronda's influence on Gwendolen but also suspect they have a love affair. In *Adam Bede* tension takes different forms and dimensions: first, there is the tension triggered by the feelings of love and attraction between Hetty and Adam, on the one hand, and Hetty and Arthur, on the other hand.

Their affair culminates with Hetty's decision to find Arthur and inform him of her pregnancy, but she does not find him and feels forced to abandon her new-born baby. Second, there is the tension that Dinah experiences when she realises she can feel love for a man even though she has decided that she will be a preacher for ever. In Dinah's case, we consider that what she experiences is a philosophical pressure which forces her to ponder her feelings. Third, there is the moral weight that Arthur has to deal with when he realises he is the only one that can save Hetty from being hanged. In *Silas Marner*, the realistic portrayal of a weaver's life which is turned upside down when his money is stolen and a child trespasses his isolated cottage. The tension that emerges in this novel comes as a result of an immoral act that has perpetuated for a long period of time; this pressure dissipates only when it is faced, i.e. when Eppie refuses to leave her adoptive father.

Gillian Beer claims that the biological determinism that some critics distinguish in Darwin's taxonomy has become paramount to the contentions about mapping the human genome. Were this true, then Eliotean female characters such as Rosamond Vincy, in *Middlemarch*, ought to be exonerated from all her ill-doings for her capacity of determining what is right or what is wrong is inherited from her parents, who are two models of the lowest existence of human feeling and compassion in the whole Eliotean work.

Throughout the 1850s and well into the 1860s, there existed a developmental theory which was generally referred to as 'the Development Hypothesis'. According to Postlethwaite's article "George Eliot and science," the hypothesis represented the enigmatic state of the natural world for there is a difference between what nature is and what we presume it to be. Gillian Beer quotes Kuhn who discusses this stage in *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* where he presents the process of scientific discovery of nature that begins with the perception of "anomaly, i.e. with the recognition that nature has somehow violated the paradigm-induced expectations that govern normal science" (Kuhn: 52, quoted in Beer: 1). He maintains that in order to perceive that alteration, theory must be "adjust[ed]." Kuhn's presentation of anomaly is similar to the way in which Eliot's female characters' rebellious (nonconformist) actions are considered

by the other characters, such as Maggie Tulliver's supposed elopement, Romola di Bardi's impulse to leave, Mrs Transome's instinct for fear, Mary Garth's desire to help Fred become a moral man.

One may assert that Eliot's literary writings could be assimilated to discovery. Her narrative introduces us into a world which seems perfect and, however, something happens that could be considered as an anomaly. For example, in *Middlemarch,* were we to consider the age difference, the difference in life goals and ideology, the marriage between Dorothea Brooke and Reverend Edward Casaubon constitutes in itself an anomaly. Dorothea is in search of an "epic life" and this is what she expects from her marriage, not to be trapped in a relationship with someone about whom she thought she had read his mind. In Eliot's works, the readers become the "scientist[s]"; the narrator's task is to present "a new sort of fact" to them so that the latter "ha[ve] learned to see nature in a different way", which, surprisingly "is not quite a scientific fact at all" (Beer 2004: 1). Modern readers may find Eliot's novels difficult to understand because of the notions she uses, i.e. scientific which includes medicine and physics, or literary. Thus, the narrator of *Middlemarch* appears to be a sociologist as the multi-plots are united as a "cobweb." Instances of such terms appear less in Eliot's novels and more in her later ones, which demonstrates the argument regarding the centeredness of nature in Eliot's earlier novels, while in her later works her attention was drawn more by political and social issues of Victorian society.

For Darwin, "variation" is the key element of the evolutionary development. Varied species of plants and animals exist on the surface of the Earth, some of them even resemble with one another: "The resemblance, in the shape of the body and in the fin-like anterior limbs, between the dugong, which is a pachydermatous animal, and the whale, and between both these mammals and fishes is analogical" (Darwin: 410). Variation is a word that can be found in Eliotean writings too. Still, there is a difference between the two approaches: Darwin suggests there is no limit of variation, while Eliot, in discussing ironically "the social lot of women" does so: "If there were one level of feminine incompetence as strict as the ability to count three and no more, the social lot of women might be treated with scientific certitude. Meanwhile the indefiniteness remains, and the limits of variation are really much wider than any one would imagine from the sameness of women's coiffure and the favourite love-stories in prose and verse" (Prelude, 1: 2-3). For Eliot, "variation under domestication", the first chapter of Darwin's *Origin of* Species, consists for women in a complicated enterprise. The narrator of *Middlemarch* criticises the Victorian attitude to woman as she was considered unable to have similar accomplishments to

man, thus, she was ruled as "incompeten[t]" (Beer 2004: 139-140). It is woman's apparent incompetency that the narrator uses to criticise the Victorian perception of woman's abilities, especially the intellectual ones in *Middlemarch*: the characters of Dorothea Brooke (Casaubon/Ladislaw) and Mary Garth (Vincy).

In depicting her characters and their actions, Eliot made use of several words that, in the Victorian age, were directly linked to science. Some critics such as Colvin and Edward Dowden have commented on her use of medical and scientific terms: "She has actually employed in a work of fiction such words as 'dynamic' and 'natural selection', at which the critic picks up his delicate ears and shies… Language, the instrument of literary art, is an instrument of ever-extending range, and the truest pedantry, in an age when the air is saturated with scientific thought, would be to reject those accessions to language which are the special gain of time. Insensibility to the contemporary movement in science is itself essentially unliterary… The cultured imagination is affected by it, as the imagination of Spen[c]er's time was affected by his use of the neoclassical mythology of the Renaissance." (Dowden: 54, quoted in Beer: 140)

Eliot's female characters can be described by using Eliot's scientific terms, as Dorothea may described as dynamic: "She was open, ardent, and not in the least self-admiring" (1: 1: 7) We should like to emphasise Eliot's use of scientific terms from an intertextual perspective. These scientific terms help her narrators depict thorough (and sometimes intricate) characters. Thus the words that she makes use of get new meanings, such as "web" which is used with a sociological meaning, i.e. it depicts the community and the interpersonal relationships that Eliot's narratives present. Lydgate's scientific research offers Dorothea the prospect to become familiar with a new domain. It is this fact that underlines her open-mindedness towards reform. Dorothea maintains faith in Lydgate when the general opprobrium disapproves of his behaviour.

Furthermore, there are certain key words that can be observed in her novels – the most prominent one is "web" that appears in several of her novels. In *Middlemarch* it is first used when the narrator states the goal: "I at least have so much to do in unravelling certain human lots, and seeing how they were woven and interwoven, that all the light I can command must be concentrated on this particular *web*, and not dispersed over that tempting range of relevancies called the universe" (2: 15: 117). In *Silas Marner* the weaver has a "web" of his own that he constantly builds, it symbolises the new beginning after fifteen years of solitude and sorrow; possessing a web and improving it all the time, means he and Eppie form a closed circuit around each other. In *The Mill on the Floss* the web has a negative

connotation as it is used by the narrator to refer to the Tullivers' sad life: "the mingled thread in the web of their life was so curiously twisted together that there could be no joy without a sorrow coming close upon it." (5: 7: 365)

Scientific references remain constant across the span of George Eliot's career, her novels record their development. All her novels contain positivist ideas and dilemmas of determinism and free will woven in a meticulously "web" of social realism. In her novels there can be identified three keys, as Postlethwaite argues: "observation," "generalization" and "the organism and the medium." (2001: 108)

From her perspective, the Victorian writer, firstly, pays attention to details by careful examination of events and feelings, secondly, finds general explanations for the characters' individual actions and evolution and, thirdly, she achieves contextual interpretations between "the organism and the medium" (2001: 108). According to what we have just stated, Eliot's novels consist of manifold such instances. In *Adam Bede* the narrator takes us back in the past through a historical reference: "With a single drop of ink for a mirror, the Egyptian sorcerer undertakes to reveal to any chance comer far-reaching visions of the past" (*Adam Bede*, 1: 1: 3). The largest generalisation that Eliot makes use of in her novels is her (re)presentation and analysis of female characters, of different social classes, but mainly the middle-class, through which she criticises woman's lot in Victorian society.

Postlethwaite considers that the term "key" has a scientific reference in Eliot's novels as through such a 'rational' tool the narrator accomplishes the depiction of female characters in a representative social environment, similar to the one mentioned by Eliot in her essay "The Natural History of German Life": "The external conditions which society has inherited from the past are but the manifestation of inherited internal conditions in the human beings who compose it; the internal conditions and the external are related to each other as the organism and its medium" (110). Thus, female characters' representation is dependent upon Victorian woman's condition that Eliot had in mind when she depicted her in her realist novels. A female character as Gwendolen is expected to be crushed by a male counterpart that only intends to transform her into a suitable wife for , but also the other characters as in *Middlemarch* where Mary Garth's choice of not burning Mr Featherstone's latest will brings along Fred Vincy's social downfall as the Garths inform Mr Farebrother:" "[…] The old scoundrel wanted Mary to burn one of the wills the very night he died, when she was sitting up with him by herself, and he offered her a sum of money that he had in the box by him if she would do it. But Mary, you understand, could do no such thing— would not be handling his iron chest, and so on. Now, you see, the will he wanted burnt was this last, so that if Mary had done what he wanted, Fred

Vincy would have had ten thousand pounds. The old man did turn to him at the last. That touches poor Mary close; she couldn't help it—she was in the right to do what she did, but she feels, as she says, much as if she had knocked down somebody's property and broken it against her will, when she was rightfully defending herself. I feel with her, somehow, and if I could make any amends to the poor lad, instead of bearing him a grudge for the harm he did us, I should be glad to do it. Now, what is your opinion, sir? Susan doesn't agree with me. She says—tell what you say, Susan..".…"Mary could not have acted otherwise, even if she had known what would be the effect on Fred," said Mrs Garth, pausing from her work, and looking at Mr Farebrother. "And she was quite ignorant of it. It seems to me, a loss which falls on another because we have done right is not to lie upon our conscience" (4: 40: 253). Therefore, moral acts can determine other characters' evolution. From a moral point of view, Mary Garth has acted correctly; however, she feels she has done wrong to the man she loves. Nevertheless, it is through this deterministic happening that Fred's change is possible as he is forced to work in order to become morally eligible for Mary.

Eliot's novels are replete with images of "the inner and outer" world; the narrator struggles to represent reality as faithfully as possible. Eliot's realistic creed prevented her from idealising human existence. Eliot's fine psychological analysis relies on science as Lewes wrote in *Problems of Life and Mind*: "Human Psychology has to seek its data in Biology and Sociology" (I: 101) and "if we desire to decipher Human Psychology we must study the Human Organism in its relations to the Social Medium" (I: 140). George Eliot must have thought the same for she studied the woman lot in its "Social Medium", the Victorian patriarchal society.

George Eliot's novels are gradually based on a scientific input that is at its highest peak in *Middlemarch*, but her earlier novels bear scientific marks. One such influence is the use of Bentham's theory of conformity and punishment that Michel Foucault brought back to light. Bentham's panopticon resembles Victorian society, as Eliot realistically portrayed it, through the structures that constitute it: the family of origin which is led by patriarchal laws as it is the father who fills the position of head of the family, the new family the woman enters through marriage, the community the female character lives in. All these parts form a whole that enforces discipline in order to obtain conformity and metes punishment in order to correct any deviations from the rule. Eliot presents female characters which either comply with patriarchal society or do not. Eliot's female protagonists' evolution underlines the scientific feature of Eliot's realism. However, her artistic creed did not exclude sympathy as the essential element that can help

her characters overcome any impediments: while she was leaving Florence, for the first time, Romola meets Savonarola whose message focuses on the concept of sympathy; in *Adam Bede* Dinah is the messenger that delivers sympathy to all the other characters, male and female: namely to Hetty, which offers the latter the chance to live even though in exile, to Lisbeth, who suffers after her husband's death, to Adam after he finds out about the secret love affair between Hetty and Arthur. Dinah turns out to evolve from a non-conformist into a conformist after she renounces preaching in exchange of marrying Adam.

The use of scientific remarks in Eliot's novels shows not only her interest in sciences, but also her ability to interpret those recent theories that Victorians were keen on. Shuttleworth considers that Lydgate's interpretation of Dorothea's mental state after Casaubon's death is based on "theories of hysteria as a form of repression, and particularly sexual repression" (quoted in Trotter 2006: 44). It is due to her awareness of woman's lot in Victorian society that Eliot is able to develop this theme later in *Daniel Deronda* in the representation of Gwendolen.

Eliot uses scientific references as diverse as possible; Picker argues that Eliot was also interested in sounds as a scientific field. In one of her journal entries she declared: "I am reading about plants, and Helmholtz on music" (Picker 2003: 87). In another passage of her notes she describes the vibrations coming out of a bell as result of "playing upon a flute under the bell" (Picker 2003: 87). The same idea of sound vibrations is reiterated in chapter 31 of *Middlemarch* where the epigraph describes the opposition between the sounds coming out of a flute and "the huge bell tremble" (31: 286, Picker 87-88). Picker also signals the simile and metaphor of electricity that the narrator of "Mr Gilfil's Love-Story" uses (2003: 88): "The vibration rushed through Caterina like an electric shock" (183). Another scientific entry related to sounds and their effect on the human body can be quoted from *The Mill on the Floss* where Maggie given the circumstances "was taken hold of and shaken […] by a wave too strong for her" (6: 7: 428). "Wave" here is related to the effect of sound as in music wave, but we consider that Eliot also referred to the effect that Stephen's music has on Maggie for the attraction between the two appears to be part of an electric "wave." In the musical entertainment scene terms such as "tenors," "troubadour," and "antidote" suggest the variety of sciences that Eliot is able to resort to in her novels.

Eliot's interest in science was not only related to her novel-writing; the scientific-based journeys that we have mentioned demonstrate this. A fact that is less known about Eliot and Lewes's private life is that on the occasion of his sixty-first birthday Eliot had a telephone "installed at the

Priory," their famous London residence (*The Letters of George Henry Lewes*, 2: 210, quoted in Picker 2003: 104). Also, Picker quotes Eliot's last manuscript's beginning that was meant to be part of a novel she never published, probably begun in 1880, the year she died: "The story will take you if you please into Central England and into what have often been called the Good old times. It is a telescope you may look through a telephone you may put your ear to: but there is no compulsion" (William Baker, "A New George Eliot Manuscript," qtd. in Picker 2003: 109)

Science is, for Eliot, an important means in her attempt to represent objectively the female self. Biological differences, which are used as excuse by man, determine woman's inferiority to man. Eliot is in a scientific quest to "decipher Human Psychology" and the environment it appears in. (Postlethwaite 2001: 114)

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Rezumat: *Oricât de mult ar fi fost de interesaţi intelectualii britanici ai secolului al XIX-lea de ştiinţa bazată pe cercetare metodologică, Originea Speciilor, a lui Darwin (1859) i-a luat prin surprindere şi a provocat schimbări de mentalitate majore. Opera sa a modelat cursul gândirii ştiinţifice, teologice şi artistice a epocii victoriene, determinând reacţii diferite, directe sau indirecte, în rândul marilor poeţi şi prozatori, printre care şi George Eliot. Articolul de faţă subliniază angajamentul autoarei faţă de teoria lui Darwin, demonstrând importanţa ştiinţei în romane precum Middlemarch. Se vor face referiri şi la alte opere aparţinând lui George Eliot: Silas Marner, Adam Bede, Daniel Daronda, şi Moara de pe Râul Floss.*

IDEALISM VERSUS REALITY IN THE MIND OF A VISIONARY

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Abstract: *"Idealism versus Reality Traces in the Mind of a Visionary" evidences Edgar Allan Poe's framework of Platonic idealism charged with Freudian images and the process of looking at things through the half-closed eye – the main idea of Poe's aesthetics and epistemology. The opposition is made between the directness of rational mind/science and the indirectness of imagination/poetry by using the force of imaginative writing to disrupt the mind's capacity to make judgments about reality. Poe's method of attracting the reader's attention through various techniques (the introduction of an incomplete solved mystery, the appearance of an incompletely exposed face or an enclosed space that never fully closes) constructs mental and physical interior states that question every perceptual limitation and expand new imaginative horizons.*

Keywords: *rational, scientific, imaginary, real, idealism.*

As poets are born, but not born fully-grown and their wisdom and knowledge increases with time, experience, and practice we can have access to their mind and visionary art through their apprentice-work. By the time Poe was eleven years old he was "known as a versifier in both a gallant and a satiric vein" (Woodberry, 1966) and by the time he turned eighteen he had published his first volume of forty pages (*Tamerlane and other Poems*, 1827). One of the poems in the volume ("The Happiest Day, The Happiest Hour") expresses what he further amplified. The attitude is that of a man bitterly tested by life experiences who longs for the past times and has no hope for the future:

> The happiest day, the happiest hour
> My seared and blighted heart hath known,
> The highest hope of pride and power,
> I feel hath flown,
>
> Of power! said I? yes! such I ween;
> But they have vanished long, alas!

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The visions of my youth have been –
But let them pass.

And, pride, what have I now with thee?
Another brow may even inherit
The venom thou hast poured on me
Be still, my spirit!

The happiest day – the happiest hour
Mine eyes shall see – have ever seen,
The brightest glance of pride and power,
I feel – have been:

But were that hope of pride and power
Now offered with the pain
Even then I felt – that brightest hour
I would not live again:

For on its wing was dark alloy,
And, as it fluttered – fell
An essence – powerful to destroy
A soul that knew it well.

The philosophy he postulates here is that of the causal connection between pleasure and pain: analysing the nature of his soul and that of his mundane environment the poet appreciates that he is mocked by fate and he is elected to damnation. On the other hand, due to the minute attention to realistic details that struck the reader at all times in his stories, Poe's pure fictions ("The Baloon Hoax," 1844; "The Case of M. Valdemar," 1845) were more often than not mistaken for scientific truths.

Believing that to look directly at something deprives it of its enchantment Poe repeatedly employs the process of looking at things through the half-closed eye, a kind of vision to which reality may be subjected. This is the core idea of his aesthetics and epistemology, because the main opposition is between the direct procedures of science/the rational mind and the indirect processes of poetry/the imagination. Following Platonic characteristics (order, proportion, harmony) Poe creates a clear universe where perceptual organs are not blinded by the fragmentary details salvaged by empiricism. The intertwined reciprocity between cause and effect that become mutual reflections of each other can in this way be analogically approached through metaphor; this function is extended by

science in that it enables man to comprehend the nature of God and also his own.

But Freudian images can also be found within Poe's framework of Platonic idealism: the psyche is presented as the life-denying absolute ideal, art as an objectification of the unconscious love-death wish, and the final unity of the I/the psyche as the full awareness that love inevitably leads to death. This is the maze that has no exit if one embraces the death-wish and love-death premises. But Poe's use of dream-imagery cannot be attributed to Freudian prefigurations without harming the author's meaning and purpose:

> Poe's philosophic perspective is rooted, not in modern ironic pessimism, but in the primacy of the unified organic tripartite self (the physical, the moral, and the intellectual or artistic). If in "Ulalume" the protagonist is identified with the realizing mind, as well as the self, seeking a unity of mind, body, and conscience, the imagery may be considered triadic rather than dualistic. More often than not, Poe's protagonist functioned also as narrator, thus symbolizing within his own mind or self the psychomachia of the modern ego, which is always more complex than the classical dualism of Reason vs. Passion, or Mind vs. Body. If classical in its allegorical symbolism, "Ulalume" employs a modern (nonrationalistic) psychology in its development and resolution of the conflict. (Carlson, 1963: 22-27)

Poe considered disorder to be the triumph of science and industrialism over man's temporal existence that only the lynx eye of the philosopher could penetrate. "The Colloquy of Monos and Una" (1841) presents the restrictive, empirical vision of the early nineteenth-century through the deformation of nature by "huge smoking cities" and the repression of imagination and taste as the causes of man's separation from "Beauty," "Nature," and "Life" (Poe, 2009: 272). The realm of the poetic sentiment is transformed from poetry to prose through the ratiocinative tale – the prose equivalent of the poem:

> if indeed, there be any one circle of thought distinctly and palpably marked out from amid the jarring and tumultuous chaos of human intelligence, it is that evergreen and radiant Paradise which the true poet knows, and knows alone, as the limited realm of his authority – as the circumscribed Eden of his dreams. But a definition is a thing of words – a conception of ideas. And thus while we readily believe that Poesy, the term, it will be troublesome, if not impossible to define – still, with its image vividly existing in the world, we apprehend no difficulty in so describing Poesy, the Sentiment, as to imbue even the most obtuse intellect with a

comprehension of it sufficiently distinct for all the purposes of practical analysis. (Poe, Review of *The Culprit Fay* and *Alnwick Castle*, from *Southern Literary Messenger*, April 1836)

Poe constantly tries to achieve the romantic idealism's ultimate triumph: for example, the Ushers may succeed in idealizing their reality altogether through the collapse of the mansion; the narrator of "Ligeia" tries to redraw reality in the form of Rowena's body to shelter the undying "idea" of Ligeia herself:

> My memory flew back, (oh, with what intensity of regret!) to Ligeia, the beloved, the august, the beautiful, the entombed. I revelled in recollections of her purity, of her wisdom, of her lofty, her ethereal nature, of her passionate, her idolatrous love. Now, then, did my spirit fully and freely burn with more than all the fires of her own. In the excitement of my opium dreams (for I was habitually fettered in the shackles of the drug) I would call aloud upon her name, during the silence of the night, or among the sheltered recesses of the glens by day, as if, through the wild eagerness, the solemn passion, the consuming ardor of my longing for the departed, I could restore her to the pathway she had abandoned – ah, could it be forever? – upon the earth. (Poe, 2001: 15)

This leads to the idea that "there may be an exact correlation between the progress of melancholia through isolation and intellectualism, to monomaniacal obsession with a single fear, to self-destruction as a result of that obsession, and the progress of romantic idealism through reclusion and cultivation of the mind's – powers, to the imaginative struggle to idealize the real, to the absolute dissolution of the real in order to achieve complete union with ideality." (Butler, 1976: 1-12)

Poe's definition of art compared with N.P. Willis' explanation on how imagination works makes clear his believes on the subject of reality and imagination. He thinks that an artist should rely on his/her inborn senses and extract meaning through 'the veil of the soul' or, on romantic terms, through the process that brings them into absolute unity with the realm of pure mind:

> Art:
> Were I called upon to define, *very* briefly the term 'Art,' I should call it 'the reproduction of what the Senses perceive in Nature through the veil of the soul.' The mere imitation, however accurate, of what *is* in Nature, entitles no man to the sacred name of 'Artist.' Denner was no artist. The grapes of Zeuxis were *in*artistic – unless in a bird's eye view; and not even

the curtain of Parrhasius could conceal his deficiency in point of genius. I have mentioned 'the *veil* of the soul.' Something of the kind appears indispensable in Art. We can, at any time, double the true beauty of an actual landscape by half closing our eyes as we look at it. The naked Senses sometimes see too little – but then *always* they see too much. (Sherwin, 1924: 115-116)

Imagination:
The *pure Imagination* chooses, from *either Beauty or Deformity*, only the most combinable things hitherto uncombined; the compound, as a general rule, partaking in character of beauty or sublimity in the ratio of the respective beauty or sublimity of the things combined; the compound, as a general rule, partaking (in character) of sublimity or beauty, in the ratio of the respective sublimity or beauty of the things combined; which are themselves still to be considered as atomic – that is to say, as previous combinations. But, as often analogously happens in physical chemistry, so not unfrequently does it occur in this chemistry of the intellect… Thus, the range of Imagination is unlimited. Its materials extend throughout the Universe. Even out of deformities it fabricates that *Beauty* which is at once its sole object and its inevitable test. But, in general, the richness or force of the matters combined; the facility of discovering combinable novelties worth combining; and especially the absolute 'chemical combination' and proportion of the completed mass – as the particulars to be regarded in our estimate of Imagination. It is this thorough harmony of an imaginative work which so often causes it to be under-valued by the undiscriminating, through the character of *obviousness* which is superinduced. We are apt to find ourselves asking "*why is it* that these combinations have never been imagined before?" (Sherwin, 1924: 116)

Poe was not a philosopher and he even disputed metaphysics, especially Transcendentalism, but this does not mean that he did not write passages with a decided transcendental flavour. Even if in his early career he opposed Wordsworth's metaphysical nature of poetry, his mature opinion differs: "We do not hesitate to say that a man highly endowed with the powers of Causality – this is to say, a man of metaphysical acumen – will, even with a very deficient share of Ideality, compose a finer poem (if we test it, as we should, by its measure of exciting the Poetic Sentiment) than one who, without such metaphysical acumen, shall be gifted, in the most extraordinary degree, with the faculty of Ideality." (Poe, 1998: 15)

Paralleling the metaphysics of John Donne and Abraham Cowley with that of Coleridge and Wordsworth, Poe states: "With the two former ethics were the end – with the two latter the means. The poet of the "Creation" wished highly artificial verse, to inculcate what he suppose to be

moral truth – the poet of the "Ancient Mariner" to infuse the Poetic Sentiment through channels suggested by analysis." (Poe, 2009: 111)

The sense with which Poe uses the word *metaphysics* here is that of an analytical and logical process, the very process by which he wrote "The Raven." Still, he had a trace of the New England philosophy that he so much disliked, through the conception of imaginative power that he took from Coleridge:

> That the imagination has not been unjustly ranked as supreme among the mental faculties, appears from the intense consciousness, on the part of the imaginative man, that the faculty in question brings his soul often to a glimpse of things supernal and eternal – to the very verge of the *great secrets.* There are moments, indeed, in which he perceives the faint perfumes, and hears the melodies of a happier world. Some of the most profound knowledge – perhaps all *very* profound knowledge – has originated from a highly stimulated imagination. Great intellects *guess* well. The laws of Kepler were, professedly, *guesses*. (Poe, 1980: 39)

According to Poe, the poet uses two complementary faculties: the institution of imaginative faculty that enables him to recognize the latent beauty found in nature as it unifies with the beauty inherent in his own soul, and the logical/metaphysical faculty, through which he can objectively render the beauty which he feels, and so to transfer to others the sentiment akin to his own soul. Thus the poet arrives at the final understanding of truth as a necessary correlative of poetry:

> And, in fact, the sense of the symmetrical is an instinct which may be depended upon with an almost blindfold reliance. It is in the poetical essence of the Universe – *of the Universe* which, in the supremeness of its symmetry, is but the most sublime of poems. Now symmetry and consistency are convertible terms: – thus Poetry and Truth are one. A thing is consistent in the ratio of its truth – true in the ratio of its consistency. *A perfect consistency, I repeat, can be nothing but an absolute truth*. We may take for granted, then, that man cannot long or widely err, if he suffer himself to be guided by his poetical, which I have maintained to be his truthful, in being his symmetrical, instinct. (Poe, 2002: 13)

Poe was undoubtedly a Romantic through formation and the most important thing that helped him in his journey through the universe of the One and of the Many is precisely his strong belief in *reason* and in *the power of reasoning* that facilitates man's ability of knowing the truth. According to Poe's theory, the human capacity of intuition and intellection

as well as the author's interpretation of reason, logic and science are directly connected with the interpretation of artistic elements, as the very intuitive process has aesthetic valences. The easiness with which Poe can apply the intuitive process characterising both the – apparent distinct – domains of science and art, demonstrates precisely the applicability of his discovery consisting in the exploration of the meaning of unity that can prove to be useful either for *truth* or for *beauty*.

In Poe's own projection of the "rational theory of art," which he was able to construct without falling into too much arid intellectualism, the place of the assertion that the intuitive powers can detect the consistency in science is taken by the exact opposite idea that intuition helps with the identification of art's symmetry.

Even if the Poesque theory echoes the Aristotelian thought, it is mainly of Schlegelian origin, as Poe had the German philosopher as main influence for his theory of unity that stands at the base of his literary creation: a poet creates unique poetry much in the same way that God created the universe – as a unique entity. Poe goes on even further, stating that this way of thinking is applicable to every successful work of art or scientific theory with a strong base.

Another governing image in Poe is the doubling and splitting of body and shadow. The act of doubling, of reflection – reminding of the Narcissus myth – could be interpreted as distorting and subverting reality rather than reflecting it iconically:

> The attempt to divide a mutually constitutive opposition and completely separate the opposing terms from each other always turns into a splitting/doubling, as if one tried to separate the north and south poles of a bar magnet by sawing the bar in half, only to find that instead of separating the poles one had produced two new bar magnets, each with its own north and south poles. Or to phrase it another way, the splitting of a mutually constitutive opposition is like the dividing of an amoeba: halving is doubling. ... It is this simultaneous internal splitting/external doubling that renders the notion of a limit problematic in a mutually constitutive opposition. For example, in the opposition between body and shadow, there is an essential (that is, original) uncertainty as to whether the dividing line between the two should be interpreted as an internal or an external limit, whether the line should be read metonymically (as the internal boundary between two halves of a whole – splitting) or metaphorically (as the external boundary between two similar wholes – doubling). (Irwin, 1983: 156)

The original literary method of replacing disorder with logic and of rationlizing the impossible set by the "father of the macabre," as well as his aesthetic influences have been the subject of literary investigation for a long time. Without a shadow of a doubt Poe is much more than the skilled craftsman of grotesque tales and romantic fantasies. "No poet has been as highly acclaimed and, at the same time, as violently disclaimed as Poe," (Felman, 1989: 27) Shoshana Felman remarks when referring to the obsessively concentrated nature of Poe's writing and antithetic style. His gothic, ratiocinative and cryptic works clearly do not fit into the mythic models on which classic American literature was based. It is precisely Poe's syncopated connection to American culture that gives his creation the power of improving tradition setting the bases, according to Stanley Cavell, to American scepticism through the first-person narrations that question the suppositions of analytical philosophy (conceptual clarity and an emphasis on argument, achieved through modern formal logic and analysis of language).

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Rezumat: *Idealism şi realitate în opera vizionară a lui Edgar Allan Poe reprezintă idealismul platonic al gândirii lui Edgar Allan Poe, încărcat cu imagini freudiene şi cu priviri între-deschise asupra lumii – ideea centrală a esteticii şi epistemiologiei lui Poe. Opoziţia este redată de francheţea raţionalităţii minte/ştiinţă şi de sinuozitatea senzualităţii imagitaţiei/poeziei prin folosirea forţei scriiturii imaginative pentru a fractura capacitatea minţii de a emite judecăţi asupra realităţii. Metoda lui Poe de a atrage atenţia cititorului, prin tehnici variate (introducerea unui mister dezlegat parţial, apariţia unei faţete incomplet expuse a unui spaţiu care nu se absconde niciodată integral) construieşte stări mentale şi fizice care pun sub semnul întrebării orice limitare perceptuală şi dezvoltă noi orizonturi imaginative.*

THE VICTORIAN AGE – AN AGE OF DOUBT

Valentina STÎNGÃ[1]

Abstract: : *In the history of English culture and civilization, the Victorian Era is conventionally described as a period of prosperity, progress and reform. In spite of all the positive features of this particular cultural paradigm, remark should be made that it simultaneously favoured the emergence of* doubt *as the fundamental lens of filtering reality. Starting from Darwin's Theory of Evolution, which challenges the conventional way of religious thinking, rejecting the explanation that the human being was created by a higher power, the idea had devastating consequences on the consciousness of most Victorians. The present paper is intended to comment on the Victorian Age from the viewpoint of its relation to doubt. The paper also focuses on the particular aspects of doubt in A. Tennyson's poetry (In Memoriam).*

Keywords: *doubt, natural selection, variation, survival of the fittest.*

On the Victorian Era

Unique for its solidity of purpose and far-reaching achievements, the nineteenth century marked the climax of Great Britain's socio-political, economic and cultural development. This particular era in the history of the nation bears the conventional denomination of 'Victorian Age/Victorian Era', thus establishing a direct connection between the significant developments of the day and a distinct paradigm in the history of Great Britain, i.e. a period revolving around the political career of Queen Victoria (1837-1901). In the history of English culture and civilization, the Victorian Age was a long period of peace generally associated with such words as stability, prosperity, progress, reform and Imperialism, during which the citizens' grounds for satisfaction were rooted in the abundant evidence of great economic development and technical progress of the nation. It was a time of major changes and breakthroughs in almost every sphere of human existence − from advances in scientific, medical and technological knowledge (such as increased specialisation and developments in surgery, anaesthetics and antiseptics, the construction of a solid national railway

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network) to significant changes in population growth and shifts in people's mentalities. It was a long period of prosperity for the British people, since the profits gained from the overseas British Empire, as well as from major industrial improvements at home, allowed the development of a large, educated middle class.

Yet, while from many points of view the Victorian Age is identified as England's pinnacle of power and prestige (cf. Galea 2), the other side of the coin was represented by the widespread poverty, miserable slums and poor working conditions that existed in many industries of Victorian England. Moreover, as time passed by, the rapid transformation deeply affected the country's state of mind: an era that had begun with a confidence and optimism that resulted in economic development and prosperity eventually gave in to uncertainty and doubt arising from "vast social and intellectual change" (Moran 2). In this sense, the Victorian era was the first great "Age of Doubt" and a critical moment in the history of Western ideas; indeed, the *Oxford Companion to Victorian Thought* defines doubt as "quintessentially Victorian" (181): more profoundly than any generation before them, the Victorians came to consider *doubt* as inseparable from belief, thought, and debate.

Overall, the Victorian Era was seen as one of the high moments in the practice of English Christianity, but, in parallel, many people were starting to voice a variety of doubts about the inspiration of the Bible and about points of Christian doctrine which had been cherished for centuries. These doubts generally stemmed from several sources, among which the discoveries in Science hold pre-eminence – it was the ability of science to make human beings question the traditional explanation of world origins that was a propagating factor of doubt in the Victorian Era.

Doubt and Science in Victorianism – Charles Robert Darwin's Theory of Evolution (1809-1882)

The development of science leads, quite naturally, to a comprehensive awareness of reality by the individual who sees himself/herself caught in between two perspectives on existence: on the one hand, life as conceived and governed by God, by an all-powerful divinity who directs human life; at the opposite end, life as a perpetual and restless chain of scientific discoveries which attest to man's perfectibility and possibility of ruling the universe.

The Victorian age marks a crucial moment in the Western individual's transition from one extreme to another – it marks the first moment of doubt in the history of Western mentalities and, traditionally,

there is one source this doubting predisposition stems from, i.e. Charles Robert Darwin (1809-1882). Indeed, Darwin is generally credited with provoking doubt in the minds of Victorian Christians as the research he carried out began to make people question the essential tenet of Christianity.

Any account of Charles Darwin's life, as succinct as it may be, should start with the observation that he lived in a period "when scientific achievement was valued, and the fruits of scientific labours were rewarded at every level of society" (Greenberger, 5). Darwin was born in a wealthy Shropshire gentry family in the small market town of Shrewsbury. His father, Robert Darwin (1766-1848), was a successful physician and son of the famous poet, Erasmus Darwin. (Erasmus Darwin (1731-1802) was an English natural philosopher, physiologist, inventor and poet. He is noted in the history of ideas for his early statement of evolution and the relatedness of all forms of life). His mother, Susannah Wedgwood (1765-1817), daughter of the founder of Wedgwood pottery, died when he was only eight years old. Watched over by his elder sisters and by the maidservants, Darwin enjoyed the privilege of growing up amidst wealth, comfort and country sports. In 1825, he went to Edinburgh University with his brother Erasmus to study medicine with a view to becoming a physician. Though the university years marked the emergence of his preoccupation with the theory of evolution, (Evolution is "the belief that organisms change over time – they adapt to and survive in their environments" – Greenberger 8) young Darwin disliked the overall study of medicine and could not bear the sight of blood; this was why his father proposed entering the church as a respectable alternative. The advantage to becoming a country parson, as Darwin conceived it, would be the freedom to continue his research in natural history.

In 1828 Darwin matriculated at Christ's College, Cambridge; during the time he spent there, he was never considered a model student, but the interesting part is that he became a passionate amateur naturalist and a devoted follower of a professor of botany, John Stevens Henslow (1796-1861), out of whose friendship Darwin learned a great deal about the actual practice of natural science. After passing his final exams in 1831, Darwin accepted the offer of travelling on a survey ship, HMS *Beagle*, as a "scientific person." During the five years he spent aboard the ship, he dedicated his time to a careful investigation of the geology and zoology of the lands he visited, especially South America, the Galapagos Islands, and the Pacific oceanic islands. The activities he performed during this time varied greatly from observing specimens, collecting organisms of all sorts to unearthing fossil creatures in South America. Several years after this voyage, Darwin used the material collected to find the answers to a series of

essential questions he had been asking himself. Thus, he began to speculate on how new species could arise and attempted to explain how living forms changed over time. In doing this, he was greatly helped by his closeness to the evolutionary speculations proposed earlier by his grandfather Erasmus Darwin and by the great French zoologist Jean-Baptiste Lamarck. (The French naturalist Jean-Baptiste Pierre Antoine de Monet, Chevalier de Lamarck (1744-1829) was an early promoter of the theory according to which evolution occurred in accordance with natural laws)

Darwin had two things to contribute to the earlier researches: a significant amount of observations on adaptation and, more importantly, a theory that could explain how new adaptations emerged without the intervention of a divine Creator. The observations were acquired during his experience on the *Beagle*, whilst the theory was his own creation. The result of his research and concomitantly its climax was *On the Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection, or the Preservation of Favoured Races in the Struggle for Life* (1859). The book as a whole can be easily interpreted as an extended argument for the belief that the present species were not created by a superior force, but rather evolved from other, past species. He solved the problem of evolution by pointing to a mechanism that depended on nothing but *variation* and *chance*: *natural selection*. He stated that "all species of organisms arise and develop through the natural selection of small, inherited variations that increase the individual's ability to compete, survive, and reproduce." This brought about the term 'survival of the fittest' or predominance by one species over another: the organisms that display superior fitness to the environment are more likely to survive and therefore can pass on their adaptive characteristics to the next generation. In simple terms, Darwin started from the hypothesis that many more individuals were born than the environment could support, which meant that some of them had to die – undoubtedly, those who had to die were the least well-adapted to their living environment. Given that there is variation in the population, and that variation is heritable (meaning that it can be passed from one generation to the next), it was clear that the most useful adaptations would be preserved in time. If enough of those adaptations were accumulated, a new species could arise.

Overall, Darwin's book challenged the conventional way of religious thinking by stating that that the human being actually evolved from an inferior species rather than having been created by a higher power. The idea had devastating consequences on the consciousness of most Victorians, who found themselves forced to reconsider their outlook on life and reanalyse their former belief in the existence of an all-powerful divinity. Furthermore,

the theory sparked dramatic debate between the old and the new way of thinking.

Doubt in Victorian Literature – Alfred, Lord Tennyson

As was natural, the major shift in scientific mentalities started to conquer other sectors of English civilisation as well. Men of letters joined scientists in making *doubt* the keyword of the day and as a consequence, a major part of the literature written during the Victorian Age directly reflected the writers' preoccupation with and involvement in the ideatically revolutionary climate.

Perhaps the best embodiment of the doubting tendency in Victorian literature was Alfred, Lord Tennyson, Poet Laureate, a continuator of the romantic tradition, whose literary heritage reveals an individual engaged in a dramatic quest for identity and for the meaning of existence in the new conditions of the 19th century. The association with the philosophy of the doubt seems to have derived from *In Memoriam* (1850), a long elegiac poem written by Tennyson as a consequence of an emotionally consuming experience, i.e. after the early and unexpected death of his close friend, Arthur Henry Hallam, in 1833. The poet's immense suffering and intense spiritual attachment to the subject matter of *In Memoriam* is best reflected in the long period he needed to bring this particular literary project to an end – it is noted in the specialized literature that Tennyson spent 17 years writing and rewriting the elegy.

This long elegiac poem is made up of 131 poetic fragments or sections that differ in theme, tone, and presentation, but are all unified by the poetic persona's grief, doubt, and search for faith. They express the spiritual growth of the artist, his feelings and meditations, having the quality of a diary – the concentrated diary of a human being confessing his inner thoughts and feelings. As time went on, the initial despair experienced immediately after his friend's death is replaced with an acceptance of it. The pattern followed by the poet is from death to life, from dark to light. The antithesis between light and darkness expresses the contrast between life and death, denial and hope. The ideas that the poet wants to express are so deep that the poet seems to question the ability of the poetic work to express them:

> I sometimes hold it half a sin
> To put in words the grief I feel
> For words like nature half reveal
> And half conceal the Soul within.

There are two themes that virtually govern and direct the meaning of the poem: *death* (mainly physical but also spiritual) and *doubt* (conceived as *questioning*/*loss* of religious faith). The first of them is openly announced by the poet from the very beginning, when he states:

> Forgive my grief for one removed,
> Thy creature, whom I found so fair.
> I trust he lives in thee, and there
> I find him worthier to be loved.

In Canto 54, Tennyson attempts to reconcile his suffering with the hope that an eternal paradise with God will come after death:

> Oh yet we trust that somehow good
> Will be the final goal of ill,
> To pangs of nature, sins of will,
> Defects of doubt, and taints of blood;

However, the emotional loss experienced and the intensity of the pain could quite easily overshadow this immaterial hope of religious intervention after death; this is why the author ends up questioning both his belief and his position in the world:

> Behold, we know not anything;
> I can but trust that good shall fall
> At last – far off – at last, to all,
> And every winter change to spring.

> So runs my dream: but what am I?
> An infant crying in the night:
> An infant crying for the light:
> And with no language but a cry.

In the two stanzas quoted above Tennyson suggests that even if the hopes of the human beings, who "*know not anything*," eventually come to be fulfilled, they will be "far off." Furthermore, faith is just a dream and the repeated metaphor of an *infant's cry* seems to highlight the futility of the human condition. And this paves the way to the second major theme of the poem, i.e. doubt, which is to be revealed to the reader only after a very careful analysis of the text. Quite surprisingly, the opening stanza of the poem seems to disclose Tennyson's strong belief in God as it starts with a

direct invocation of Christ: *Strong Son of God, immortal Love*; Yet, the prologue goes on to reflect the *doubt* that had begun to take hold of the poet's mind:

> Whom we, that have not seen thy face,
> By faith, and faith alone, embrace,
> Believing where we cannot prove.

Or:

> We have but faith: we cannot know;
> For knowledge is of things we see
> And yet we trust it comes from thee,
> A beam in darkness: let it grow.

Conceived by others as "Devil-born", doubt seems to be a guarantor of meaning in Tennyson's system of thought and a key to a proper decoding of existence:

> Perplext in faith, but pure in deeds,
> At last he beat his music out.
> There lives more faith in honest doubt,
> Believe me, than in half the creeds.

Doubt emerges as a consequence of death; though previously believing in God's existence, even if there was no actual possibility of proving it, Tennyson's perspective on life shifts dramatically the moment he is forced to ascertain his friend's death and start asking himself questions as to whether they would meet again. Death in *In Memoriam* "keeps the key to all the creeds" and launches an even greater philosophical meditation: the poet becomes aware of the emotional reality of loss and concomitantly he finds himself forced to consider the hypothesis that not only he himself, but also the entire human species could die out:

> Our little systems have their day;
> They have their day and cease to be:
> They are but broken lights of thee,
> And thou, O Lord, art more than they.

This takes us to a new interpretation of the theme of doubt as "profoundly connected in the poem to the new evolutionary explanation of the universe that was emerging in the 1840's and 1850's. This did not find

its full expression until the publication of Darwin's *On the Origin of Species* in 1859, but it was 'in the air' around Tennyson at Cambridge and elsewhere much earlier than that." In this sense, *In Memoriam* "offered the most profound integration of the evolutionary narrative into everyday experience" (Secord 530). As a result, the poem contains geological images to create a framework in which nothing is permanent and every object or moment is merely a link in an evolutionary chain:

> 'So careful of the type?' but no.
> From scarped cliff and quarried stone
> She cries, 'A thousand types are gone:
> I care for nothing, all shall go.'

The above-quoted lines make explicit reference to a geological past through the phrase '*A thousand types are gone*'; when he refers to a '*type*', Tennyson is undoubtedly referring to an *evolutionary phase* or to a *biological species*. The poet's opinion is further explained: events in life are no more significant to an impersonal 'Nature' than any other natural process: *all shall go*. The poem is also known for enshrining one of Tennyson's famous characterisations of nature as "*red in tooth and claw*" – a structure that describes the ruthlessness of the way in which Nature daily dispenses of individuals and, implicitly, of species. Therefore, the theory of evolution was definitely present in Tennyson's mind when he composed his elegy, even if the poem was published before Charles Darwin's theory became public in 1859.

All the above-mentioned observations lead to the well-founded conclusion that there is no other poet who reflects more completely in his works the questions that were affecting the minds of the Victorian individual than Alfred Tennyson, who was particularly interested in contemporary scientific theories and incorporated numerous references to them, particularly to geology, within his poetry.

Conclusion

Through its accented focus on scientific discoveries of all types, the Victorian Age succeeded in turning doubt from a *religious sin* into an *ethical necessity*. The emergence of doubt was also reflected in the literature of the age, as demonstrated in the present paper.

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Rezumat: *În istoria culturii şi civilizaţiei Angliei, epoca Victoriană este descrisă, în mod convenţional, drept o perioadă de prosperitate, progres şi reformă. În ciuda trăsăturilor pozitive ale acestei paradigme culturale, specifice, trebuie remarcat faptul că, în acelaşi timp, este favorizată apariţia îndoielii drept lentilă fundamentală a filtrării realităţii. Pornind de la Teoria Evoluţiei, a lui Darwin, care pune sub semnul întrebării modul convenţional al gândirii religioase, respingând explicaţia că fiinţa umană a fost creată de către o instanţă divină, ideea a avut efecte devastatoare asupra conştiinţei victorienilor. Lucrarea de faţă îşi propune să analizeze Epoca Victoriană din perspetiva relaţiei sale cu îndoiala.*

NEVER DOUBT THE ARTIST. Self-PORTRAITURE YESTERYEAR AND TODAY

Aloisia ŞOROP[1]

Abstract: *Self-portraiture has confronted artists with a multitude of challenges, because the painted one and the painter are the same person. Though they should perforce give a true-to-life representation of the sitter, self-portraits have always revealed the difficulties of the negotiation between the artist's real self and his narcissistic projection. The paper explores some cases in the history of this artistic vacillation by offering brief descriptions of some major self-portraits, such as those belonging to Albrecht Dürer, Rembradt van Rijn, Johannes Gumpp, William Hogarth or Francis Bacon. The intention was to prove that self-portraiture was considered as the perfect opportunity for painters to explore their own artistic identity.*

Keywords: *pictorial metaphor, identity, painter-subject-object, truth.*

Skepticism in the artistic domain is so elusive and equivocal a method that it can never pass for a serious philosophical approach in the process of aesthetic evaluation. Artistic reality unfolds its fabulously creased fabric far beyond people's perception of physical reality and brings the imagination into play in such a way as it allows for fresh negotiations between art's fruits and the consumers' experience of them.

In his *Biographia Literaria* (1817) Samuel Taylor Coleridge explained that his intentions in *Lyrical Ballads,* his and Wordsworth's joint publication, was 'to transfer from our inward nature a human interest and a semblance of truth sufficient to procure for these shadows of imagination that *willing suspension of disbelief* for the moment, which constitutes poetic faith.'(emphasis added) (Coleridge, 1817). By coining a new phase in critical assessment, i.e.*'willing suspension of disbelief'*, he was actually invoking his readers' capacity to forget about their empirical knowledge of the world and feign a candour that would enable them to aesthetically comprehend, internalize and react to his use of the preternatural in his poems. Disbelief and Cartesian doubt would thus be marginalized, if not

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entirely banned, as pernicious to the encounter between poetry, in this case, and its public.

By extension, one can claim that artistic reality dwells in its own kingdom, plays its own game by its own rules and has its own audience. If, by any chance, it crosses paths with physical reality in any way other than drawing inspiration from it, it is the art consumers' task to tell the fool from the wise, or accept and relish both as part of their privilege of being humans.

But the crooked ways of artistic perception and evaluation prompt me to digress from what I have hitherto tried to touch upon as one of art's prerogatives, that is its quasi independence from physical reality, as I will go on to discuss portraiture and its more egocentric variant, self-portraiture, the two painting genres that are generally assessed in terms of their likeness to the real object of their representation.

Tailoring images to mimic reality plays a major part in painting a successful portrait, but the pictorial context is sometimes more poignant than mere resemblance. Taking into consideration that portraits have almost always been commissioned and substantially paid for, they are actual *sites of stature construction* for their commissioners. They will perforce immortalize not only the sitters' physical traits but also their social status, wealth, trade, hobbies and talents. In order to correctly decode the array of symbols that the painters bring onto the canvas one must mentally transform the portrait into a 'speech act'. Portraits speak more eloquently than sitters and, occasionally, their discourse is more suggestive and elaborate than any made out of plain words. The details in a portrait work in much the same way as figurative language and each will articulate particular stories which, if pieced together, produce a coherent and meaningful narrative of the sitter.

Portraits, undoubtedly, have been painted to serve several purposes, the commissioners' differing from the artists'. The process of portrait painting starts with the commissioners' proclaimed aim of having an oeuvre painted that will operate with visual artifacts to 'freeze' their image into the future, to have it 'Havishammed' forever, assuming a single posture, wearing one set of clothes, against a unique backdrop, more often than not creating an idealized version of themselves. But the final stages of the painting process will pertain to the painters' expectations, which are neither few nor insignificant. The painters' ambition, like the writers', is to show and not to tell, in a pictorial manner and using a painter's means. They strive to thoroughly examine the sitters' hidden and intricate nature, to explore their selves and bring to the surface their diverse humours, to capture people's briskness, melancholy, weaknesses and strengths, past and present. To put it in a nutshell, they endeavour to reach that vague and

elusive territory of man's identity and chart it on the canvas in anticipation of having their skills stand the test of time.

But the real champion of portraiture is the self-portrait, the instance when the painter and the painted one are the same person, a situation which should of necessity solve issues of conflict and misinterpretation on either side: the artists know only too well who they are and how they are to convey it onto the canvas in a most rewarding manner aesthetically speaking. The question rises then, is introspection more difficult to practise than simple conjecture about other people's selves? The painter-subject-object stance can be highly challenging from this vantage point, because it brings to the fore the artists' ultimate ambition: to provide the visual image their posterity will know them by and which will, inevitably, be further scrutinized for their souls and craft to be finally analyzed and catalogued.

The real problem with self-portraits lies with two conjunctive issues: an unavoidable *narcissistic stand* on the part of the artist which leads to his/her *laciniate sincerity* as far as resemblance is concerned. The problem is how much and to what extent is the artist willing to reveal his/her personality on the canvas and in what ways self-concealment works to the artist's own benefit. Mention must be made from the very beginning that this is not the case with all self-portraits. But artists are special beings, who indulge in their peculiarities more readily than us, common people. Their identity is subject to (artistic) change in much the same way as the raw material they work upon. They continuously create and recreate their identity, as if they had multiple egos. Their over-sensitive nature, their powerful imagination and other inordinate artistic capacities increase their self-esteem to the point that their egos get inflated and they tend to represent themselves very different from their true selves/appearance/nature, if they ever come to know their real selves. They actually produce engaging fictitious selves with the same easiness and talent they paint other subjects and they are tempted to present their public with chameleonic, often highly enriched, images of their identity.

I would take the liberty of calling this category of self-portraits *pictorial metaphors* bearing in mind the terms David Punter used to define metaphor based on figurative language and similarity but retaining, at the same time, the 'irreconcilable' character of the terms a metaphor consists of (Punter, 2007:9). With particularly visionary painters self-portraits rank as metaphors of their real selves because they reproduce images of their authors and thus fall into the category of similarity that a metaphor implies. Given their artists' outstanding talent and personality, these self-portraits are not paintings of their real selves, but representations of their idea about

themselves, and thus the second requirement of a metaphor, dissimilarity *in situ*, is met.

The history of self-portraits is rather long, though in ancient times artists were punished if they dared to immortalize their figures in stone. Starting with the 15th century, though, painters grew more and more fascinated with the idea of having their image displayed on canvas or the wall. They sometimes mimed anonymity and inserted self-portraits in motley groups of characters, as is the case of Raphael (in *The School of Athens*) and Michelagelo (in *The Last Judgment*).

One of Albrecht Dürer's (1471-1528) famous self-portraits, the one he painted in 1500, presents him wearing long, curled hair, a Jesus-like image, basking in full light, keeping his fur-lined coat with his right hand fingers in a gesture that reminds the gesture of blessing. Far from being blasphemous, Dürer conceives himself to be in close proximity to God owing to his creative powers.

A much more prolific artist who lived half a century later, Rembrandt van Rijn (1606-1669) was so obsessed with his own image that he kept painting self-portraits throughout his life. He never tired of showing his changing fortune and recording his aging process, producing thus what was called *a visual diary*. Every detail is important in his portraits from his posture to his caps, from his gaze to his wrinkles. At the end of his life he could boast of having completed seventy-nine self-portraits: forty paintings, thirty-two etchings and seven drawings.

The use of a mirror, instrumental in discovering the contour and details of one's face, resulted in a special category of self-portraits: those depicting the actual moment the artist is working on his canvas. The triple portrait painted by Johannes Gumpp (1646) is an interesting example because the artist is presented engrossed in his work, with his back turned on the beholder. He is framed by two reflections of his face, at his left there is the mirror in which he captures the likeness of his face that we also partake of, at his right, gazing directly at the beholder, is his portrait under construction, with a shadow of a smile on his lips. In his triple hypostasis the artist both connects and resists communication with the beholder. The painting highlights his total devotion to this trade and his remarkable pictorial achievement in terms of resemblance. Its subtext reveals his pride of being what he is, thrice.

On the other hand, Gump's choice of self-revealing is entirely Platonic and definitely significant as a pictorial metaphor (discussed above), as it openly directs the beholder to a second degree type of reception based on our assumption that neither the mirror nor the portrait present counterfeited images. We only see reflections of his face in a work that

already is a reflection of the artist's true image: a *mise en abyme* that deepens the mystery of self-revelation and explores new forms of artistic experience.

In England, the British-born artist who imposed a national style and tradition in painting was William Hogarth (1697–1764), also revered for his moralizing series of engravings and paintings (*A Harlot's Progress*, *A Rake's Progress*, *Marriage à-la-mode*), as well as for his *Analysis of Beauty*, a treatise on art in which he praised 'the serpentine line' as being the only one that creates genuine beauty. An accomplished satirist in the age of parody, Hogarth painted a self-portrait entitled *Painter and his Pug* in 1745 in which his self-portrait is set on a pile of books (Shakespeare, Milton and Swift) and his loyal but bored looking pug dog stands in front of the portrait. He reified his image as an art object heavily relying on literature under the lush folds of a rich curtain. A palette is laid just in line with the dog and it reads 'The line of BEAUTY and GRACE', the last two words becoming evident after the paint that had covered them wore out.

The self-portrait is a telling proof of Hogarth's satirical intentions and mocking spirit: he, a creator, was transferred, and implicitly, immobilized, onto the canvas as the effigy of his trade (he is wearing his working attire) while his dog, a bit dull but real, keeps close to the effigy unsure about the whole business of portrait-painting and the utility of art in general. Ironically, his facial traits resemble the dog's. The painting could well have been called *Pug and His Master* because the dog seems to be the protagonist of the painting and the picture of the painter, like Dorian Gray's, stands there to remind us of the mutability of life and the eternity of art.

Even though the laws of painting and artistic reception have changed over the centuries, self-portraits have remained basically stagnant in scope, in the sense that the artist has been working under the same pressure caused by his/her reiterated attempts of self-discovery and strong drives of self-concealment. The 20th century taste for introspection successfully steered by psychoanalysis has prompted the artists to shift their focus from likeness and appearance to tales of the psyche. Resemblance has remained rather vague on their list of priorities and painted self-portraits have receded leaving room to technologically modern *selfies*. Though the tradition of issuing images of oneself has turned into an affordable craze and image manipulation has reached a peak over the last few years, artists are still interested in the meanings a self-image can convey and by what standards it can be judged artistic.

Francis Bacon (1909-1992) was a nonconformist figurative Irish painter who built his fame on painting self-portraits and portraits of friends that are literally contorted, distorted, de-fleshed and un-boned images of

faces which, paradoxically, owing to his genius, resemble their sources of inspiration. Bacon confessed in an interview that painting portraits was a matter of willed artistic mishmash and negligence that turned out well. '…the other day I painted a head of somebody, and what made the sockets of the eyes, the nose, the mouth were, when you analyzed them, just forms which had nothing to do with eyes, nose or mouth; but the paint moving from one contour into another made a likeness of this person I was trying to paint' (David Sylvester, 2007) I would add that neither randomness of form nor moisture of paint would produce the astonishing likeness that his (self) portraits reveal unless a formidable artistic intuition and a great caricaturist spirit would put them into place.

In his introduction to *Francis Bacon. Portraits and Self-Portraits* Milan Kundera comments on the manner Edmund Husserl's theory on how variations help in tracing the essence of a phenomenon applies to Bacon's series of (self) portraits. He discusses how the portraits' diversity is actually based on a shared core which he calls 'the self of a face' (Kundera, 1996:11). Moreover, though highly disjunctive among themselves and totally estranged from the reality they depict, Bacon's portraits always contain signs of the 'organic' structure of the human face (Kundera 11). They consistently convey the sense of flesh, bone and blood vessels, in spite of the black holes that pierce faces like horrible open mouths shouting silent cries, despite the blue patches and thick dark lines that tear faces in terror and disruption.

Bacon painted over forty-three self-portraits, preferring, as he confessed, to look at photos of himself rather than in the mirror. His (own) faces are undone, fractured, asymmetric, with missing parts suggesting a temporary suspension of identity. Moreover, the dark background evoking hostile environment invades and erodes parts of his figures leaving them defaced, sometimes separating the head from the neck and the neck from the body, though, suggestively, the figure in the portrait is fashionably clad.

Bacon's self-portraits are actually in consonance with the fissured post-modernist world that he lived in. Antithesis and absence, anarchy and, probably, a sense of exhaustion informed Bacon's outlook of the world and of himself, though he denied having any. His portraits frighten beholders as he, himself, was a frightened man; they further question the essence of humanity and its future.

Bacon's self-portraits differ from the previously discussed examples. They are violent though silent cries of self-dissipation in a deaf and blind world-desert, they do not voice his anxieties as a single individual, they express what happened to the earth, to men, to human relationships, to our sense of beauty.

The brief description of some major self-portraits that I have undertaken in this paper has hopefully served its purpose. I intended to demonstrate that self-portraiture has been the perfect opportunity for painters to explore their selves and find out the deep, shallow or empty space inside. Whether they translated their discoveries onto the canvas or continued their archaeology of self, their pictorial discourse ultimately revealed the multiple facets of our world, the changing moods of humanity.

Artists have been free to lie, to tell the truth, to imagine and juxtapose, to be the heralds of masses or voice their singular yearnings. In poetry, music or painting, they have provided us with a world differently structured, with distinct perspectives and inordinate epiphanies. Even when they speak about themselves, they do it 'against the idea of the unity of the ego' (Taylor, 1989: 478) favoring what is idiosyncratic and general, at the same time. They are never to be doubted because the truth they speak is universal.

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Rezumat: *Autoportretul le-a prilejuit artiștilor nenumărate provocări, deoarece modelul și pictorul erau una și aceeași persoană. Deși, prin definiție, autoportretul trebuie să fie o reprezentare fidelă a modelului, autoportretele au divulgat întotdeauna dificultățile negocierii dintre sinele adevărat al artistului și proiecția lui narcisică. Lucrarea de față examinează câteva cazuri din istoria acestor oscilații artistice, prin intermediul unor scurte descrieri ale unor autoportrete relevante, precum cele aparținând lui Albrecht Dürer, Rembradt van Rijn, Johannes Gumpp, William Hogarth sau Francis Bacon. Intenția autorului a fost de a demonstra că autoportretul era văzut drept pretextul perfect prin care pictorii își puteau motiva dorința de a-și explora propria identitate artistică.*

RESILIENCE

Lelia TROCAN[1]

Abstract:

A duty of memory and a duty of reflection

Irony prompts the reader to question the facts. It is a part of reality, but it is also presupposed in the unfolding of the story. To identify the irony means to capture the questioning. In fact, it is a glance cast upon the world, which denies nothing to the facts. It is an evaluation, a piece of critical judgment. There is definitely a quest for finding out who motivates it. It is a game of inverse worlds, of upturning of values in a hierarchy based on oppositions and exclusions. Irony opens up the text, calling for the interpretation of the narrative. It is thus associated with a quest for meaning.

Keywords: *memory, duty, opposition, reconciliation, questioning.*

I stand in total agreement with Mihai Creangă, who signs the forward to the novel *Les Années de Plomb (The Lead Years):* "One might ask oneself – or, rather, one should ask oneself! – how humanity is going to regard, in a more or less distant future, the 20th century. A century ravaged by two world wars and by numberless local armed conflicts, during which civilians had infinitely more to suffer than fighting soldiers. A century stigmatized by the gory and brutal experience of the most terrible totalitarian regimes: Nazism and communism.

Are we going to place the 20th century under the hallmark of the gloomy personalities of Lenin, Stalin, or Hitler? Or are we more likely to remember Boris Pasternak or Thomas Mann? If we are to adopt the criterion of popularity, the great criminals appear to have won over. A great many people know who Hitler was. Much too few know about Thomas Mann. A great many people know who Stalin was. Very few know about Pasternak. The portraits of Hitler and Stalin are preserved and adored by some, and crowds will sometimes march with them triumphantly. By saying that we might give the impression that we are giving up hope on the future generations. But we would be inconsiderate to assume that their judgment would be based on popularity alone."

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The survivors want to be heard, and thus to regain their humanity and their power to think. The witness must avoid two drawbacks. Doubtlessly, silence kills the victims for a second time. But the spoken word can betray their memory. Self- betrayal is forbidden, to speak out is impossible. To defeat the deafness of the world, to set out to find the appropriate language, to bear testimony to death in favor of life, that is the challenge that enhances one's resilience.

Bearing witness is not easy. It amounts to finding the words to make humanity understand inhuman deeds committed by humans; it is obvious how frail words are when it comes to an abominable experience, as they go through doubts and dilemmas.

The experience of the deported is not unspeakable, but it needs to be transformed in a space of creation. The imagination alone makes it possible to speak about a reality over-passing any imagination. A cohabitation of the real and the fictional is required. Only a text that constitutes itself as a work of art would be capable of rendering the dense and poignant recollection of what has been an existence in hell.

It is also essential to consider the role played by the addressee, who validates the status of the story. The true issue is that of listening. The presence of the other, who is listening, makes the reappropriation of the world possible. Writing is the second stage of the testimony. It is a communication of the factual through the fictional.

The last question is that of form. We have asked ourselves what language to choose, since the deportation has created a crash between language and reality. It was necessary to integrate the extermination of the deported into a historical process and give a meaning to it.

Apprehending the reality of evil presupposes going beyond the referential, gaining access to the underlayers of the imaginary and the symbolic. Transforming history into myth, translating real events into allegory, all that is better suited for revealing an unthinkable reality.

The problem of the apprehension of reality through discourse concerns all texts, be they historical or literary. As an author, I have tried to filter, to reconstruct reality, in a subjective manner, starting from my own vision. Novelists and historians alike mediate reality through language. Novels and history are both reflections of reality. The work of historical novelists strengthens the complicity between literature and history.

I do not undertake here to draw a panorama of the literature of deportation, but merely to map the domain to which it belongs, to legitimize its account of a unique moment in History, when humanity itself was put to question, to establish its place among historical writings. What is essential, after all, is to draw the attention of the public and to give it food for thought.

To put forth the voices of victims, those of witnesses and those of torturers means to engage in the writing of the unrepresentable.

My books, *Arta supravieţuirii*, 1998 (*The Art of Survival)*, *Les Années de plomb*, 2007, (*The Lead Years*), *Rezilienţă*, 2011 (*Resilience),* shape, cross the testimonies of tormentors, of the people close to them and of the survivors of extermination camps. Our quest for truth leads to the acknowledgment of the tormentor's guilt, too atrocious for them to be able to live with it. It is the result of a long process of fictionalization and internalization of the memory. It is the re-enactment and the comprehension of the past, in its orbits of evidence. It is in fact a peeling off of the evil, as we have seen it. It is the temptation to find answers, or at least partial answers, to some of the questions raised by these issues.

My books undertake to be a call-out through their contents, structure and style. They deal with a major problem in our view, the communist genocide, but they also bring to the attention of intellectuals a problem more actual now than ever: the problem of genocides past and present, unfortunately re-emerges, even more stringently, alongside that of the responsibility of those who have, in various ways, either by remaining silent when they knew, or through their actions, allowed the extermination of entire populations to take place, because of religious, or political beliefs, *passim*. My works, through their very existence and the quality of the documentation they are based upon, raise an interest for having taken stance on such issues. They prove, in their way, the necessity to analyze the existence of genocide, atrocious in its methods and proportions.

The stance we take, disturbing though it may be, is assuredly liable to generate a principled debate. We have not confined ourselves to it, but we have explored its reality, investigated its whys and wherefores, we have taken an interest in the actions of all the actors, contemplating the facts in an objective and nuanced, and therefore a more equitable, manner. It is thus a matter of describing the mechanism of extermination, but also of questioning its motivations.

We have not exorcized the culpability of the survivor, or that of the human being who has never experienced the horrors of deportation, neither closely nor remotely. We have by no means tried to confer a kind of posthumous life onto the departed. Our manifest intention has been to honor the duty of reflection above the duty of memory. What counts is to survive our quest for meaning and the story told, given that our existence has been placed, from birth, under the sign of destruction, suffered or imposed.

From the very start, we decided to write a novel, moreover, a novel in first-person narrative. We also resorted to such an ambiguous genre as the historical novel and we exploited antithetical sources: Historical references based on solid documentation, main character evolving within a real historical frame.

Thanks to other characters, involved in the real events of the deportation of 1951, to the Dropia camp, we revisited the issue of the deportation from an intentionally novel point of view, lighted by a cruel unexpected light, prompting a deeper and more subtle questioning, integrating the notion of subjectivity, stirring up the question of sincerity and bringing about a pondering over the function of the novel.

We cannot fail to grasp the fact that the point of view can feed on the narration. Reality can be perceived and subsequently narrated. And that is so because it has previously completely left its stamp on the narrator (body, heart, spirit, education, thoughts, beliefs…). We have thus raised the issue of conscience as a grasp of reality and appreciation of responsibility.

The narrator's voice, at the point of jointure between the physical and the psychological, with all its inflections, its breath and its thinking, transmits, we believe, the way in which he chooses to get involved with reality.

The magnitude of the deportation, the number of victims, the extermination of certain classes of people, have turned it into a reality unparalleled in its gloominess. Beyond the occurrences of the genocide, its whys and wherefores are fundamental, starting from the line that divides the humane from the inhuman, for victims and torturers alike.

We have firmly leaned on reality. Thus, the fabricated part has also smoothly followed path. We have referred to every minute detail that characterizes and constitutes the genocidal system. It is a very difficult reality to lend credence to, because it is absurd. Its significance does not lie in the implacable unfolding of events, but in the discovery of the flaws, tears, gaping holes, abysses of reality. It is the obsession of the void that invades the narrator when searching for reality through its various layers. In that sense, the effect of non-accomplishment, of lack, is perceived at the level of the narration by way of voids which surge and open up new meanings. On the other hand, the failure is found at the level of the body, a living mirror of the monstrosities inflicted upon the victims of deportation.

We wanted to create a narrative burst in the story told, accompanied by vertical flash-back associations: recursions to myths and to other books, because in that way the story opens up. Following the orientations of our musical ear, we have imposed a certain rhythm upon our pieces of writing.

The wandering of the deported also takes the form of the exile. It signals a break-up between the individual and the community. The hero's inability to adapt to the requirements of the system makes a stranger of him. The term wandering equally expresses the idea of intermediate, border space between two other spaces. Crossing a border actually corresponds to the narrator's attitude. He experiences contradictory feelings having to do with behavior relative to a line drawn in the name of humanity: not to assume

any crimes committed in obedience to the respective political regime and trying to understand this murderous policy and depart from it.

We shall not fail to establish the connection between the wandering and the organization of the scriptural space, the latter being enhanced by a scattered temporal structuring. The historical memory follows its habitual course. It is nonetheless also true that, from the point of view of the recollection of our own family novel, we have allowed a temporal dysfunction to set in. We have provided scraps of our own past in an apparently disjointed manner: previous memories, dreams, nightmares, fantasies of the recovery of our own intimate self, a true inner wandering. The abolition of time and space leads to freedom, once escaped from the constraints of the social ego.

By bearing witness, we intended to set ourselves free. There is the human being, acting upon his free will, and there is God. The depiction of the tragedy of human condition requires putting down one's thoughts, in black and white, that is, expelling them from one's tormented spirit and thus purging it. That is, again, where resilience lies.

The deported clinging to life go through terrible pain. Staying alive becomes possible if one refuses to think, even though thinking is the hallmark of human beings. Deportation appears like an interplay of mirrors reflecting scenes of destruction.

We have tried to bring back to life the abominable reality of deportation. We have looked for images, traces, clues, marginal points, in order to gain access to reality as we perceive it. We detect a different reality if we know how to see, because the gates open at the level of the senses. Reading the images means taking them to pieces and then interpreting them. It is a sequence of images transposed into language. The depicted reality is more than the reality seen, lived through.

The experience of death has been one of the most powerful engines for the human process of creating images. We, in our turn, have attempted to reflect experiences of life and death that humanity is becoming aware of with the discovery of the deportation camps. But all the fall does is to open the way to spirituality. The imaginary of death becomes a resource for life. Death and revival are inseparable. Nothing is simple. The evil is real, massive, opaque, unexplainable. It is what prompts the narrator to pursue the quest and the questioning, about him himself and the dramas that have left their stamp on him.

Telling the story, expressing oneself, that can be the way to recovery. It is in fact the essence of resilience. Our vision of reality, constructed from scraps of the cruel reality, troubling visions, memories interconnected so as to create

meaning beyond what is being expressed, and, most notably, waiting for the reader's interpretation to take shape.

The mechanics of extermination are symbolized by repetitive gestures.

The trivialization of the act eliminates any realization of the enormity of the actions. The executants of the Dropia camp appear to take lives without any awareness of what they are doing. The evil takes root in oblivion. Everything is ultimately confined to the space of the body: agony, destitution, fall and relapses.

Our choice to expose oneself, to lay bare our thoughts, to unveil our search, our doubts and hesitations, might be instrumental to undermining the position of the reader, who no longer manages to interpret the facts through his own grid of prejudice; but we have always claimed his confidence. And it is only thanks to it that the weakness, the doubt, the inner agony can be thoroughly described.

The progressive organization of the spatial dimension of the historical novel moves in the opposite direction from the regression of the intimate universe of the narrator-character. In the autobiographical writing, the reader sees the latter reading documents or passages which he will introduce in the text. These paragraphs are part of his future narrative. Thus, the reader perceives the narrator-character in the process of constructing his work. Detecting slices of life in a work-of-art, on the one hand, turning one's life into a work-of art (memoires), on the other hand, evokes an interplay of mirror effects that doesn't fail to be noticed. My pieces of writing, set up as interrogations, never fail to point to our problem-ridden existential path, itself marked out with questions. The act of writing and the act of reading unite in a quest for the truth. This immergence into the reality lived through must enable one to go beyond the cold, historical representation of the event. The reader's approach coincides in a way with that of the narrator, who tries to seize what has escaped him at the time when the events concerned unrolled.

The interplay between the *I* of the first person narrative and the receptor *you* tends to leave out the *(s)he*. The other one, pointed out as representing evil, is part of humanity. The testimonies are continued without worrying about order and the rational questioning characteristic for historical writing. The personal itinerary of the first person narrator is discontinuous. The story is full of holes. The event – the deportation, the loss – is constructed like a fracture, irreparable.

Irony prompts the reader to question the facts. It is part of reality, but it is also presupposed in the unfolding of the story. Its identification enlightens the relationship of the narrator with totalitarian ideology, it casts a light upon their relation with evil, with the incoherence of theories meant to lead entire nations to a glory based on inequity and crime. To identify the irony in the novel means to capture the questioning. In fact, it is a glance cast upon the world, which denies nothing to the facts. It is an evaluation, a critical judgment. There is definitely a

quest for knowing who motivates it. The irony arises in the gap between the seriousness of the subject matter and the triviality of the detail. It is a game of inverse worlds, of upturning of values in a hierarchy based on oppositions and exclusions. Irony opens up the text calling for the interpretation of the narrative. It is thus associated with a quest for meaning. The power and authority are subjected to irony. The reversal of this situation has to do with the irony of fate, as tomorrow will not be like yesterday.

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Rezumat: *Datoria memoriei şi a reflecţiei*

Ironia solicită cititorul să pună la îndoială faptele. Ea este o parte a realităţii, dar este, de asemenea, presupusă în derularea poveştii. Identificarea ironiei înseamnă capturarea interogatoriului. De fapt, aceasta este o privire aruncată asupra lumii, care nu neagă nimic faptelor. Este o evaluare, o bucată de judecată critică. Există cu siguranţă o ţintă a căutării pentru a afla cine o motivează. Este un joc de lumi inverse, de rotaţie ascendentă de valori într-o ierarhie bazată pe opoziţii şi excluderi. Ironia deschide textul, făcând apel la interpretarea naraţiunii. Este astfel asociată cu o căutare a sensului.

'SHOPPING FOR REAL LIFE'? LANDSCAPES OF CONSUMPTION AND THE POLITICS OF REALITY

Martin WALTER[1]

Abstract: *As places of leisure, consumption and entertainment, the shopping mall has become a familiar sight in many capitalist countries, but also a contested and instable space, having been accused of a tendency towards spatial uniformity and of fostering a sense of placelessness. Focussing on a number of examples, the article argues that the built environment of the mall has become a site where ideas of what is perceived as real and authentic are frequently challenged and blurred.*

As postmodern places of hyperreality and visual markers of ideologies, they both contribute to a destabilisation of spatial and temporal relations and confront the visitor with a pre-fabricated form of authenticity that naturalises consumerist behaviour.

Keywords: *Shopping mall, construction of landscapes, consumption, postmodernism, hyperreality*.

Introduction: The Construction of Landscapes

As sites of everyday life, landscapes give the impression that they are somehow naturally connected to the realm of the visual, seemingly telling the onlooker that what he or she sees is real. As "[a] picture representing natural inland scenery" (OED), the term *landscape* came into use in the late 16th century as a technical term of painters, relating to a representation of a specific space. Looking at some of the roots of the word, however, also reveals that the Old English *landscipe* or the German *Landschaft* can take the meaning of "a place and the people who dwell there, past and present. Land means both the physical features of a place and its population. *Skabe* and *schaffen* mean 'to shape' […]", like Anne Whiston Spirn has claimed (Spirn, qtd. in DeLue and Elkins 92). As such, we may argue that a painting of a mountain landscape is not less real or authentic than a natural Alpine landscape or the drawing of a landscape in a geography book but part of an arrangement of signs, whose meaning is the result of "attitudes and actions" (Baker 2) in a specific cultural context.

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By drawing on a number of contemporary popular landscapes, the article wants to argue that the creation and perception of our surroundings is not only mentally constructed and subject to frequent change, but also culturally coded and perpetuated by popular culture and social media. That is to say that the study of landscapes must be based on a cultural analysis of its material reality, arguing that what is perceived as authentic, is in fact highly ideological, "denying that the shape and structure of reality is inevitable" (Grossberg 22). By way of an example that focuses on a specific landscape of consumption, i.e. the modern shopping mall, I want to argue that landscapes are never neutral, and as such also challenge ideas of what is perceived as real or authentic. The article wants to highlight how the interpretation of landscapes is not only reliant on a subjective visual perception but how as part of a shared imagining, popular landscapes can provide insights into Western culture's dominant ideas, ideologies and social practices.

As dynamic spaces, the original idea of landscape has been and is frequently challenged. Landscapes are subject to change, they represent not only an isolated spatial extent of scenery, but their existence may also be temporarily limited, like in the case of many of the early industrial landscapes of England and the German Ruhr. What is more, especially in the context of urban planning or tourism, cultural, i.e. man-made landscapes not only seemingly mimic or imitate natural landscapes, making them "contentious, compromised product of society" (Zukin 16), but they also function as visual markers of power and as a means of articulating ideas of nationhood, as they become icons of identity. Taking into account that they both mirror and contribute to the formation of ideologies, is to reject essentialist views of environmental determinism and to understand landscapes as cultural products, a way of approach that is characteristic of cultural geography.[2] Influenced by Marxist ideas of power relations, this sub-discipline which has emerged since the 1980s sees landscapes as actively shaped by humans. As such, this branch of geography owns much to the works of Raymond Williams which laid the foundations for the field of cultural studies, arguing that making sense of places is related to matters of power and resistance, understanding "geography as a system that is both made and used by capitalism" (Mitchell and Breitbach 473). To apply these ideas means to regard landscapes as representations of ideologies and ideological practices, i.e. to read them like texts, as social documents or "configurations of symbols and signs." (Cosgrove and Jackson 96)

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[2] For an introduction to the field of cultural geography, see Donald Mitchell (2000).

Going shopping: Landscapes of Consumption

In one of his essays that form part of *The Eiffel Tower and Other Mythologies* (1979), French writer Roland Barthes addresses what he calls "the inevitable sign" (4) of the Eiffel Tower to which a number of divergent meanings can be attributed, highlighting what is in fact an empty signifier: "This pure – virtually empty – sign is ineluctable, because it means everything" (ibid.). As a "universal symbol", Barthes argues, "the Tower attracts meaning, the way a lightning rod attracts thunderbolts; for all lovers of signification, it plays a glamorous part, that of a pure signifier, i.e. of a form in which men unceasingly put meaning […]" (5). As the simplest graphical representation of Paris, we may argue that the meaning of this particular iconic landscape is dependent on its being used and circulated as part of meaningful social practices, i.e. in the moment the Tower and its representations become integrated into a meaningful form of behaviour. The Tower is thus not only represented on stereotypical postcards, Cubist paintings by French artist Robert Delaunay, or as part of traditional establishing shots of the Parisian landscape, but has become the subject of commodification, mass-marketed in the form of souvenirs such as key chains, statues or coffee mugs or part and parcel of tourist photographs.

With tourism becoming an activity of the middle-classes, it also became increasingly connected to the consumption of spaces. As part of the commodification of public urban spaces, spaces not only become invested with ideological sediments, but the appropriation of space also "involves the circulation of people to specific locations that are consumed as spaces" (Gottdiener 268-269). To develop "sensitivity to landscape" (Trinder 253) is thus to read these representational landscapes not as isolated, primary texts but in their connection to Marxist ideas of power, i.e. as manifestations of the dominant ideology of capitalism, as it surfaces in the built environment, like Alan Baker proposes: "Ideology, then, involves systems and structures of signification and domination: any landscape is likely to contain all manner of ideological representation so that a description of its appearance must also logically be 'thickened' into an interpretation of its meaning." (4)

That is to draw on a particular strand of research that focuses on a series of phenomena in which spaces of consumption have undergone heavy transformation as they became subject to commodification and leisurisation, accompanied by a tendency of homogenisation of shopping malls, high streets and road sides, a trend that George Ritzer and Allan Liska have labelled "McDisneyfication" (96) – an amalgam of McDonaldization and Disneyzation. The built environment of many a Western city, it is argued, is thereby linked to the logics of capitalism, as it renegotiates ideas of

production and consumption along the lines of locality and globalism, of which the shopping mall is a potent spatial materialisation.

Although, spaces of consumption predate the arrival of modernity or industrialisation, and have long existed in the form of public market places or shopping arcades in London or Paris[3], the concept of the shopping mall, understood as "a group of retail or other commercial establishment, that is planned, developed, owned and managed as a single property" (qtd. in Falk 15), has become a defining feature of the second half of the twentieth century. 'Invented' in the USA, the mall quickly became a feature of suburban America after the nationwide breakthrough of the private motor car (Hahn 17), and has since spread to other Western countries. While as a landscape of consumption, the mall has an undeniable functional role in that it provides spaces for the exchange of commodities, as a place of social life that is connected to the workings of global capitalism, it can also be understood as "an ensemble of material and social practices and their symbolic representation" (Zukin 16). On a sign level, the shopping mall both naturalises a specific form of behaviour and plays around with how consumers experience reality.

A major strategy in turning shopping places into meaningful places in which consumers adhere to the logic of consumerist behaviour, is thus to rely on a number of spatial arrangements that not only help to naturalise the consumerist behaviour, but which challenge notions of the authentic and real, making it difficult to distinguish distinct spheres of economy and culture. Postmodern capitalism thus has a "tendency to infuse an ever widening range of outputs with aesthetic and semiotic content" (Scott x), and is increasingly related to a blurring of boundaries between everyday life and arts, or what Mike Featherstone has called the "aestheticisation of everyday life" (64), arguing that a seemingly mundane built environment can not only be perceived along the lines of beauty, but becomes an arena of a new "experience economy" (Pine and Gilmore), triggering off emotions and feelings of pleasure. In the words of French philosopher Jean Baudrillard, what is perceived as real, is turned into images and signs, making reality a product of "the world as it is seen and interpreted through the sign" (155), a simulated environment or simulacrum. Never reaching a final meaning, the consumer instead faces an endless "floating of signifiers" (Lévi-Strauss 1966, 63), a surplus of signification.

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[3] For an insight into the aspects of modern consumer culture and early shopping arcades in Paris, see the groundbreaking work by Walter Benjamin. *The Arcades Project* (1999).

Shopping Malls and the Construction of Authenticity

Shopping malls have increasingly been subject to the semantics of an "entertainment experience" (Moss) that has retailers stressing the spectacle character of going shopping by transforming the rather mundane practice into a seemingly extraordinary or magical experience. The Santa Maria Town Center in the city of the same name is advertised with the slogan "transforming shopping into an experience" (Santa Maria), the Eastview Mall in Victor, New York even promises "a higher form of shopping" (Eastview), while the Har Mar Mall in Roseville, Minnesota has its visitors "shopping for real life" (Har Mar) – whatever that means.

While on a textual level, advertisements pre-frame consumers' assumptions by telling them what to expect in advance, the major part of perceiving the built environment of the mall is made up by the rapid flow of images and styles which have become a distinctive feature of its architecture and interior design. A prominent example is the use of seemingly familiar signs but placing them in a new context, a practice that Claude Lévi-Strauss called "bricolage" (1987, 21). This is done by borrowing or quoting styles and bringing together existing material. The Thier-Galerie, an inner city shopping mall which opened in 2011 in Dortmund, Germany houses 160 shops occupying 33,000 m2 and has its customers enter the building through a portal of neo-classicist pillars. These pillars, however, had been newly erected after the original Wilhelminian style building had to be pulled down. On the inside, however, visitors again face the ever increasing homogenisation of signs that does little to distinguish the place from other shopping malls in the world. Owning more than 189 shopping malls with a retail sale of more than 21 billion Euros in the whole of Europe (ECE Business Profile), the multinational mall developer and market leader ECE that also owns the mall in Dortmund has been facing similar complaints as part of a "battle over the retro-look", with shopping malls that are "brilliant in front but banal at the back" (Schulz). As such, the postmodern idea of playing around with different styles more likely adheres to Frederic Jameson's concept of pastiche, i.e. "the imitation of a peculiar or unique, idiosyncratic style, the wearing of a linguistic mask, speech in a dead language" (17) or "cannibalization of all the styles of the past, the play of random stylistic allusion" (ibid., 18). The façade, rather than being an appropriation of history, is a playing around with signifiers that allow for only one ritualized behavior – that of shopping. The landscape of the shopping mall is thus a potent spatialisation of ideology – a space, in which

individuals through their behaviour, perform and reinforce the logic of consumerism.

Closely connected to this is the phenomenon of theming, a strategy that tries to counter the process of homogenisation and accusations of creating inauthenticity. Analysing a number of themed milieus from restaurant chains to theme parks, Mark Gottdiener has argued that everyday life has been pervaded with themed environments as it "occurs within a material environment that is dependent on and organized around overarching motifs" (3). The consumer thus finds him- or herself facing the circulation of a number of different signifiers that naturalise a particular social behavior, a behaviour which is in fact conformist and ideological. While the early arcades of the 19th century often featured a linear, straight aisle, postmodern indoor malls may not only mimic the feeling of strolling around Main Street, but usually have the customer walk around in circles along a triangular or quadrangular shape without any possibility to look outside.

What is more, the architecture of the mall uses other artefacts to hide its constructive character, for example by the commodification of nature in the form of an enclosed interior food court, usually along the lines of what has been labelled the "Paradise Myth" (Winchester 79). The food court at the Chevron Renaissance mall in Gold Coast, Australia features not only fountains and palm trees, suggesting natural surroundings, but again reproduces the architectural styles of other places, a composition that comprises colourful elements, remotely mirroring Moorish architectural styles of the Alhambra, but also exhibits neo-classicist arches and friezes. At the same time, the place is illuminated by old-style street lights, while Mid-European street signs simulate spatial wideness. Yet with its solar panel, the place could also be reminiscent of a Mediterranean beach scenery. Although then, an authentic experience or 'true' meaning is therefore not ultimately lost, but endlessly postponed in a row of signifiers, the scene evokes a feeling of harmony and authenticity. What is real? What is fake? We cannot possibly tell. Instead, we find ourselves in a space, where reality has been replaced by signs – a simulated, yet still authentic version of reality.

However, while the idea of having palm trees in a food court mimicking the concept of an oasis may offer potential for a consciously or unconsciously perverted interpretation ('Who saves you from dying in the shopping desert? Of course, Coca Cola'), the overall playing around with meaning, we may argue, is still a conventional. While offering little more than the postmodern aesthetics of false realism, this version of reality evokes the feeling that it has run out of stylistic innovation and instead plays around with signs by imitating dead styles, "randomly and without

principle" (Jameson 19). Another exemplary spatialisation of this cannibalizing of signs is the architecture of Terminal 21, a shopping mall in Bangkok, Thailand. The mall is themed around the idea of 'famous shopping streets of the world', in that it dedicates each of its floors to "unique destinations from around the world such as Rome, Paris, Tokyo, London, Istanbul, San Francisco and Hollywood into one fully-furbished department store" ("About Us"), while giving the impression of walking around an airport terminal – an impression that is strengthened by the mall's glass façade and shopping aisles. While the customer is thus able to visit a miniature replica of the Golden Gate Bridge, the Arc de Triomphe and London's red telephone boxes within the period of one day, is guided by electronic display signs and staff members dressed up as flight attendants, the experience in this case falls short of creating an authentic experience. If agreed that a place is made meaningful by localizing it in a specific time and space, then the themed shopping mall is an example of how the commodification of spatial arrangements has led to a struggle to maintain a sense of place and time, resulting in what geographer David Harvey has called "time-space compression" (240), referring to "processes that so revolutionize the objective qualities of space and time that we are forced to alter, sometimes in quite radical ways, how we represent the world to ourselves" (ibid.). This destabilization of spatial and temporal relations leads to a form of 'perfect' hyperreality, a bricolage or copy of signs that seems more real than the original: "The pleasure of imitation, as the ancients knew, is one of the most innate in the human spirit; but here we not only enjoy a perfect imitation, we also enjoy the conviction that imitation has reached its apex and afterwards reality will always be inferior to it." (Eco 46)

That is to say that the Champs-Éllysées of Terminal 21 is a 'clean', hyperreal copy of the original, devoid of tourist and beggars. Just as the mall seemingly combines all major high streets of the world in one building, the mall's food court brings together all of the world's cuisines for the customers' pleasure, while reducing the world's geographical complexity to a culture of sampling, albeit with the attempt "to conceal almost perfectly any trace of origin, of the labour processes that produced them, or of the social relations implicated in their production" (Harvey 300). Having become a part of this fragmented pseudo-geography, it may be argued, it does not matter where and when the customer is situated in real life, as long as he or she feels to belong to this "imagined geography." (Said 54)

The question remains now: Why should we see this development critically? Is it because under the triumph of simulation, global capitalism increasingly reduces our built environment to an endless chain of signifiers?

Does it really matter that an experience is perceived as 'authentic'? Or do postmodern landscapes of consumption keep the individual from critically engaging with his or her environment, like Lunt and Livingstone claim?

The shopping mall is a public form – the site of participation in late capitalist society as formulated through commoditization. The consumer culture is a new form of the manipulation of the ordinary person by the exchange system. When the family goes to the shopping mall together at the weekend, the mall provides a form of leisure, of structuring time, and a site for constructing family relations of gender and generation. (21)

Far from predicting the arrival of a "consumer apocalypse" (Jackson et al. 25), an exemplary reading of these commodified spaces may suggest that the semiotic character of the mall supports an arguing for a loss of critical engagement with our surroundings. What is more, as spaces designed for leisure, these places challenge seemingly fixed notions of what is perceived as real and not. It thus seems legitimate to argue in favour of the passive consumer, who endlessly wanders along the 'placeless' mall – an idea made famous by George R. Romero's zombie film *Dawn of the Dead*.[4] An idea among the consumerism debate, however, that neglects considerations about how the space of consumption also "empowers capitalist subjects by granting them a limited, but politically important space in which to live out utopian fantasies of autonomy" (Harper). I want to propose that as part of an everyday perception of these spaces, individuals try to actively engage with representations of the authentic, thereby producing a 'gaze of the real.' This is to follow Meaghan Morris' idea that consumers indulge in a "more complex and localized affective relation to shopping spaces" (67), thereby also rendering notions of authenticity and reality.

I want to briefly highlight a particular phenomenon that may be linked to what can be called a 'quest for authenticity' in the re-appropriation of the shopping mall as a space of consumption. Sociologist John Urry has claimed that, while on holiday, tourists take part in, or more specifically, produce the "tourist gaze" (1), meaning that they have a specific idea in mind of what they expect when travelling – a phenomenon that in recent years has also been reinforced by the rise of ready-made photography in smartphones. Similar to the holiday, the personal encountering of the shopping mall works as an authenticity marker by modifying the question of what is real. By taking photos of themselves while they are consuming,

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[4] Lampooning American consumer society, the film depicts a world that has become devastated by zombies. Besetting a group of survivors that has found shelter in a suburban shopping mall, it is argued that 'some kind of instinct' drew them there. See Harper (2002).

consumers are seemingly trying to convey a visual proof, a feeling of 'we are here, going shopping', when in fact, they are again only producing another level of representation on their quest for the authentic. With the subject becoming the centre of the photo, the mall as a place of consumption becomes meaningful. While in 2013, the word "selfie" was named word of the year by the Oxford Dictionary, and has us entering "the Selfie Decade" (Waterstreet), the Siam Paragon mall in Bangkok has recently been labelled the "most photographed place" (Cripps) on Instagram, the social media service that allows its users to upload pictures, supplanting sights like Taj Mahal or Times Square.

While consumers indulge on a search for self-identity, seemingly looking for an experience that is real and authentic, photography and social media, Facebook or Instagram, not only reproduce a specific touristic gaze but are far away from any active subversion. Albeit its seemingly authentic character, does the 'selfie' not also adhere to a form of ritualised, conformist behaviour, like enjoying your latte macchiato under the fake palm trees of the food court? Does it not reproduce the 'male gaze', like feminist criticism has claimed (Ryan). Does it provide the photographer with an agency that breaks away from the logic of consumption or – as part of the economy of attention – is it not rather a celebration thereof?

Conclusion

The article wanted to suggest that just as any form of landscape is embedded in a network of signs, also the landscape of the mall is always a product of a specific mind-set. Today's spaces of consumption can thus be understood as arenas in which the logic, rules and symbols of consumer society and the ideology of capitalism are constantly reinforced and reproduced. As such they produce tensions between what is real and what we perceive as real, producing a form of authenticity, albeit a subjective one. Taking a photo in the changing rooms of a store again re-enforces the logic of consumption-based places, making consumption visible by rendering the photographer part of the world of consumer capitalism. The same accounts for the perception of the hyperreal environment of many a mall's interior decoration. In an age of simulation, the mall is yet another spatialisation of a simulated dream-world, a version of the reality that is perceived as better than reality itself. Seemingly on a quest for the real, in their symbolic performance of walking around the mall, consumers find themselves part of a social space which increasingly relies upon a fixed set of symbols that naturalises consumption by providing a pre-fabricated form of authenticity. While malls provide little space for "'deviants' who refuse

to spend, or who cannot afford to spend" (Bocock 107), an analysis of the production and appropriation of these sites of entertainment and consumption can shed light on the logics of postmodern consumer-culture, and highlight that what is presented as 'real' is often highly ideological.

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Rezumat: *Apreciate pentru posibilitățile de relaxare și agrement pe care le oferă, precum și pentru devotamentul față de consumerism, mallurile au devenit o prezență familiară în multe țări capitaliste. Criticii le consideră însă spații contestate și instabile, fiind acuzate de tendința de a uniformiza și a anonimiza. Bazându-se pe un număr de exemple, articolul de față susține că mediul construit al mallului a devenit un loc în care ceea ce este perceput ca fiind real și autentic este adesea contrazis și estompat.*

Prin calitatea lor de locuri posmoderne ale hiper-realității și markeri vizuali ai ideologiilor, mallurile contribuie la destabilizarea spațială și temporală a relațiilor, conducând la confruntarea vizitatorului cu o formă pre-fabricată de autenticitate care naturalizează comportamentul consumerist.